

Inclusive Education in Elementary Schools in Pandeglang District: Challenges and Accessibility Strategies for Children with Special Needs

Ratna Dewi^{1*}, Soleh Hidayat¹, Aan Hendrayana¹

¹ Doctoral Program in Education, Postgraduate, Universitas Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa, Serang, Indonesia.

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Corresponding Author:

Ratna Dewi

7782230017@untirta.ac.id

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Abstract: Inclusive education is a learning system that aims to provide equal education services for all children, including children with special needs (ABK). This study aims to examine the challenges faced by Elementary Schools in Pandeglang Regency in implementing inclusive education and strategies to increase accessibility for children with special needs. Parental support in the learning process of children at home, as well as social acceptance in the surrounding environment, greatly determine the sustainability of education for children with special needs. In addition, partnerships between schools and local communities are effective strategies in building a friendly, inclusive, and participatory learning environment. Therefore, integration between policy approaches, teacher capacity development, and community empowerment is an important foundation in building a sustainable inclusive education system. The method used is descriptive qualitative with data collection through observation, interviews, and document analysis. The findings show that the limited number of trained educators, minimal facilities and infrastructure, and social stigma are the main obstacles, as well as the high number of children who do not attend school. The strategies implemented include teacher training, partnerships with parents and social institutions, and the use of adaptive learning technology. The research recommendations emphasize the need for policies to support inclusion and strengthen school capacity in serving children with special needs (ABK).

Keywords: Accessibility; Children with special needs; Elementary school; Inclusive education; Pandeglang

Introduction

Inclusive education is an education system that unites all children, including children with special needs (ABK), in regular education for joint learning without discrimination (Putri et al., 2022). This principle emphasizes equal rights in obtaining quality education regardless of physical, intellectual, social, or emotional abilities (Chairunnisa & Rismita, 2022; Deroncele-Acosta & Ellis, 2024a). In Indonesia, inclusive education has been regulated in the Minister of National Education Regulation No. 70 of 2009 concerning Inclusive Education for Students with

disabilities and have the potential for intelligence or special talents. Elementary schools as the initial foundation of formal education have an important role in the implementation of inclusive education in the government's efforts to shape the nation's next generation (Rapp & Corral-Granados, 2024). However, its implementation in various regions, including Pandeglang Regency, still faces various obstacles.

Pandeglang Regency as one of the areas in Banten Province with a fairly large population, has its own potential and challenges in providing inclusive-friendly education services (Ratna Sari et al., 2024). Geographical constraints, limited trained educators,

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and low public awareness are the main factors that hinder the acceleration of inclusion programs in this region (Dare & Nowicki, 2023; Poikola et al., 2024). Pandeglang Regency is one of the regions in Banten Province that has significant geographical and social challenges in the implementation of basic education. This area is dominated by mountains and villages, with limited transportation and communication infrastructure. This condition has a direct impact on the accessibility of education services, especially for children living in remote areas and children with special needs. Data from the Pandeglang Regency Education Office in 2023 showed that out of 500 Elementary Schools spread across this region, only 29 schools were designated as schools that provide inclusive education. This means that less than 6% of Elementary Schools have formal inclusive status.

Ironically, the number of children who do not attend school is still high, most of whom are children with special needs who do not have access to education due to various structural and cultural barriers. This fact shows a serious gap between policy and implementation in the field (Hudson et al., 2019; Zech et al., 2023). The child's learning environment consists of various systems that influence each other (Rahmania, 2024; Villardón-Gallego et al., 2018). Therefore, efforts to build inclusive schools must pay attention to individual aspects of children's needs, micro (teacher and student interactions), meso (parental support) to macro (government policies). In addition, the theory of social constructivism (André et al., 2025), where the zone of proximal development (ZPD) is relevant in the context of learning for children with special needs (ABK). Where social interaction is the main foundation for children's cognitive development (Dzainudin et al., 2018; Morgan et al., 2021; Kärtner & Köster, 2024).

By referring to the approach to education based on student needs, inclusive education requires schools to adjust the curriculum, learning strategies, and assessments that are adaptive to the abilities and potential of each child (Rincon-Flores et al., 2024; Ugalde et al., 2021). This study attempts to map the actual challenges faced by Elementary Schools in Pandeglang in implementing inclusive education, while also offering alternative strategies that allow for increased access and quality of education services for ABK. Furthermore, the literature also emphasizes the importance of the role of families and communities in supporting the success of inclusive education. Parental support in the child's learning process at home, as well as social acceptance in the surrounding environment, greatly determine the sustainability of education for children with special needs. In addition, partnerships between schools and local communities are an effective

strategy in building a friendly, inclusive, and participatory learning environment (Renbarger et al., 2025; Leifler, 2020; Manahasa et al., 2021). Therefore, the integration of policy approaches, teacher capacity development, and community empowerment is an important foundation in building a sustainable inclusive education system.

