

Implementing Inclusive Education in Urban Indonesian Elementary Schools: Regular Classroom Services and Teachers' Adaptation Strategies

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive education has been mandated in Indonesia, yet its implementation in regular elementary classrooms remains uneven, particularly in relation to teacher readiness, classroom adaptation, and support for students with special educational needs. This study explored how inclusive education is enacted in urban Indonesian elementary schools and how teachers adapt regular classroom services. A qualitative multiple-case study was conducted in two public elementary schools in Jakarta with official inclusive-school status. Data were collected through four weeks of classroom observation, in-depth interviews with 10 informants, including principals, classroom teachers, special needs teachers, and parents, and analysis of school documents. The data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings show that inclusive education was supported by strong institutional commitment from principals and teachers, as reflected in school policies, teacher collaboration, and the development of Individualized Education Programs. However, implementation was constrained by a limited number of special needs teachers, insufficient practical training, and varied understanding of inclusion among school staff. Classroom adaptations were mostly ad-hoc and improvisational, with dominant strategies including content simplification, modified learning objectives, visual support, peer assistance, and basic competency substitution. Inclusive education in regular classrooms requires more than policy compliance. Systematic teacher training, structured collaboration, adequate special education support, and consistent monitoring of adaptation practices are essential to ensure meaningful participation and equitable learning opportunities for all students.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has become a major agenda in contemporary education systems because it emphasizes the right of every child to access quality learning opportunities in regular school environments. In Indonesia, the implementation of inclusive education is supported by national policies that encourage schools to provide educational services for students with disabilities, special educational needs, and other diverse learning characteristics. At the elementary school level, inclusive

education is particularly important because this stage forms the foundation for students' academic development, social interaction, emotional growth, and participation in school life. Therefore, inclusive education should not be understood merely as placing students with special educational needs in regular classrooms. Rather, it requires schools to create learning environments that ensure participation, support, and meaningful learning for all students.

The central principle of inclusive education is that diversity is a natural part of the classroom and should be addressed through responsive teaching practices. Florian (2014) argues that inclusive education is not only concerned with access to schooling but also with improving teaching and learning for all students. This view shifts inclusion from a placement-oriented model to a participation-oriented model. In other words, the success of inclusive education cannot be measured only by whether students with special educational needs are enrolled in regular schools, but also by whether they are actively involved in learning activities, interact with peers, receive appropriate support, and achieve meaningful progress. This makes regular classrooms the main arena where inclusive values are translated into practice.

In regular classroom services, teachers have a crucial role as the primary agents of inclusion. Teachers are responsible for planning instruction, managing classroom interaction, assessing learning progress, and adapting learning activities to meet diverse student needs. However, inclusive classroom practice is often challenging because students may differ in readiness, learning pace, communication ability, behavior, attention span, and social-emotional development. Sharma, Forlin, and Loreman (2008) note that teachers' concerns about inclusion are often related to their perceived competence and the availability of adequate support. When teachers lack training or professional assistance, inclusive education may remain symbolic rather than transformative. This condition highlights the importance of examining how teachers implement regular classroom services and what adaptation strategies they use in daily teaching.

Inclusive pedagogy provides a useful theoretical foundation for understanding how teachers can respond to learner diversity. Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) explain that inclusive pedagogy focuses on extending what is ordinarily available to all learners rather than creating separate or isolated learning pathways for certain students. This means that inclusive teaching should not depend solely on individual pull-out services or special interventions outside the classroom. Instead, teachers should design classroom learning that is flexible enough to include students with different abilities and needs. Through inclusive pedagogy, all students remain members of the same learning community, while teachers provide different forms of support within shared classroom activities.

