

# Optimizing Inclusive Education: Uncovering Challenges and Strategies in Primary Schools Through a Literature Review

Ediyanto✉<sup>1</sup>, Putri Mahanani<sup>1</sup>, Imas Diana Aprilia<sup>2</sup>, Risa Safira Ramadhani<sup>2</sup> & Verra Wulandary<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Special Education, Universitas Negeri Malang, Malang, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup> Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia

<sup>3</sup> Hiroshima University, Higashi-Hiroshima, Japan

✉ ediyanto.fip@um.ac.id

**Abstract.** Inclusive education means that every student, including those with special needs, has the right to an education in an inclusive school environment. In the context of inclusive education, several fundamental obstacles stand in the way of creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment. The current study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the importance of inclusive education and the steps that can be taken to ensure that every child, including those with special needs, can benefit from a balanced and equitable education. The method used in writing this article is a literature review, with the ten articles published in 2020-2023. Articles were selected by determining the scope, selecting relevant keywords, and writing eligible articles related to the implementation of inclusive education in Indonesia. The results show that most schools in Indonesia understand inclusive education but still need to improve their implementation. Factors include the need for more special assistant teachers, socialization of inclusion policies, and limited budgets. Although some schools have implemented the inclusion program well, there are still challenges, including a need for more understanding from the community and parents, a shortage of human resources, and barriers to optimizing inclusive education activities. In implementing inclusive education, success factors involve teachers' attitudes and knowledge, communication, and adequate infrastructure.

**Keywords:** Elementary School; Inclusive Education; Literature Review; Problems in Inclusive Schools; Students with Special Needs.

## 1. Introduction

The current state of education globally is witnessing a growing interest in inclusive education. This approach advocates for integrating children with special needs into mainstream primary school settings. Given the diverse and inclusive nature of today's global context, implementing inclusive education at the primary school level is both a complex challenge and a crucial endeavor to ensure equal educational opportunities for all children (Sanisah, 2022).

### 1.1. Problem Statement

Optimizing inclusive education in primary schools presents a complex challenge, as evidenced by the myriad obstacles highlighted through an extensive literature review. The failure to effectively implement inclusive practices can result in the marginalization and exclusion of students with special needs, hindering their access to quality education and exacerbating educational disparities. To address these issues, the literature suggests various strategies, including developing inclusive curricula, teacher training in student-centered approaches, utilizing additional resources and technology to support students with special needs, and fostering close collaboration among educational stakeholders. These proposed strategies are underpinned by credible sources within the field of inclusive education, such as academic journals, textbooks, and research reports from reputable institutions, which provide empirical evidence supporting the importance of these approaches in enhancing inclusive education in primary schools (Afifa, & Subowo, 2020).

## 1.2. Related Research

Inclusive education is a common goal in education today, where all children, including children with special needs, are entitled to equal learning opportunities. However, in its implementation, there are still many hurdles to overcome. This problem is explained in the research of Sunardi et.al, 2024 that the problems of inclusive education include: limited resources, such as trained teachers, inclusive teaching materials and disability-friendly facilities, being one of the main obstacles. The curriculum is not fully inclusive and the stigmatization of children with disabilities also exacerbates the situation. To address these challenges, schools need to take strategic steps (Bunbury, 2020).

Teacher capacity building through training and collaboration is key. Schools also need to provide inclusive teaching materials and learning media and adjust the curriculum to suit the needs of children with disabilities. Building a disability-friendly school environment and raising awareness about inclusive education is also important (Ní Bhroin, & King, 2020; Duncan et.al, 2021; Kubacka, & D'Addio, 2020).

These efforts are expected to realize optimal inclusive education where all children can learn and develop together in a safe, inclusive and supportive environment (Ng & Kwan, 2020). It is important to remember that inclusive education is not only the school's responsibility, but also the responsibility of all of us. Let us together create an inclusive and quality education system for all children.

## 1.3. Research Objectives

The primary focus of this research is to delve into the implementation of inclusive education at the primary school level. The objectives are:

- To identify and analyze practical strategies for implementing inclusive education.
- To examine the challenges faced in the implementation of inclusive education.
- To understand the extent to which inclusive education meets the needs of students, especially those with special needs.

