

Inclusive Education in Indonesia: Implementation and Challenges in Public Primary School Contexts

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Abstract

This study examines the implementation and challenges of inclusive education in Indonesian public primary schools. Despite progressive national policies and international commitments, inclusive education remains inconsistently practiced across the country. Using a qualitative, document-based approach, this study analyzes the intersection of policy, pedagogy, and socio-cultural factors. Findings show that while schools are officially designated as inclusive, many lack the necessary training, infrastructure, and pedagogical adaptation to support diverse learners. Barriers include limited teacher preparation, cultural stigma toward disability, rigid curricula, and fragmented policy execution. The research employs theoretical models including the social model of disability, the Index for Inclusion, and ecological systems theory to frame its analysis. The study concludes that meaningful inclusion requires systemic transformation, including localized policy support, professional development, and community engagement. It contributes both theoretical refinement and practical strategies for advancing inclusive practices within Indonesian educational systems.

Keywords

inclusive education; Indonesia; public schools; educational barriers; disability inclusion

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has emerged as a vital component of educational reform in both global and national contexts, aiming to ensure that all learners, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds, are provided with equal opportunities to succeed in mainstream classrooms. In Indonesia, this commitment is anchored in constitutional mandates and supported by national legislation such as Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, which emphasizes the right to education for all citizens. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), ratified by Indonesia in 2011, further underscores the nation's obligation to provide inclusive and equitable quality education for students with disabilities (UNESCO, 2015). Despite these legal provisions, the implementation of inclusive education in

Indonesian public primary schools remains inconsistent and under-researched (Miles & Singal, 2010).

The theoretical underpinnings of inclusive education rest upon social justice and human rights perspectives, promoting the dismantling of systemic barriers and fostering environments that embrace diversity (Ainscow, 2005). Empirical studies reveal that when properly implemented, inclusive education benefits not only students with disabilities but also their peers, teachers, and communities by fostering empathy, collaboration, and innovation (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). However, translating these ideals into practice in the Indonesian context is hindered by logistical, cultural, and pedagogical challenges. Schools frequently lack sufficient infrastructure, specialized personnel, and adaptive teaching methods, all of which are necessary for successful inclusion (Sunardi et al., 2011).

Indonesian research has identified several factors contributing to the slow progress of inclusive education. These include inadequate teacher training, limited policy dissemination, and a lack of monitoring and evaluation systems (Suharto et al., 2013). Furthermore, many schools struggle with negative societal attitudes toward disability, which perpetuate stigma and exclusion (Murniati, 2014). This gap between policy intention and classroom reality necessitates further scholarly inquiry, particularly in public primary schools where foundational learning occurs. Given that early educational experiences significantly influence long-term academic and social outcomes, understanding the barriers to inclusion at this stage is essential (Mitchell, 2014, p. 98).

While prior studies have addressed various components of inclusive education in Indonesia, few have holistically examined its implementation and challenges within public primary school contexts. This study aims to fill that gap by offering a comprehensive analysis of how inclusive education is currently operationalized and what impediments continue to exist. It investigates not only policy alignment and institutional readiness but also classroom practices and community involvement. The goal is to illuminate both systemic and localized dynamics that affect inclusion, thereby offering actionable insights for stakeholders and policymakers (Booth & Ainscow, 2002).

This study is guided by three research questions embedded within this inquiry: (1) How is inclusive education currently implemented in Indonesian public primary schools? (2) What are the primary challenges to successful inclusion in these schools? (3) What strategies can enhance the sustainability and effectiveness of inclusive education in this context? By addressing these questions, the study contributes to the broader discourse on educational equity and aims to inform policy, practice, and future research in inclusive education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of inclusive education has evolved significantly over the past few decades, with its roots deeply embedded in human rights discourse and the social model of disability. Internationally, inclusive education is defined as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures, and communities (UNESCO, 2009). Scholars such as Ainscow (2005) and Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) emphasize that inclusive education transcends mere physical integration of students with special needs; it requires pedagogical transformation and systemic restructuring to ensure meaningful learning experiences for all. The Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) set a foundational framework for inclusion, advocating that schools should accommodate all children regardless of physical, intellectual, emotional, social, linguistic, or other conditions. This paradigm shift is crucial in reshaping educational practices toward equity and justice.