Based on the background above, a study was conducted on Inclusive Education in Elementary Schools in Pandeglang District: Challenges and Accessibility Strategies for Children with Special Needs. This study aims to examine the challenges faced by Elementary Schools in Pandeglang Regency in implementing inclusive education and strategies to increase accessibility for children with special needs.

Method

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach that aims to provide an in-depth description of the implementation of inclusive education at the Elementary School level in Pandeglang Regency, Banten. This approach was chosen because it is able to explore social dynamics, direct experiences, and concrete challenges faced by education actors in a local context comprehensively. The main focus of this study is to understand how inclusive education policies are implemented in Elementary Schools, how teachers and principals respond to these policies, and what obstacles and opportunities arise in the implementation process. The data in this study were collected through several techniques, namely: Documentation studies, which include analysis of school documents and activities; field observations, carried out directly in the school environment to observe physical facilities, interactions between teachers and students, and the general atmosphere of the learning process; and in-depth interviews, conducted with various key information, including principals, class teachers, and assistant teachers (GPK).

The research sample consisted of 5 inclusive Elementary Schools that had been determined by the Pandeglang Regency Education Office and were spread across five different sub-districts, namely Labuan, Menes Saketi, Panimbang, and Mandalawangi Sub-districts. The selection of this location is based on considerations of the implementation practices of inclusive education in each school. Data analysis was carried out thematically, with steps that include identifying key issues, grouping data based on themes or categories, interpreting the meaning of field findings, and exploring what has been and can be done to improve inclusive education services. Data validity is maintained through triangulation of sources and

methods, and confirmation of the results of the analysis to informants (member checking). With this approach, it is hoped that the research will be able to provide a factual and reflective picture of the real conditions of inclusive education in Pandeglang, as well as provide practical recommendations for the development of more adaptive and inclusive education policies in the future.

Result and Discussion

General Conditions of Inclusive Education in Pandeglang

The results of field observations and in-depth interviews conducted in five Elementary Schools that provide inclusive education in Pandeglang Regency revealed that in general the implementation of inclusive education is still in the initial stages and faces various limitations. Most of the schools designated as providers of inclusive education are not yet equipped with adequate facilities to support the needs of students with special needs (ABK). Safe wheelchair access, disability-friendly toilets, counseling service rooms, and visual and sensory learning media are still rare in many schools (Reindrawati et al., 2025).

On the other hand, human resources, the majority of teachers do not yet have an adequate understanding of the concept of inclusive education and limited special training in inclusive education. The learning approach applied is still uniform (homogeneous), has not implemented a differentiation learning model or curriculum modification that adapts to student characteristics. Most teachers also admitted that they had never received formal training related to inclusive learning strategies (Parada-Gañete & Trillo-Alonso, 2023; MacKenzie et al., 2023). They still rely on personal experience or limited references to teach ABK students. This is certainly a major obstacle in realizing an inclusive learning environment that is responsive to student needs.

Therefore, ongoing formal training for teachers is a crucial investment in inclusive education. This training should include an understanding of the different types of special needs children, differentiated learning strategies, inclusive classroom management, and how to collaborate with parents and other professionals. With competent and confident teachers, learning environments that are truly inclusive and responsive to the needs of all students, including special needs children, can be created.

Challenges Faced

Various structural and cultural challenges are still the main obstacles in the development of inclusive education in Pandeglang Regency.

Weak Regional Policy

To date, there has been no Regional Regulation (Perda) or derivative policy that specifically regulates the implementation of inclusive education. The absence of this regulation makes coordination between the Education Office, schools and other stakeholders partial and unsustainable. Mentoring and training activities are still sporadic and have not targeted all inclusive schools.

Lack of Inclusive Teachers and Special Assistant Teachers (GPK)

Of the 29 Elementary Schools with inclusive school status, only 12 schools have teachers with a background in inclusive education training or certification. In fact, only 6 schools have permanent Special Assistant Teachers. This condition results in an additional burden for regular teachers to handle students with special needs without adequate expertise, which often leads to the marginalization of these students in the classroom (Douglas et al., 2024; Hasim et al., 2023).

Stigma and Lack of Social Awareness

At the community level, the view that children with special needs should attend SLB (Special Schools) is still very dominant. Many parents of regular students reject the presence of children with special needs in their children's classes on the grounds that it disrupts concentration in learning. On the other hand, families of children with special needs also tend to hide their children from social interaction because they are afraid of rejection and ridicule from those around them. This phenomenon hinders the process of social integration and reduces school participation among children with special needs. Addressing this phenomenon requires systematic efforts from various parties. Public education about diversity and the rights of children with special needs is crucial to eliminate the stigma. In addition, schools and governments need to create a truly inclusive and friendly environment, so that families feel safe and motivated to involve their children with special needs in social and educational life (Cumming et al., 2024).

