

Inclusive Education in Indonesian Primary Schools: A Multidimensional Evaluation of Institutional Capacity and Systemic Disparities

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ABSTRACT:

Inclusive education is and will always be a global commitment and a national mandate concerned with ensuring that all children along the age continuum are able to receive a quality education without any form of discrimination. In spite of considerable policy related efforts, the practice of inclusive education in Indonesia is still beset by a number of issues, including, but not limited to, the uneven distribution of qualified educators, the lack of policy advocacy coupled with poor educational infrastructure, and the uneven implementation of policy advocacy at the local government level. This study focuses on the implementation of inclusive education at the primary school level in Indonesia, with particular reference to the seven major institutional dimensions.

An evaluative research design using a survey strategy was employed to collect data in 108 primary schools that have implemented inclusive education and were chosen through purposive sampling. The Inclusive School Self-Evaluation tool was modified to collect data, and data analyses were performed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression analysis.

This study shows widespread variation in the quality of implementation across dimensions. The student-related dimension shows the most success followed by human resources (63%), and then school management (58%). On the other hand, facilities and infrastructure (23%), financing (36%), and community participation (47%) were the most deficient. Correlation analysis showed strong relationships between institutional management, curriculum and learning, and human resources. Regression analysis also showed significant urban-suburban differences, with urban schools outperforming suburban schools in the majority of dimensions.

Keywords: Inclusive education, Primary education, School management.

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is widely acknowledged and incorporated in most national and international policies related to education. Inclusion is based on the premise that access to education is a basic human right and an important pathway to achieving social equity and justice. The inclusive education paradigm is based on the idea that a high quality education must be provided to all students, regardless of any barriers to learning and school participation (Sánchez et al., 2019). The inclusive education paradigm is also consistent with international pledges aiming to eliminate exclusion and discrimination in education, and guarantee that education institutions are inclusive of all learners. Inclusive Education has been adopted as a growing policy priority since the Salamanca Declaration. However, research shows that translating these principles into school practices is challenging and inconsistent. Although numerous countries have adopted laws on the books for inclusive education, there continues to be a disconnect due to insufficient institutional implementation, unreformed teacher training and educational resources, and unsupportive sociocultural frameworks to disability (Smith et al., 2025). Thus, inclusive education has been taken to mean more than just the physical presence of students with special needs in a school's general education classrooms. It means a systemic overhaul of a school's entire educational ecosystem, including structural changes to school curricula, teacher training, school leadership, community participation, and education financing.

Within Indonesian educational policy, inclusive education is regarded as a national imperative. The inclusion of education as a national mandate is guided by The Regulation of the Minister of National Education Number 70 of 2009, which identifies inclusive education as a system in which learners who are disabled or who are considered to have exceptional intelligence, as well as, other students, are entitled to study together in regular schools (Derakhshan & Lalli, 2025). This mandate positions the responsibility of implementing inclusive education upon all educational institutions at the primary and secondary levels. It, however,

describes the central and regional governments as having the critical responsibility in terms of support, supervision, and the provision of resources (Bahtiar, 2023). In the last decade, the country has made significant advancements in policy related to the inclusion of education, especially in the areas of student access, documentation, assessment, and curriculum (Akpobome, 2020).

Regardless of these policy commitments and administrative progress, the implementation of inclusive education in Indonesia is still facing major setbacks. Research shows ongoing challenges in human resource constraints, in particular, the lack of special guidance teachers, the absence of sufficient teacher training, and the unequal distribution of professional skills across the regions (Ahmed et al., 2022). Deficient policy infrastructures, regionally inequitable resource allocations, and deficient policy implementations further compound these challenges, particularly in suburban and rural areas (Ezeude & Fadeyi, 2024). Consequently, inclusive education service quality is inequitable and leaves much to be desired in the varying schools. The situation exacerbates the issues of equity and the sustainability of the practice.

Teacher-related factors are perhaps the most prominent obstacles to the effective integration of inclusive education in Indonesia. Findings show that indicators of inclusive education stand at 75.78% and teacher-related perceptions are noted as the weakest at 80.70% (Chu-Chang et al., 2013). A significant number of teachers are either unwilling to embrace inclusive education or do not have a clear sense of inclusive practices, and often refer to a perceived increase in their workload and insufficient instructional support, as well as their lack of ability to respond to the varying needs of students that have disabilities. These findings strengthen the assumption that the success of inclusive education is not simply a function of policy, but rather the commitment of teachers, their professional development, and their skills, or lack thereof (Staden-payne & Nel, 2023).

The adoption of inclusive education goes beyond teacher preparedness and requires institutional support on various levels. Prior studies have spotlighted school leadership and

management; adaptable curricula; student support services; personnel development; the provision of accessible infrastructure; community engagement; and the availability of funds as important factors in the development of inclusive education environments (Michael et al., 2023). Although inclusive education in Indonesia has been studied, it has been noted that most schools apply generic management models and lack the institutional incorporation of inclusive education frameworks (Basuki et al., 2025). The gap between the educational policies and the practice at the school level justifies the need for evaluative studies that address the complexity that is characteristic of inclusive education.

While valuable insights have been garnered from various studies on inclusive education in Indonesia, several gaps still exist in the literature. There is a predominant focus in the existing studies on one dimension of inclusion, such as teachers' attitudes, modifications to the curriculum, or single inclusive school case studies (Amjad et al., 2023). Although they provide value in context, their focus is rather one-dimensional and therefore does not consider the multiple institutional facets that interact to determine inclusive education results at the school level. Furthermore, few studies focus on the articulation of inclusive education at the national

level, and even fewer that explore the practice in a wide sample of primary schools. The consistent growth in the population of students with special needs within Indonesian schools makes the aforementioned scarcity in research even more relevant. In the absence of systematic and multidimensional reviews, policy responses tend to be piecemeal and inadequately address the realities within schools. This study aims to provide a holistic evaluation of the implementation of inclusive education at the primary school level in Indonesia, focusing on seven distinctive dimensions.