Within the Indonesian context, inclusive education has been gradually incorporated into educational policy and discourse. The Indonesian Ministry of National Education introduced inclusive education programs in early 2000s, marking a transition from segregated schooling to more integrative models (Sunardi et al., 2011). Despite policy efforts, empirical studies highlight significant implementation gaps. For example, research by Suharto et al. (2013) found that many teachers in public schools lacked the necessary training and resources to adapt their teaching methods to accommodate diverse learners. Similarly, Murniati (2014) noted that societal and institutional perceptions of disability continue to hinder inclusive practices. Moreover, inclusive education is often misunderstood as merely integrating students with disabilities, rather than as a broader initiative that supports all learners with diverse educational needs (Mitchell, 2014, p. 88).

The literature further suggests that the success of inclusive education depends heavily on contextual factors such as school leadership, community engagement, and policy coherence (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). Teachers' attitudes and beliefs significantly influence their willingness and ability to implement inclusive practices (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). In Indonesia, this is compounded by infrastructural limitations and inconsistent policy enforcement, which collectively undermine inclusive efforts (Miles & Singal, 2010). Although there is growing awareness of inclusive education's importance, comprehensive frameworks integrating theoretical, empirical, and practical dimensions remain underdeveloped in Indonesia. This study aims to address this gap by synthesizing these dimensions into a coherent analysis of inclusive education in public primary schools.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study is rooted in the social model of disability, which challenges the traditional medical model that views disability as a problem residing within the individual. Instead, the social model posits that disability arises from societal barriers that restrict participation and access (Oliver, 1996, p. 34). In the context of inclusive education, this perspective shifts the focus from individual deficits to systemic transformation. Applying this model allows us to critically examine the policies, school environments, and pedagogical practices that either facilitate or hinder the inclusion of students with diverse needs. It emphasizes the importance of removing institutional and attitudinal barriers within educational settings (Thomas, 2007, p. 59).

Complementing the social model, Booth and Ainscow's (2002) Index for Inclusion provides a practical framework for evaluating and developing inclusive school cultures, policies, and practices. Their model comprises three dimensions: creating inclusive cultures, producing inclusive policies, and evolving inclusive practices. These dimensions serve as a diagnostic and developmental tool for schools seeking to become more inclusive. This study utilizes these dimensions to assess how Indonesian public primary schools align with inclusive principles, thereby providing a structured basis for identifying implementation gaps and formulating recommendations.

Additionally, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979) offers a layered understanding of how different environmental systems—ranging from microsystems such as classrooms and families, to macrosystems like national policies and cultural beliefs—influence inclusive education. This theory is instrumental in analyzing how multiple levels of interaction affect the learning experiences of children with special needs. For example, teacher training (microsystem) and educational policy (macrosystem) are interconnected and jointly impact classroom inclusivity (Donald, Lazarus, & Lolwana, 2010, p. 72).

Critical pedagogy also informs this study by highlighting the role of power, voice, and equity in educational settings. Freire (1970, p. 45) emphasized the importance of education as a practice of freedom, where learners are active participants in constructing knowledge. This perspective is particularly relevant in inclusive education, where traditional teacher-centered methods often marginalize students with special needs. Inclusive pedagogy, as articulated by Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011), promotes the use of flexible teaching strategies that accommodate all learners without categorizing them based on ability. This pedagogical shift requires a reconceptualization of teacher roles and curriculum design, aligning closely with the study's goals.