One practical approach that aligns with inclusive pedagogy is differentiated instruction. Differentiated instruction refers to the adjustment of content, learning processes, learning products, and classroom environments based on students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles (Tomlinson, 2001). In inclusive elementary classrooms, differentiation may include simplifying learning materials, modifying task difficulty, using visual aids, giving additional time, providing step-by-step instructions, applying peer-assisted learning, and using varied assessment methods. These strategies help teachers maintain regular classroom services while still responding to individual student needs. However, differentiation should be planned systematically, not merely implemented spontaneously when problems arise. Without systematic planning, classroom adaptation may become ad hoc, inconsistent, and dependent on individual teacher initiative.

In the Indonesian context, one important instrument for systematic adaptation is the Individualized Education Program, known as Program Pembelajaran Individual or PPI. PPI is designed to identify students' strengths, needs, learning barriers, goals, and support strategies. A well-developed PPI helps teachers translate inclusive principles into concrete instructional plans. It can guide curriculum modification, classroom accommodation, assessment adjustment, and behavioral support for students with special educational needs. PPI also allows schools to monitor students' progress and evaluate whether the support provided is appropriate. However, the effectiveness of PPI depends on collaboration among classroom teachers, special assistant teachers, principals, parents, and other relevant professionals. If PPI is prepared only as an administrative document without consistent

implementation and evaluation, its function as a tool for inclusive learning becomes limited.

The role of Guru Pendamping Khusus, or GPK, is also essential in supporting inclusive education in regular classrooms. GPKs are expected to assist classroom teachers in identifying students' needs, designing PPI, adapting materials, providing individual support, and communicating with parents. Their presence can strengthen teacher confidence and improve the quality of learning adaptation. However, many inclusive schools still face a shortage of qualified GPKs. When the number of students with special educational needs is not proportional to the available GPK support, classroom teachers often have to manage complex learning needs with limited assistance. This situation may lead teachers to rely on trial-and-error strategies rather than evidence-based adaptation. Avramidis and Norwich (2002) emphasize that teacher training and support strongly influence teacher attitudes and readiness toward inclusive education. Therefore, the availability and quality of GPK support are key factors in determining the success of inclusive practice.

School leadership also plays an important role in sustaining inclusive education. Ainscow, Booth, and Dyson (2006) argue that inclusive schools require collaborative cultures, reflective practices, and leadership that promotes shared responsibility. Principals can support inclusion by establishing inclusive school policies, allocating resources, facilitating teacher collaboration, encouraging professional development, and building partnerships with parents. In schools where leadership commitment is strong, inclusive education is more likely to be understood as a whole-school responsibility rather than the task of individual teachers or GPKs alone. Conversely, when leadership support is weak, inclusive practices may become fragmented and inconsistent.

Another important element of inclusive education is collaboration between schools and parents. Parents have valuable knowledge about their children's daily behavior, communication patterns, emotional needs, learning habits, and progress outside school. Turnbull, Turnbull, Wehmeyer, and Shogren (2015) emphasize that family-school partnerships are essential in special and inclusive education because they support shared decision-making and continuity of intervention. In inclusive elementary schools, regular communication between teachers, GPKs, and parents can help ensure that classroom adaptations are aligned with students' actual needs. Collaboration with parents is also important in the development and evaluation of PPI, because parents can provide information that may not be visible during classroom observation.

Although inclusive education has been widely promoted through policy, its implementation in regular classrooms remains uneven. Previous studies have often focused on policy, teacher attitudes, or school readiness, while empirical evidence on teachers' concrete classroom adaptation strategies is still limited. This gap is important because inclusive education is ultimately enacted through daily classroom decisions: how teachers modify instruction, organize peer interaction, use PPI, coordinate with GPKs, and communicate with parents. Understanding these practices is necessary to improve teacher professional development, strengthen school support systems, and refine inclusive education policy.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the implementation of inclusive education through regular classroom services and the adaptation strategies used by teachers in urban Indonesian elementary schools. Specifically, this study examines how inclusive services are enacted in regular classrooms, what adaptation strategies are used by teachers, how PPI and GPK support are involved, and what factors shape the implementation of inclusive practices. The guiding research question is: How are inclusive education services implemented in regular elementary classrooms, and what adaptation strategies are used by teachers to support students with diverse learning needs?