The expected outcomes include a deeper understanding of the importance of inclusive education and the presentation of effective strategies for creating an inclusive educational environment for all students.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1. Inclusive Education

Inclusive education means that every student, including those with special needs, has the right to an education in an inclusive school environment (De Beco, 2022). This means not only understanding diversity but also establishing an environment that supports the growth and learning of all students. In the context of inclusive education, this provides a foundation that every child has the same right to a quality education without discrimination (Adelakun & Ajayi, 2020).

Inclusive education is not simply placing children with special needs in regular classes. It requires comprehensive adjustments from the curriculum, infrastructure, and facilities to the learning system (Baharudin & Saidang, 2020). The curriculum must be flexible and responsive to individual needs, considering each child's learning style and potential. School infrastructure must be disability-friendly, allowing full access and participation for all students. Learning systems must also be adapted with strategies and methods to accommodate diverse learning needs (Dacholfany et al., 2023; Adjanku, 2020).

Dagiene et al. (2022) emphasize the importance of providing the broadest possible opportunity for learners with special needs to obtain quality education. This is in line with the goal of inclusive education, which is to open access and provide appropriate services for children with disabilities so that they can develop optimally. Inclusive education is not only the responsibility of schools but also of all stakeholders. Teachers need to be equipped with the relevant knowledge and skills to teach in inclusive classrooms. Parents should be involved in the education process of children with disabilities and have open communication with the school.

The community also needs to be educated about the importance of inclusive education, building an attitude of tolerance and inclusiveness in the neighborhood. Realizing inclusive education requires commitment and cooperation from all parties.

## 2.2. Success Factors for Inclusion Implementation

The concept of implementation success factors includes aspects such as teacher attitudes, knowledge, effective communication and adequate infrastructure. Positive attitudes and adequate knowledge from educators, along with good communication, can be key in shaping a successful inclusive environment (Kuyini et.al, 2020). Adequate infrastructure is also needed to support the optimal implementation of inclusive education (Azzahra et.al 2022). Through understanding these factors, this study aims to identify the key elements that influence the implementation of inclusive education in primary schools and provide recommendations based on these findings.

## 3. Method

### 3.1. Research Design

The method used in writing this article is a literature review, which is research by summarizing several research results and comparing them to produce a holistic interpretation. This literature review critically reviews the knowledge, ideas, or findings contained in a corpus of academically orientated literature (Kitchenham et al., 2009). Articles were selected by defining the scope, selecting relevant keywords and writing eligible articles related to the implementation of inclusive education in Indonesia.

### 3.2. Participants or Respondents

This study did not involve any direct participants or respondents as it used a literature review method that involved critically analyzing existing research articles.

### 3.3. Data Collection

Data collection was conducted through a literature search using keywords relevant to the research topic. Articles were searched on Google Scholar and Eric with the keywords "implementation of inclusive education at primary school level". The articles used were literature published in 2020-2023. The article selection scheme can be seen in Figure 1.

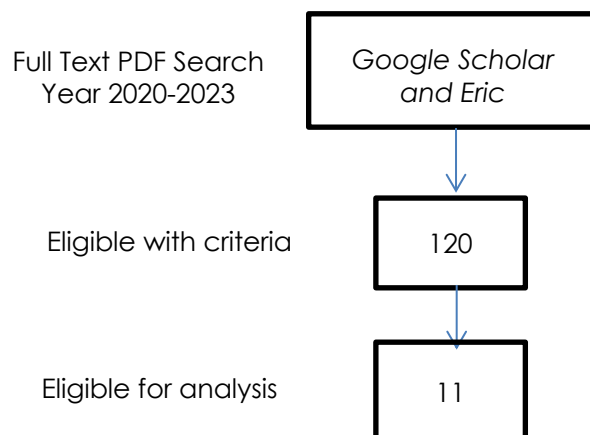


Figure 1. Scheme of Article Selection

### 3.4. Data analysis

Data analysis was conducted by summarizing the selected journal articles. Information retrieved included the researcher's name, year of journal publication, research title, methods, and a summary of results or findings in tabular form. Further analysis was conducted on the content contained in the research objectives and results/findings (Kitchenham et al., 2009).