Together, these theoretical perspectives—social model of disability, Index for Inclusion, ecological systems theory, and critical pedagogy—form an integrative

framework for this research. They allow for a nuanced exploration of inclusive education that is both structural and relational, bridging macro-level policy analysis with micro-level classroom practices. This multidimensional framework not only enhances analytical depth but also provides practical relevance for stakeholders involved in implementing inclusive education in Indonesia.

Previous Research

Early scholarly attention to inclusive education in Indonesia emerged in the mid-2000s, following global calls for equity and the nation's adoption of inclusive education policies. Sunardi et al. (2006) conducted one of the first national evaluations of inclusive education implementation. Using qualitative methods, they assessed policy readiness, teacher capacity, and resource distribution across several pilot schools. Their study concluded that while legal frameworks existed, many schools lacked clarity in operationalizing inclusive practices. This foundational research underscored the importance of institutional alignment and set the stage for subsequent inquiries.

In 2008, Miles and Singal explored inclusion within low-income contexts, using Indonesia as a case study. They emphasized the importance of cultural perceptions and community-based education in facilitating or hindering inclusive practices. Their findings suggested that although inclusive education is conceptually accepted, practical application is often obstructed by deep-rooted societal stigma and the marginalization of students with disabilities. Their research contributed significantly to understanding the intersection of poverty, disability, and access to education.

By 2010, Ainscow and Sandill's international comparative study introduced the idea of system-wide reform as a prerequisite for inclusive success. Although not exclusively focused on Indonesia, the study's emphasis on leadership, professional development, and organizational change resonated with Indonesian challenges. It inspired localized research to consider not just teacher attitudes but also institutional support mechanisms. Indonesian scholars such as Murniati (2011, p. 103) built upon these findings, identifying insufficient training and lack of collaboration as systemic barriers in public primary schools.

Suharto et al. (2013) provided a detailed analysis of inclusive policy implementation in urban and rural schools across Indonesia. Their findings revealed stark contrasts between regions, with urban schools generally more prepared due to better access to training and infrastructure. Their study introduced the concept of "inclusive readiness," a measurable framework assessing teacher skills, physical accessibility, and curriculum flexibility. This model has since been referenced widely in Indonesian inclusive education discourse.

Another significant contribution came from Mitchell (2014, p. 88), who offered an integrative framework for inclusive pedagogy based on global best practices. Although his work was international in scope, it provided concrete strategies for curriculum adaptation and differentiated instruction, both of which are highly relevant for Indonesian public schools. His emphasis on universal design for learning (UDL) has influenced ongoing efforts to make classrooms more accommodating to diverse learners.

In 2015, research by Salend and Duhaney emphasized the importance of teacher beliefs and school culture in sustaining inclusive practices. Their case studies highlighted how leadership support and peer collaboration significantly influenced teacher attitudes toward inclusion. Indonesian scholars have since echoed these findings, arguing that professional development must be paired with systemic cultural change to achieve genuine inclusion (Yusuf, 2015, p. 119).

Despite this body of work, a significant research gap remains. Most studies focus either on policy evaluation or teacher preparedness in isolation. Few have integrated multiple dimensions—policy, pedagogy, infrastructure, and societal attitudes—into a comprehensive analysis of inclusive education in Indonesian public primary schools. Moreover, rural schools remain underrepresented in the literature, leading to an incomplete understanding of nationwide implementation. This study addresses these gaps by holistically analyzing inclusive education through an integrated theoretical and empirical lens.

RESEARCH METHODS

The type of data employed in this study is qualitative and textual, comprising published academic literature, government regulations, and institutional reports. This approach is suitable for exploring the implementation and challenges of inclusive education as it allows for in-depth thematic analysis and contextual interpretation. Qualitative data is particularly effective for investigating educational phenomena where human experiences, institutional structures, and policy narratives intersect (Creswell, 2014, p. 186). It also permits a layered understanding of inclusion that cannot be captured through quantitative measures alone, especially in diverse school settings such as those in Indonesia (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 81).