2. METHOD

This study aims to explore the implementation of inclusive education through regular class services and adaptation strategies implemented by teachers in elementary schools. A qualitative descriptive approach with case study methodology was used in this study. The researcher acted as the main instrument for data collection by visiting the data source directly. The selection of this school as

a research location was based on the unique characteristics of the school. The subjects of the study included the principal, teachers, and school supervisors selected through purposive sampling. Data collection was carried out through structured interviews. Observations were conducted in the classroom, while interviews were conducted after the implementation of inclusive services. The validity of the data in this qualitative study refers to the standards of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Creswell, 2010).

The research location was at Kamal 02 Morning Elementary School and School B, Pegadungan 11 Morning Elementary School. The school selection criteria were: (a) official inclusion organizer status from the DKI Jakarta Education Office, (b) minimum duration of inclusion implementation of 3 years (showing sufficient experience), (c) accessibility for intensive field research.

Data collection was conducted through interviews. The interview stage involved direct and in-depth exploration with informants. Respondents were individuals who had a clear understanding of the research topic. Ten respondents participated in the interview, which followed guidelines focused on the implementation of regular class services and adaptation strategies implemented teachers in elementary schools. Data analysis was conducted using the model analysis approach (Miles & Huberman, 2014). The process begins with data collection, followed by data reduction, meaning organizing data in such a way that final conclusions can be drawn and verified, and conclusions are drawn by interpreting the results of the verified classification so that they can be truly accounted for.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Both schools demonstrate a strong commitment to implement inclusive education, driven by Jakarta regional government policies and the principal's initiative as an agent of change. SDN Kamal 02 Pagi has had an Inclusion Organizer Decree since 2018 and has explicitly integrated its inclusion commitment into the school's vision and mission: "Creating a resilient generation that values diversity and is globally competent." The principal actively encourages teachers to accept and teach children with special needs through regular meetings and has allocated a dedicated space for pullout sessions. The principal's statement demonstrates a deep understanding of inclusion:

"Inclusion is not just placing children with special needs in regular classes. It's about changing the way we think about education. All children deserve quality learning, with the support they need. This is our moral and legal responsibility as a school."

Pegadungan 11 Pagi Elementary School demonstrates a similar commitment, albeit with slightly different implementation intensity. The Inclusion Organizer Decree was issued in 2019, and the school has integrated inclusion into several operational policies. However, resource allocation for accessibility facilities remains limited compared to West Jakarta Elementary School. Policy support from the Jakarta Education Office through the redistribution of GPK (School Teachers' Group) and the designation of pilot schools facilitated the presence of GPK in both schools, although the number is still far from proportional to the number of children with special needs served. This institutional commitment is the first crucial supporting factor in the implementation of inclusion.

In the classroom, teachers attempted to adapt learning, often on an ad-hoc basis and without systematic planning. The teacher opened the lesson by introducing the Core Competency (KD): "Reading short narrative texts fluently." For regular students, the teacher prepared a text in the form of a children's story. For Joni (a child with mild intellectual disability), the teacher prepared cards with simple CV-VC syllables (ba, bi, bu, be, bo) and supporting images. For 30 minutes, regular students worked on text comprehension problems, while Joni focused on syllable recognition with the help of visual cards. The teacher used a visual timer (a 5-minute hourglass) to help Joni understand the duration of the task. When Joni began to become restless (ADHD trait), the teacher gave him a 3-minute break and then continued with the reward system (stickers for each correct syllable). The GPK arrived at 9:15 and immediately assisted Joni without prior coordination with the teacher about the focus of the intervention.