### 3.5. Validity and Reliability

In the literature review method, validity and reliability focus more on the selection of relevant and credible articles. Proper keyword selection and selection of articles that fit the criteria ensure the validity of the study. In addition, the clarity of the steps in summarizing and analyzing the articles helped to ensure the reliability of the results.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Limited Resources

In the context of inclusive education, several fundamental obstacles stand in the way of creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment. Firstly, the lack of competent special assistant teachers with appropriate educational backgrounds can hinder learning (Raihan, 2023; Wijaya & Supena, 2023; Opoku, 2020). Their inadequate presence disrupts the flow of learning and makes it difficult to provide appropriate attention to students with special needs. Furthermore, the lack of understanding from class teachers and accompanying teachers about the learning needs of children with special needs creates confusion for students. This causes misalignment in the learning process and reduces the effectiveness of teacher-student interactions. The negative attitude of some teachers towards children with special needs is also a serious problem, creating dissonance and disrupting a sense of comfort in learning (Iqbal et.al, 2023; Kusmaryono, 2023). This can damage the relationship between teachers and students and affect their motivation to learn. Finally, the need for teacher training in various aspects of inclusive learning, such as curriculum modification and collaborative teaching, is key to improving the quality of inclusive education. However, the lack of access to this training limits teachers' ability to guide students well. Therefore, a better understanding of these needs and challenges is important to improve the effectiveness of inclusive education in the school environment. In addition, in an effort to create an effective inclusive learning environment, adequate facilities and infrastructure are of key importance. However, in reality, many schools experience problems in this regard. The lack of supporting facilities and infrastructure, such as disability-friendly classrooms, good accessibility and appropriate learning aids, is often an obstacle in providing full participation for students with special needs (Nurfadillah et.al, 2022). This situation can be compared to an inadequate performance stage, which hinders students' ability to engage to their full potential. In addition, poor sanitation facilities, such as lack of ramps, poor classroom hygiene, and poor acoustics, create an uncomfortable learning atmosphere (Jayadi, & Supena, 2023; Ni'mah et.al, 2022). This is similar to sound disturbances, which interfere with learning focus and comfort. Related to the problem of facilities and infrastructure, budget limitations are also a major obstacle. (Raihan, 2023; Iqbal et.al, 2023) Limited funding for inclusive education services in schools can be likened to a lack of funds for a concert. This hinders the implementation of programmes and activities needed to create a quality inclusive learning environment. Thus, gaps in facilities, infrastructure and funding are major barriers to effective and equitable inclusive education for all students.

### 4.2. Policy and Support

In realising inclusive education, it is important to pay attention to policy aspects and support from various related parties. However, there are often significant obstacles in this regard. Firstly, the lack of socialisation of the education system's service policy through inclusive schools is a serious problem. This limitation means that many parties, including key stakeholders such as teachers, students and parents, do not fully understand the purpose and benefits of inclusive education (Kusmaryono, 2023; Nurfadillah et.al, 2022). The impact is similar to information not being conveyed, causing uncertainty and incomprehension among the education community. Furthermore, weak coordination and communication between parties in supporting inclusive school implementation creates chaos and hinders effective co-operation. On the other hand, the lack of support from parents and communities for the needs of children with special needs creates a feeling of lack of acceptance and respect for them. Analogously, like an unenthusiastic audience, this can undermine these children's confidence and motivation to learn (Raihan, 2023; Ileri et.al, 2020; Ludago, 2020). In addition, negative societal views of inclusive education create stigma and barriers to the overall development of inclusive

education. These negative views, similar to unconstructive criticism, can hinder efforts towards an inclusive and supportive learning environment for all students. Therefore, a better understanding of inclusive policies and strong support from parents and communities are key in promoting the successful implementation of inclusive education (Wijaya & Supena, 2023; Jayadi & Supena, 2023).