The data sources include peer-reviewed journal articles, Indonesian governmental publications, international reports (e.g., UNESCO, World Bank), academic books, and dissertations relevant to inclusive education. These sources were selected based on their credibility, traceability, and relevance to the research questions. Using scholarly databases such as JSTOR, ProQuest, and Sinta, only works published in or before 2016

were included, in compliance with the study's parameters. The integration of Indonesian and international sources enables a comparative perspective that contextualizes local challenges within global discourse (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Sunardi et al., 2011). This ensures that the findings are not only valid within Indonesia but also theoretically robust on a wider academic scale.

The data collection technique employed is document analysis, which involves the systematic evaluation of policy documents, literature, and research studies. This method is ideal for exploring how inclusive education is represented, interpreted, and operationalized across various stakeholders and institutions. Bowen (2009) emphasized that document analysis can uncover trends, policy inconsistencies, and institutional narratives that might be overlooked in other methods. In this study, policy guidelines, teacher training manuals, and empirical studies were analyzed for themes relating to inclusion, accessibility, and educational equity. The use of multiple document types allows for triangulation, thereby increasing the reliability of the data (Creswell, 2014, p. 191).

The data analysis technique used in this study is thematic analysis, which identifies, analyzes, and reports patterns within the data. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is flexible and particularly suited for examining qualitative educational data. The coding process involved identifying key themes such as "teacher readiness," "policy-practice gap," "infrastructure limitations," and "cultural attitudes." These themes were then mapped against the theoretical framework, including the Index for Inclusion and the social model of disability. This interpretive approach facilitates a critical and theory-informed understanding of inclusive education's multifaceted challenges in Indonesian public primary schools.

Conclusion drawing in this research was carried out through interpretive synthesis, linking themes to the research questions and theoretical constructs. This involved constant comparison and reflection, ensuring that emergent insights remained grounded in both empirical evidence and conceptual frameworks. The findings were interpreted not as isolated issues but as interrelated challenges embedded within a broader educational ecosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). This synthesis allowed the study to generate practical recommendations and theoretical contributions, such as refining the concept of inclusive readiness and highlighting the influence of socio-cultural dynamics on policy implementation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal a complex and layered picture of inclusive education implementation in Indonesian public primary schools. The results indicate that while

legal and institutional frameworks supporting inclusive education are well established, significant discrepancies exist between policy ideals and classroom realities. This gap is reflective of systemic limitations in infrastructure, human resource capacity, and cultural perceptions—many of which are deeply entrenched in broader socio-political and educational systems (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Murniati, 2014). The study's dialogue with Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979) underscores how multi-level interactions—from governmental policy to classroom practices—influence the outcomes of inclusive education.

Building on the theoretical framework, the Index for Inclusion provides a valuable lens to assess the inclusivity of school environments. While some schools have made progress in developing inclusive cultures and policies, the evolution of inclusive practices remains inconsistent. The findings demonstrate that many educators lack the confidence and training to modify curricula or use differentiated instruction effectively, aligning with Florian and Black-Hawkins' (2011) argument that inclusive pedagogy requires ongoing professional development and institutional support. In this regard, inclusive education in Indonesia appears more symbolic than transformative, often characterized by administrative compliance rather than substantive pedagogical change.

The study also uncovers expert perspectives that extend the discourse beyond previously identified challenges. For example, there is increasing advocacy for integrating inclusive education into broader school improvement initiatives, rather than treating it as a separate agenda (Ainscow, 2005). Moreover, emerging discussions in Indonesian educational journals emphasize the need for localized models of inclusion that reflect cultural and community contexts rather than replicating Western paradigms (Sunardi et al., 2011). These insights suggest that context-sensitive strategies and decentralization may be key to advancing inclusion in diverse Indonesian settings.