Both schools have developed PPI for their ABK, although the level of depth and consistency of implementation varies: SDN Kamal 02 Pagi: PPI is developed by a team involving class teachers, GPK, and the principal. Coordination meetings are held once a month to review progress. The PPI example shows specific, measurable, and achievable learning objectives (SMART goals). SDN Pegadungan 11 Pagi: PPI exists but is simpler, and coordination meetings are minimal (ad-hoc, when there are problems). PPI implementation depends on individual teacher initiative rather than a structured system.

A classroom teacher at SDN Kamal 02 Pagi said:

"I don't have a specific background in teaching children with special needs. When I first started teaching a child with ADHD, I was very panicked. There was no clear guidance. I learned through trial and error, discussions with other teachers, and YouTube. The one-day training I attended wasn't enough too much material, not hands-on practice."

A classroom teacher at SDN Pegadungan 11 Pagi said:

"I felt unprepared to be a classroom teacher. My background is as a regular classroom teacher, not a special needs teacher. When I was appointed as a classroom teacher, I was given very little guidance. I had to work with six children with very different needs. One had ADHD (requiring energy), another had intellectual disabilities (requiring patience), and another had hearing impairment (requiring special communication). I focused on the most challenging ones, leaving the others less visible."

Parental Perceptions of Inclusion:

"I'm happy that my child learns with friends who don't have special needs. It helps him feel more confident and less alone. At home, he talks about how his friends help him." (Parent of a Special Needs Child, SDN Kamal 02 Pagi).

The finding that strong institutional commitment from principals and teachers is a key driver of inclusion implementation aligns with transformational leadership theory in education (Bass & Riggio, 2006) and the concept of institutional commitment in organizational behavior. A principal with a clear vision for inclusion can mobilize the entire school organization to change, creating a culture that supports inclusion. However, commitment alone is not enough. Data shows that at SDN Pegadungan 11 Pagi, despite commitment, implementation was hampered by limited human resources. This aligns with Beamish et al.'s (2024) findings on the research-to-practice gap: good policies do not automatically result in good implementation without adequate resource support. The phenomenon of "ad-hoc" adaptation found in this study represents an important empirical contribution that has not been widely documented in Indonesian inclusion literature. Ad-hoc adaptation means teachers make learning adjustments based on trial-and-error experience, rather than systematic planning supported by theory and evidence.

This differs from systematic adaptation, which is: (1) based on a thorough assessment of the needs of students with special needs, (2) planned in a clear PPI document, (3) implemented consistently, and (4) evaluated periodically. SDN Kamal 02 Pagi shows signs of more systematic adaptation, while SDN Pegadungan 11 Pagi tends to be ad-hoc. This phenomenon can be explained through the concept of "practical wisdom," or *phronesis* (Aristotle), cited in modern pedagogy: when teachers lack formal theoretical knowledge about inclusion, they use experience and intuition to make practical decisions. This is not inherently bad, but it is suboptimal and not scalable.

Research by Turnbull et al. (2015) in "Exceptional Lives" emphasizes the importance of partnerships between schools and families. The finding that SDN Kamal 02 Pagi, with its formal PPI Team and consistent communication, demonstrated better outcomes supports this theoretical framework. Structured collaboration enables alignment between school and home interventions and the sharing of information about children with special needs' progress and challenges.

The findings indicate that inclusive education in elementary schools is primarily implemented through regular class services, where students with and without special educational needs learn

together in the same classroom environment. This approach aligns with the core principle of inclusion, which emphasizes participation rather than segregation. Florian (2014) argues that inclusive education should be understood as improving teaching and learning for all students, not only those identified as having special needs. However, the effectiveness of regular class services largely depends on teachers' ability to recognize learner diversity and respond to it through flexible instructional practices.