Non-Integrated Data Collection of Special Needs Children

The Pandeglang Regency Education Office does not yet have an accurate and integrated information system to record the number of profiles of special needs students in each school. Data collection is still done manually and tends to be out of date, making it difficult to design programs, allocate resources, and provide targeted support services.

Improvement Strategy

Despite various challenges, there are several strategic efforts that have been and are being carried out by various parties to strengthen inclusive education in Pandeglang:

Strengthening Teacher Capacity through Continuous Training

Through the Continuous Professional Development (PKB) program and collaboration with NGOs such as the Bhakti Inklusi Foundation and state SLB, several schools have begun to hold regular teacher training. This training includes basic understanding of ABK, differentiated learning techniques, and inclusive classroom management. In the future, this training needs to be formalized as part of the service program and is targeted to reach all inclusive elementary schools (Marmoah et al., 2022; Larios & Zetlin, 2023).

Advocacy for the Preparation of Regional Regulations

The community of people with disabilities, women's organizations, and several NGOs have initiated advocacy for the preparation of a Regional Regulation on Inclusive Education in Pandeglang Regency. The draft academic paper has been formulated and is currently in the public discussion stage. If passed, this Regional Regulation is expected to be able to become a strong legal umbrella for the development of an inclusive education system in a more systematic and sustainable manner (Lindner & Schwab, 2020; Yang et al., 2025).

Parent and School Committee Involvement

Several schools have successfully formed groups with the support of parents of students with special needs who play an active role in school decision-making, as well as in providing learning aids through voluntary contributions. School committees have also begun to be involved in the socialization of inclusive education to residents and community leaders (Khaleel et al., 2021). School committees are key to the success of inclusive education, especially in building understanding and support in the wider community. Their involvement in socializing inclusive education to residents and community leaders brings many important benefits (Walton & Engelbrecht, 2024).

Benefits of School Committee Involvement in Inclusive Education

Building Community Trust: School committee members, as representatives of parents and community leaders, already have strong trust in their environment. Messages about inclusive education delivered by them will be more easily accepted and believed by residents than if they only come from the school or government.

Deep Understanding of Local Context: School committees have a deep understanding of the culture, values, and specific concerns of the local community (Fisher, 2021). They can adjust the way they convey inclusion messages to suit the local context, use familiar language, and effectively answer questions or objections that may arise from residents or traditional leaders.

Combating Stigma and Misconceptions

One of the biggest obstacles to inclusive education is the stigma and misconceptions about children with special needs (ABK). School committees can have direct dialogue with residents and community leaders to correct misinformation, explain the benefits of inclusion for all children, and share success stories from inclusive schools (Elder & Kuja, 2019; Deroncele-Acosta & Ellis, 2024b). This helps change negative perceptions into acceptance and support.

Encouraging Active Community Participation:

Effective socialization by the school committee can encourage active participation from the community. For example, parents of children with special needs may feel more comfortable and brave enough to send their children to an inclusive school (Tarantino et al., 2022; Hirpa, 2021). Other residents may be moved to volunteer, provide financial support, or help create a more disability-friendly environment around the school.

Creating a Comprehensive Inclusive Environment:

The involvement of the school committee in socialization ensures that inclusive education does not only occur within the school environment, but also becomes a value held by the entire community. This means that acceptance and support for children with special needs extends to the home environment, places of worship, public facilities, and other public spaces, forming a truly inclusive ecosystem. In short, the school committee functions as a bridge and agent of change that brings the vision of inclusive education from the policy realm to real practice in the community. Their active role is crucial to creating an environment that supports and embraces diversity (Eshete & Birbirssa, 2024; Croitoru et al., 2022).

Development of an Integrated ABK Data Collection System

Initial steps are being taken by the Education Office in collaboration with the Social Service and Health Service to develop a school-based digital data collection system that integrates children's medical and educational information. This system is intended to facilitate mapping of needs and appropriate interventions for children with special needs. with the

right commitment and investment, the development of an integrated ABK data system will be a very strong backbone for the success of inclusive education in the future (Ahmed et al., 2025).

Conclusion

The implementation of inclusive education in Elementary Schools in Pandeglang Regency still faces various obstacles, especially related to limited human resources and adequate supporting facilities. However, through continuous training for teachers, active partnerships between parents and social institutions, and the use of learning technology, access to education for children with special needs can continue to be improved. The success of inclusive education requires synergy and joint commitment from local governments, educational institutions, families, and the wider community. Therefore, stronger policy support and active involvement of all parties are needed so that schools can provide truly inclusive and quality education services for all children.

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Conceptualization, R. D.; methodology, S. H.; validation, A. H.; formal analysis, R. D.; investigation, S. H.; resources, R. D.; data curation, S. H.; writing—original draft preparation, A. H.; writing—review and editing, R. D.; visualization, R. D. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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