This study fills a critical research gap by examining the intersection of policy, pedagogy, and socio-cultural factors in shaping inclusive education. It also builds upon previous research by integrating structural, institutional, and personal dimensions into a unified analytical narrative. Unlike earlier studies that focused narrowly on one aspect—such as teacher attitudes or infrastructure—this research adopts a holistic perspective, supported by the multi-theoretical framework outlined earlier. The following thematic subsections respond directly to the research questions posed in the introduction, offering a structured analysis of inclusive education's implementation, challenges, and potential solutions in Indonesian public primary schools.

1. Evaluating the Implementation of Inclusive Education in Public Primary Schools

Inclusive education in Indonesian public primary schools is primarily driven by policy mandates from the Ministry of Education and Culture, with support from global frameworks such as the CRPD and Education for All. While these policies advocate for equity and access, their practical implementation varies widely across regions. Schools designated as “inclusive” are expected to accept students with special educational needs (SEN); however, this designation often lacks accompanying structural and pedagogical support (Sunardi et al., 2011). Many schools accept these students in principle but lack mechanisms for differentiated instruction, individualized support plans, or assistive technologies—key components of inclusive practice as defined by Mitchell (2014, p. 91).

The Index for Inclusion (Booth & Ainscow, 2002) outlines the importance of inclusive cultures as foundational for meaningful implementation. Yet in many schools, there is limited awareness or understanding of inclusive values among educators and administrators. Inclusion is frequently interpreted as physical placement of students with SEN in regular classrooms, without corresponding shifts in teaching methods or classroom management. Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) argue that inclusive pedagogy must begin with the assumption of learner diversity and adapt teaching accordingly. However, in the Indonesian context, standardized curricula and rigid assessment methods pose additional barriers.

Teacher preparedness is a critical aspect of implementation. Research by Suharto et al. (2013) shows that most public school teachers in Indonesia have not received sufficient training in special education. Professional development programs are sporadic and not embedded in continuous learning models. This results in a lack of confidence and competence among teachers when accommodating diverse learners. The ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) helps to contextualize this issue by showing how the lack of support from teacher training institutions (exosystem) influences classroom practices (microsystem). Teachers often rely on peer support or personal initiative, leading to inconsistent and unsystematic implementation.

Curriculum adaptation is another area of concern. Although national policy allows for curriculum modification, schools are seldom guided on how to translate this into practice. According to Ainscow and Sandill (2010), curriculum flexibility is a key indicator of a school’s inclusiveness. In many Indonesian

schools, teachers use uniform lesson plans and assessments, with little consideration for individual learning needs. Moreover, school infrastructure often lacks accessibility features such as ramps, tactile signs, or adapted seating, making physical inclusion difficult for students with physical disabilities (UNESCO, 2015).

Despite these challenges, there are isolated examples of effective implementation. Some urban schools with better funding and leadership support have piloted inclusive practices, such as team teaching, use of ICT for learners with disabilities, and peer-assisted learning (Murniati, 2014). These schools often benefit from partnerships with NGOs or universities, reflecting the importance of external support in sustaining inclusive initiatives. However, such cases remain exceptions rather than the norm, highlighting a systemic lack of scalability and sustainability.

Furthermore, implementation efforts are often hindered by policy fragmentation. National directives are not always accompanied by clear operational guidelines at the local level. According to Miles and Singal (2010), successful implementation of inclusion requires coherence between policy, practice, and community values. In Indonesia, decentralization of education has led to inconsistent interpretations of inclusion across districts, weakening policy impact. Schools require not only mandates but also practical tools and capacity-building initiatives to ensure that inclusion becomes an integral part of school identity rather than a superficial label.

In conclusion, the implementation of inclusive education in Indonesian public primary schools remains uneven and largely aspirational. While policies are in place, the lack of teacher preparedness, curriculum adaptation, infrastructural support, and coherent local governance limits effective enactment. The findings suggest that inclusion must be embedded as a systemic and cultural shift, rather than treated as an isolated policy directive. Bridging the gap between policy and practice will require a multidimensional strategy that addresses teacher training, institutional readiness, and localized interpretation of inclusive principles.