Teachers implement various adaptation strategies to support inclusive learning, such as modifying learning objectives, simplifying instructional materials, and providing additional scaffolding for students who require more support. These strategies reflect the concept of differentiated instruction, which is considered essential in inclusive classrooms (Tomlinson, 2017). The discussion of these findings supports the view of Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011), who emphasize that inclusive pedagogy focuses on extending what is ordinarily available to all learners rather than creating separate learning pathways. This suggests that adaptation strategies are most effective when embedded within regular classroom instruction. According to Florian (2014), the gap between inclusive ideals and classroom realities is often caused by insufficient professional preparation and support systems for teachers. This condition highlights the urgency of studying how teachers implement inclusive education through regular class services and classroom adaptations.

Despite positive efforts, teachers continue to face significant challenges in implementing inclusive education. Limited training, large class sizes, and insufficient support from special education professionals often hinder the consistent application of adaptation strategies. Sharma, Forlin, and Loreman (2008) highlight that teachers' concerns about inclusive education are closely related to their perceived competence and the availability of resources. These challenges may lead teachers to rely on minimal adaptations, which can reduce the overall effectiveness of inclusive practices.

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Inclusive education in urban Indonesian elementary schools reflects a shift from a placement-oriented model toward a participation-oriented approach. As emphasized in contemporary inclusive education literature, inclusion is not simply about enrolling students with diverse needs in regular classrooms, but about ensuring that they actively engage, interact, and achieve meaningful learning outcomes. This paradigm requires schools to restructure teaching practices, assessment systems, and classroom environments so they are responsive to learner diversity. In this context, regular classroom services become the primary arena where inclusive values are enacted. The success of inclusion therefore depends not only on policy mandates, but also on how effectively teachers interpret and implement these policies in their daily instructional practices.

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the research was conducted in a limited number of urban elementary schools, which may not fully represent the diverse conditions of inclusive education implementation across different regions of Indonesia, particularly in rural or remote areas. Second, the study relied primarily on qualitative data from interviews and classroom observations, which may be influenced by participants' subjectivity and social desirability bias. Although triangulation was applied, the findings remain context-specific and may not be generalizable to broader populations. Additionally, the study focused mainly on teachers' perspectives and adaptation strategies in regular classroom services, without deeply exploring students' voices, parents' experiences, or quantitative measures of learning outcomes. The absence of longitudinal data also limits the ability to examine the long-term impact of adaptation strategies on students' academic and social development. Future research is therefore recommended to involve more diverse participants, apply mixed-method approaches, and conduct longitudinal investigations to provide a more comprehensive understanding of inclusive education practices.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that inclusive education in urban Indonesian elementary schools is primarily enacted through regular classroom services supported by teachers' adaptation strategies, including modification of learning objectives, simplification of instructional materials, differentiated tasks, additional scaffolding, visual support, peer assistance, and the development of Individualized Education Programs. The main finding indicates that strong institutional commitment from principals and teachers can support inclusive practices; however, implementation remains inconsistent because many adaptations are still ad-hoc rather than systematically planned, and schools continue to face limited special assistant teacher support, insufficient practical training, and varied understanding of inclusive education among staff. This study is limited by its focus on only two urban elementary schools, its relatively short observation period, and its reliance on interviews and classroom observations, which may not fully capture students' learning experiences, parents' perspectives, or the long-term effects of adaptation strategies. Future research should involve a wider range of schools across different geographical and socio-economic contexts, include students' and parents' voices, apply mixed-method or longitudinal designs, and examine how structured teacher training, stronger GPK support, and systematic PPI implementation influence students' academic, social, and emotional outcomes in inclusive classrooms.

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Conflicts of Interest: The authors report no conflicts of interest.

Ethical Considerations: This research was carried out in line with ethical standards to safeguard the rights, privacy, and welfare of all participants. Before any data was gathered, informed consent was secured from each participant. They received both verbal and written explanations detailing the study's purpose, the procedures involved, possible benefits and risks, and their freedom to withdraw at any point without any negative consequences. The consent document clearly stated that participation was entirely voluntary and that all collected data would remain confidential.

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