#### **4.3. Curriculum and Learning**

Inadequate curriculum to accommodate the learning needs of children with special needs is one of the main challenges in inclusive education. This limitation makes it difficult for children with special needs to follow the flow of learning. With a curriculum that has not been properly adapted, these children may feel neglected or even left behind in the learning process (Kusmaryono, 2023; Ni'mah et.al, 2022). Adequate customisation of the curriculum is necessary so that every child, including those with special needs, can access the subject matter in a way that suits their abilities and needs. Without adequate customisation, efforts to create an equitable and fair inclusive learning environment will be hampered, thus reinforcing the importance of curriculum development that is inclusive and responsive to the needs of all students. Lack of curriculum customisation can also impact on overall student motivation and engagement (Raihan, 2023; Kusmaryono, 2023). When curricula do not take into account the individual needs of each student, including those with special needs, the risk of a mismatch between learning materials and students' abilities and interests is higher (Opoku, 2020). As a result, students may lose interest in learning, feel frustrated, or even experience a drop in self-confidence as they find it difficult to keep up with a learning flow that is not suited to their abilities. In the long run, this can have a negative impact on students' academic performance and personal development. Adequate customisation of the curriculum is therefore crucial to creating an inclusive learning environment, meeting the needs of diverse students and encouraging active participation and optimal achievement for each individual.

#### **4.4. School Strategy**

Ineffective school strategies in dealing with the physical barriers that hinder the implementation of inclusive education are a significant obstacle. Without a focus on overcoming these physical barriers, the strategy seems misguided and unproductive. The result is an increasingly chaotic and uncoordinated symphony of inclusive education. Physical barriers, such as lack of accessibility, non-disability-friendly facilities or inappropriate learning environments, can be a real barrier to the full and equitable participation of all students, including those with special needs (Wijaya & Supena, 2023; Iqbal et.al, 2023). Without effective strategies to overcome these barriers, efforts to create an adequate inclusive learning environment will be hampered, making it difficult to achieve the overall goals of inclusive education. It is therefore important for schools to develop more effective and targeted strategies to deal with these physical barriers as a step towards an inclusive and supportive learning environment for all students.

#### **4.5. Impact of Lack of Inclusive Implementation**

The impact of suboptimal implementation in inclusive education is felt directly by students and also impacts the school as a whole. Firstly, the impact on students includes various learning challenges arising from the diversity of severity and types of disabilities among them (Ileri et.al, 2020). The difficulty in creating activities that engage all students is also a serious problem, which is compounded by the lack of specialised support teachers to handle individualised learning plans (Wijaya & Supena, 2023; Ludago, 2020). This results in the need for more time in providing attention to each student, while control of the classroom becomes difficult to maintain. In addition, the demands of the students' parents also add to the burden that must be overcome, making their learning progress difficult. Analogously, it is like a hurdle that students have to jump through, which ultimately hinders their learning progress (Iqbal et.al, 2023).

The impact on schools is also significant, especially in terms of high dropout rates (Nurfadillah et.al, 2022; Ludago, 2020). The number of students repeating or even dropping out of school is increasing, signalling that unsupportive learning environments have created major barriers to student success. Lack of support and resources to address inclusive challenges can also

compromise the overall quality of the learning environment, hindering the effective achievement of the school's educational goals. It is therefore important for schools to prioritise efforts to support inclusion and address the challenges faced by students and schools in the implementation of inclusive education.