2. Barriers to Realizing Inclusive Education in Indonesia

The successful realization of inclusive education in Indonesian public primary schools is impeded by several interconnected challenges, ranging from systemic constraints to deeply rooted socio-cultural beliefs. One of the most pressing obstacles is the persistent lack of teacher training in inclusive pedagogical strategies. Despite government initiatives, most pre-service and in-

service teacher education programs remain focused on conventional, one-size-fits-all approaches, offering limited exposure to differentiated instruction or classroom management for diverse learners (Suharto et al., 2013). As Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) note, inclusive teaching requires not only strategies but a shift in mindset—a pedagogical belief in the value and potential of every learner. Without this foundational perspective, even well-intended efforts may fall short.

Another significant challenge is the inadequate allocation of financial and physical resources. Many public primary schools operate with limited budgets, which restrict their ability to invest in accessibility improvements, teaching aids, or support staff. For example, schools frequently lack facilities such as ramps, accessible toilets, or assistive technologies for students with visual or auditory impairments (UNESCO, 2015). According to Booth and Ainscow's (2002) Index for Inclusion, physical and environmental inclusivity is essential for meaningful participation. However, in practice, infrastructure improvements are often deprioritized, especially in rural and underfunded schools.

Cultural attitudes and societal stigma toward disability also pose formidable barriers. In many communities, children with disabilities are still viewed through a lens of charity or pity rather than rights and inclusion. This perception influences school culture, teacher expectations, and peer interactions (Miles & Singal, 2010). Such attitudinal barriers are reinforced by a lack of public awareness and advocacy, which limits parental engagement and community support. Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1979) helps illuminate how macrosystem values (societal beliefs) trickle down to the microsystem level (school and classroom), thereby shaping the inclusivity climate. In this context, even policies that promote inclusion may fail if the cultural readiness of the community is not addressed.

Inconsistencies in policy implementation and monitoring further exacerbate these challenges. Although national policies mandate inclusive practices, local education authorities often lack clear operational guidelines or accountability frameworks to enforce them. According to Murniati (2014), the absence of coherent intergovernmental coordination leads to confusion among school administrators and educators, who are uncertain about how to execute inclusive mandates. This policy-practice disconnect undermines the credibility and sustainability of inclusive education efforts, particularly in schools where leadership commitment is low.

The lack of collaboration among educational stakeholders—teachers, parents, school administrators, and external specialists—also restricts the development of inclusive environments. Effective inclusion requires interdisciplinary

teamwork and continuous dialogue to adapt teaching plans, share responsibilities, and address individual needs (Mitchell, 2014, p. 95). However, in Indonesian public schools, such collaboration is often hindered by rigid administrative hierarchies and the absence of support personnel such as special education consultants or school counselors. This results in an overburdened teaching workforce with limited capacity to cater to diverse classroom needs.

Moreover, the standardized national curriculum presents a rigid framework that leaves little room for adaptation. While inclusive education demands curricular flexibility to meet varied learning styles and paces, Indonesian teachers are often bound by centrally prescribed syllabi and high-stakes testing requirements (Sunardi et al., 2011). This discourages innovative or inclusive teaching approaches and pressures educators to prioritize uniform academic outcomes over individualized growth.

In sum, the barriers to inclusive education in Indonesian public primary schools are multifaceted and deeply embedded within institutional, cultural, and structural domains. These include unprepared teachers, limited resources, societal stigma, weak policy enforcement, lack of stakeholder collaboration, and inflexible curricula. Addressing these barriers requires not only technical interventions but also a cultural and ideological shift in how inclusion is understood and practiced. Without a holistic and context-sensitive response, inclusive education will remain an aspirational goal rather than an operational reality.

3. Toward a Sustainable and Contextualized Inclusive Education Strategy

Building a sustainable and effective model of inclusive education in Indonesian public primary schools requires strategic alignment between policy formulation, community engagement, and pedagogical innovation. One essential strategy is the institutionalization of inclusive values within teacher education programs. Rather than treating inclusive pedagogy as a supplementary subject, it must be integrated into core teacher training curricula (Mitchell, 2014, p. 93). Embedding inclusive practices early in teacher development fosters a professional ethos of diversity, equity, and adaptability. This also aligns with Florian and Black-Hawkins' (2011) call for inclusive pedagogy that is not only methodologically diverse but also philosophically grounded in the right of every learner to participate meaningfully.

In-service professional development must be continuous, collaborative, and context-specific. Programs should adopt a school-based model that enables

teachers to engage in reflective practice, peer mentoring, and localized problem-solving. Ainscow (2005) emphasizes the importance of practitioner-led innovation in promoting inclusive cultures. Case studies from Indonesian urban schools show that teacher networks, when supported by school leadership and external partners, can generate scalable models of inclusive instruction (Murniati, 2014). These professional learning communities empower teachers to share strategies, co-develop lesson plans, and adapt instructional tools without over-reliance on external consultants.

On the policy level, a decentralized and adaptive governance model can enhance inclusivity. National directives should be accompanied by locally formulated guidelines that reflect the unique cultural, economic, and demographic characteristics of each region (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). This would reduce the “one-size-fits-all” approach and allow for policy flexibility. Furthermore, establishing dedicated inclusion coordinators within district education offices can improve oversight and support for schools. These coordinators can serve as liaisons between schools, parents, and ministries, ensuring that implementation is monitored and responsive to local needs (UNESCO, 2015).

Engaging families and communities is equally critical for sustaining inclusive education. Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory (1979) illustrates that microsystem-level actors—such as parents, community leaders, and religious institutions—exert substantial influence on children’s educational experiences. Schools must actively involve parents in decision-making processes and raise public awareness about the importance of inclusion. Outreach campaigns, community forums, and school open days can help demystify disability and counter societal stigma. Involving respected local figures in advocacy can further enhance legitimacy and community buy-in (Miles & Singal, 2010).

In terms of curriculum, adopting the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) can create a more flexible and inclusive instructional environment. UDL encourages multiple means of representation, expression, and engagement, making learning accessible to all students without requiring individualized plans for each learner (Mitchell, 2014, p. 97). Incorporating UDL into Indonesian primary school curricula would require not only policy revision but also practical tools and teacher training materials tailored to local contexts. This pedagogical shift could be supported by pilot programs, instructional videos, and localized teaching modules co-created by teachers and researchers.

Finally, sustainability depends on robust monitoring and evaluation systems. Schools need inclusive education indicators—such as student participation rates, teacher attitudes, and infrastructure readiness—to assess their progress.

These indicators must be linked to school accreditation and funding mechanisms to incentivize genuine reform. As Ainscow and Sandill (2010) argue, inclusion should be embedded into school improvement frameworks rather than treated as a peripheral initiative. In Indonesia, integrating inclusive goals into existing school-based management systems could help ensure continuity and accountability.

In conclusion, sustainable inclusive education in Indonesia requires a coordinated strategy involving curriculum reform, localized policy implementation, stakeholder engagement, and professional development. These efforts must be grounded in both global best practices and local realities to be effective. By institutionalizing inclusive values, building systemic support, and fostering cultural acceptance, Indonesia can move from policy rhetoric to meaningful inclusion in its public primary schools.

This study has critically examined the implementation of inclusive education in Indonesian public primary schools, answering three key research questions and illuminating significant gaps and opportunities for progress. The findings confirm that while inclusive education policies exist at the national level, their practical application remains limited and inconsistent. Schools often interpret inclusion as mere physical access rather than meaningful pedagogical and institutional transformation. The first research question—concerning the implementation of inclusive education—reveals that although inclusive schools are officially designated, they frequently lack teacher training, adaptive curricula, and accessible infrastructure. These deficiencies hinder the realization of inclusive values in classroom practice.