**Table 1.** Table Caption Usage

<b>Author, Year, Article Title</b>	<b>Findings</b>
Raihan, S. (2023). Analysis of Readiness to Implement Inclusive Education in Elementary Schools.	Based on the results of interviews and questionnaires distributed to 39 schools in Makassar, it is known that most schools have an adequate understanding of the implementation of inclusive education, but for the most part they are still not ready to implement it. Factors affecting school readiness are related to the readiness of teaching and education resources, facilities and infrastructure, curriculum adjustments and the willingness of schools to form a school environment that accommodates the needs of all children including children with special needs.
Wijaya, S., & Supena, A. (2023). Implementation of Inclusive Education Program in Primary Schools in Serang City.	It was found that the dominant factors that hinder the implementation of inclusive education in primary schools are the unavailability of competent special assistant teachers with appropriate educational backgrounds, the lack of socialization of education system service policies through inclusive schools, the limited budget for inclusive education services in schools, the unavailability of facilities and infrastructure supporting inclusive schools, poor coordination and communication between parties in supporting the implementation of inclusive schools.
Iqbal, M., Solin, S. N. A., Harahap, H. T., & Sulaiman, H. (2023). Implementation of Inclusive Education Policy at SMP Negeri 27 Medan.	The implementation of inclusive education at SMP N 27 MEDAN consists of 5 interconnected and inseparable components, namely: (1) Bureaucratic Structure (2) Communication, (3) Resources (4) Policy Environment (5) Problem Characteristics The constraints aspect relates to the Human Resources (HR) involved in the implementation of inclusive education, such as the Principal, Teachers, special assistant teacher, and parents.
Jayadi, J., & Supena, A. (2023). Implementation of Inclusive Education at SDN K1 in Karawang Regency.	The result of this study is that the implementation model of the inclusive education program has been running well by making learning tools, implementing inclusion and also evaluation. Meanwhile, the problems that arise are the lack of understanding from the community and parents about inclusive education so that its implementation needs to be optimized. Human resources owned by schools are still lacking so that they are not optimal in carrying out inclusive education activities and providing services to children with special needs.
Kusmaryono, I. (2023). Influential factors, challenges, and needs of teachers in inclusive schools in Semarang City.	The research found several factors that influence the successful implementation of inclusive education, including: teachers' attitudes, teachers' knowledge about inclusive education, communication and interaction between teachers and students, and adequate infrastructure. The challenges faced by teachers in organizing inclusive education include: (1) the severity and type of disability of students (35%), (2) creating activities that involve all students (20%), (3) not having enough teacher aides to cope with individualized lesson plans, (4) taking a lot of time and classroom control becomes difficult (10%), and (5) dealing with parental demands from students (10%). Meanwhile, teachers' needs are training to modify the curriculum, specialized training for students in inclusive classrooms, and collaborative teaching training.

Author, Year, Article Title	Findings
Ni'mah, N. U., Istirohmah, A. N., Hamidaturrohmah, H., & Widiyono, A. (2022). Problems in organizing inclusive education in primary schools.	The results showed that there are problems in the implementation of inclusive education which include aspects of students, curriculum, teaching staff, learning activities, school management, market facilities, cooperation between schools, government and parents, and community views. The main problem relates to teaching staff where class teachers and accompanying teachers do not have a good understanding of learning for children with special needs. Other problems relate to the lack of a support system from various parties such as parents and the community towards the needs of children with special needs.
Nurfadillah, S., Hambari, A. A., Nisaa, K., & Maharani, S. C. (2022). Analysis of the Implementation of Inclusive Education for Children with Special Needs at SDN Karawaci 5 Tangerang City.	The results showed that SDN Karawaci 5 Kota Tangerang implements an inclusive program by maintaining the system and keeping it in balance with other systems. The implementation of inclusive education is carried out by SDN Karawaci 5 Tangerang City by adjusting the resources it has.
Ileri, B. R., King'endo, M., Wangila, E., & Thuraniira, S. (2020). Policy strategies for effective implementation of inclusive education in Kenya.	The study established the school strategies were not anchored in overcoming physical barriers that hindered the implementation of inclusive education, with various challenges affecting the strategies. Therefore, the study concluded that ineffective school strategies contributed to lack of overcoming physical barriers and this negatively impacted the implementation of inclusive education in schools.
Opoku, M. P. (2021). Exploring the intentions of school leaders towards implementing inclusive education in secondary schools in Ghana.	However, in the Ghanaian context, information on the intentions of school leaders toward implementing inclusive education in secondary schools is sparse. Using the theory of planned behavior (TPB) as a framework, we interviewed 17 school leaders to understand their intentions toward the education of students with disabilities in secondary schools in Ghana. The participants were skeptical about the government's commitment to provide them with the needed resources to enhance their practices.
Ludago, T. B. (2020). Practices, challenges and opportunities of inclusive education implementation in Kambata Tambaro Zone, Ethiopia.	The finding revealed that there are inadequate infrastructures and education facilities, sanitation facilities, lack of ramps, dirty and dusty classrooms and acoustically non-treated classrooms, equipments and services; moreover, negative attitudes of teachers, lack of budget, limited professionals, lack of responsible personnel in district, zone and region education offices. There is highest number of repeaters and dropouts in early schools because of unfriendly learning environment for diversified learners.