In addressing the second research question, the study identified major barriers to inclusion: insufficient professional development, limited financial resources, persistent social stigma, and fragmented policy enforcement. These barriers are compounded by an inflexible national curriculum and lack of collaboration between educational stakeholders. The interaction between systemic, cultural, and institutional factors highlights the multifaceted nature of these challenges and the need for comprehensive, cross-sectoral solutions.

The third research question focused on strategies to enhance sustainability and effectiveness. The findings emphasize the need for integrated approaches grounded in the Index for Inclusion, Universal Design for Learning, and ecological systems theory. Key recommendations include the incorporation of inclusive pedagogy into teacher education, the decentralization of policy application with localized support structures, and the cultivation of community engagement to shift cultural perceptions. These

strategies not only address technical gaps but also aim to foster a more inclusive school culture.

The theoretical implications of this study include the refinement of inclusive readiness as a multi-dimensional framework encompassing policy, practice, and cultural variables. The integration of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory and inclusive pedagogy demonstrates the utility of cross-theoretical approaches in educational research. By situating inclusion within systemic, relational, and pedagogical contexts, the study provides a nuanced understanding of how inclusion functions—or fails to function—in complex environments.

Practically, this research contributes actionable insights for policymakers, school leaders, and educators. It proposes sustainable models for professional development, community engagement, and inclusive school management. These insights are especially valuable for decentralized education systems like Indonesia's, where local autonomy can either advance or inhibit inclusive goals depending on the presence of enabling mechanisms. The study also underscores the importance of developing context-sensitive tools, such as culturally adapted teaching resources and monitoring instruments, to evaluate inclusive progress.

In conclusion, this research bridges theoretical analysis and practical application to offer a comprehensive framework for inclusive education in Indonesia. It contributes to both local and global discourses by contextualizing inclusion within the socio-political realities of public primary schools, while also affirming universal principles of educational equity and justice.

CONCLUSION

Inclusive education in Indonesia represents both a moral imperative and a strategic challenge, particularly within the context of public primary schools where foundational learning and social integration take place. This study has revealed that despite national policy commitments and international obligations, the practical realization of inclusive education remains uneven and often superficial. The gap between policy and practice is shaped by a confluence of factors, including limited teacher training, inadequate infrastructure, socio-cultural stigma, and fragmented governance structures. These factors not only constrain access for students with diverse needs but also hinder the broader transformation of the educational environment.

The research has confirmed the relevance of applying a multi-theoretical framework—drawing on the social model of disability, inclusive pedagogy, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, and the Index for Inclusion—to interpret the challenges and

possibilities of inclusion. These frameworks allow for a more holistic understanding of how inclusion must be rooted not only in institutional policy but also in classroom practice, teacher beliefs, and community values. The integration of these theoretical insights with empirical data has enabled a nuanced exploration of the structural and relational dimensions of inclusive education.

Several key recommendations emerge from the findings. First, teacher education programs must embed inclusive pedagogy as a core component, fostering not only skills but also inclusive mindsets. Second, educational policy must become more responsive and localized, allowing districts and schools to implement strategies that reflect their unique challenges and resources. Third, ongoing public awareness and community involvement are essential to dismantling stigma and building social support for inclusive practices. Fourth, inclusion must be seen as a systemic reform embedded within broader educational improvement efforts rather than a peripheral or conditional goal.

Finally, future research should focus on longitudinal studies that track the outcomes of inclusive education strategies over time, particularly in rural and marginalized communities. Comparative research between different districts or provinces may also yield insights into best practices and scalable innovations. By continuing to explore these areas, Indonesian education can progress toward a system where all learners are truly valued and supported.

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