## 5. Discussion

The literature study presents a fairly broad view of the implementation of inclusive education in Indonesian schools. Most schools understand the concept of inclusion, although major challenges remain in putting it into daily practice. The main obstacles include a shortage of special assistant teachers, minimal socialization of inclusion policies, budget constraints, and a lack of supporting infrastructure, especially at the primary school level (Tamela, Bungai, & Kartiwa, 2020).

The importance of human resources in the implementation of inclusive education is highlighted. The limited number of accompanying teachers who have the appropriate competencies and educational backgrounds is a dominant problem, especially at the primary school level. (Haq, & Maunah, 2023). The lack of socialization of inclusive policies, accompanied by limited budgets and supporting infrastructure, has also contributed significantly to the barriers to implementation (Putri, Miarakhman, & Krisnawati, 2020).

Although some schools have been able to run inclusion programs well, there are still challenges that must be overcome. One of them is the lack of understanding among the community and parents about inclusive education, which requires optimizing implementation through a comprehensive approach. The lack of human resources in schools is a serious obstacle that can hinder the optimality of inclusive education activities and services for children with special needs (Taufik, & Tadzkiroh, 2021; Khaerunisa, 2023).

The successful implementation of inclusive education not only depends on the ability of teachers but also involves aspects of teacher attitudes and knowledge, the quality of communication between teachers and students, and the availability of adequate infrastructure. Constraints faced by teachers include the severity and type of disability of students, the organization of activities involving all students, the lack of auxiliary teachers, time constraints and class control, and demands from parents (Widaningsih & Herawati, 2023).

To formulate strategies to improve the implementation of inclusive education, there is a need for careful planning at the school and classroom levels, training and support for all teachers, and active support from school leadership to implement an inclusive vision in their environment. At the national level, challenges involve supporting policies, effective data management, flexibility in the curriculum and close coordination with various stakeholders in the community (Amon, & Harliansyah, 2022).

## **5. Conclusion**

The literature review results show that most schools in Indonesia understand inclusive education but still need to improve their implementation. Factors such as the lack of special assistant teachers, lack of socialization of inclusion policies, limited budgets, and lack of infrastructure are barriers at the primary school level. Five components related to implementing inclusive education, such as bureaucratic structure and communication, face significant constraints in human resources. Although some schools have implemented inclusive programs well, challenges still need to be addressed, including a lack of understanding from the community and parents, a shortage of human resources, and barriers to optimizing inclusive education activities. Success factors involve teachers' attitudes, knowledge, communication, and adequate infrastructure. Overall, implementing inclusive education requires good planning, training, and support at the school level, while national challenges include aspects of policy, data management, curriculum flexibility, and coordination with relevant communities.

### **Limitation**

While the research results provide valuable insights, this study has some limitations. Firstly, the literature review was limited to articles published within a specific time frame (2020-2023). This limitation may affect the comprehensiveness of the understanding of recent developments in implementing inclusive education. In addition, resource constraints may limit access to relevant literature.

### **Recommendation**

Several recommendations can be made to other researchers or stakeholders based on the research results. Firstly, further research involving field studies is needed to get first-hand perspectives from schools implementing inclusive education. Secondly, stakeholders, including the government and educational institutions, can improve the socialization of inclusion policies, increase budget allocations, and provide adequate training for educators and school staff.



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## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest that may affect the objectivity of this research.

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