METHODOLOGY

This research is an evaluative study. This study used a survey approach in 108 elementary schools in Indonesia designated as providers of inclusive education. The selection of sample districts/cities and educational units was carried out using a purposive sampling technique. The data collection instrument used the Inclusive School Self-Evaluation questionnaire with experts in inclusive education measurement.

The details of the dimensional components measured in this study include 7 dimensions. The number of items for each aspect in the instrument used is as follows:

Table 1. Measurement Items

Dimension	Total Question Items
School Management	17
Curriculum and Learning	13
Student Affairs	11
Human Resources	7
Infrastructure	7
Community participation	20
Financing	13

The data obtained were then analyzed using descriptive statistics and categorized into 5 categories, namely:

Table 2. Achievement categories

Category	Achievement Percentage
Very less	0% - 20%
Not enough	21%-40%
Currently	41%-60%
Enough	61%-80%
Good	81%-90%
Very good	91%-100%

RESULTS

Multidimensional Performance of Inclusive Education in Primary Schools

The descriptive profiling allows us to recognize the most prominent patterns, the relative strengths, and the structural weaknesses of the executing inclusive

education. The table examines the overall dispersion of schools across the categories and shows the overall level of inclusion and the degree of institutional imbalance between the dimensions. This table is a useful tool to identify the complexity of inclusive education, which cannot simply be captured through one or more aggregate scores.

Table 3. Distribution of Inclusive Education Performance Across Seven School Dimensions

Dimensions	Category	Frequency (n = 108)	Percentage (%)	Mean	Elementary School
School Management	Very less	8	7	12.50	3.77
	Not enough	15	14	31.18	6.37
	Currently	26	24	49.10	6.36
	Enough	17	16	73.70	5.55
	Good	20	19	85.29	2.52
	Very good	22	20	93.98	2.94
Curriculum and Learning	Very less	9	8	19.81	19.16
	Not enough	19	18	32.15	5.07
	Currently	21	19	51.44	5.71
	Enough	34	31	71.35	6.48
	Good	9	8	84.18	2.57
	Very good	16	15	97.89	2.87
Student Affairs	Very less	3	3	0	0
	Not enough	0	0	0	0
	Currently	11	10	51.40	4.95
	Enough	28	26	69.78	6.51
	Good	17	16	84.39	2.88
	Very good	49	45	96.55	3.53
Human Resources	Very less	3	3	2.38	4.12
	Not enough	9	8	30.95	6.68
	Currently	25	23	51.12	5.53
	Enough	35	32	68.44	6.09
	Good	29	27	85.50	3.32
	Very good	7	6	98.67	3.73
Infrastructure	Very less	46	43	6.23	7.00
	Not enough	22	20	29.96	5.55
	Currently	31	29	48.39	5.45
	Enough	6	6	71.97	5.31
	Good	1	1	86.36	0
	Very good	2	2	100.00	0
Community Participation	Very less	9	8	11.11	3.76
	Not enough	31	29	29.95	5.66
	Currently	35	32	49.59	5.73
	Enough	18	17	71.03	7.13
	Good	5	5	85.71	0
	Very good	10	9	97.14	3.69
Financing	Very less	24	22	2.98	5.12
	Not enough	26	24	33.52	4.41
	Currently	46	43	49.38	4.95
	Enough	7	6	71.43	5.83
	Good	1	1	0	0
	Very good	4	4	98.21	3.57

Performance across dimensions shows wide-ranging variability which can be found from the very

low to very high levels of implementation in Table 3. With school management, the implementation

pattern shows some heterogeneity. While a notable number of schools are categorized as “Good” and “Very Good,” a large number are found in “Very Less,” “Not Enough,” and “Currently.” This distribution implies that some schools have built sufficient management frameworks to promote inclusion, while a large number are still unable to convert inclusive policies into effective management. Such gaps capture policy advocacy (Kenny et al., 2023) gap and school execution, which is a consistent characteristic of inclusive education in developing countries.

The curriculum and learning dimension is a noticeable improvement with a greater proportion of schools in “Enough,” “Good,” and “Very Good” categories, especially when compared to previous dimensions. This indicates that inclusive instructional practices and curriculum adaptations are becoming more developed dimensions of inclusion in Indonesian primary schools. More highly mean scores in this dimension show that more teachers and schools are focusing on curriculum modifications, differentiated instruction, and flexible assessment to respond to diverse learners. The presence of schools still clustered in lower categories indicates that curriculum inclusivity still unevenly distributed.

Implementation in the student affairs dimension stands out as the most notable area across the seven dimensions evaluated. About 50% of the surveyed institutions landed in the “Very Good” category, with no institutions reported as “Not Enough” and only a very small percentage as “Very Less.” This means institutions have a fair level of success in student related services, including identification, monitoring and support for children with disabilities. Excellent student affairs performance may not translate to high levels of inclusion as it requires a commensurate level of support and institutional resource capacity.

The human resources dimension illustrates a moderate level of implementation, with a predominant number of institutions falling in the “Currently” and “Enough” levels. Even though some institutions have strong Human Resources capacity with trained teachers and support staff, a large share of institutions are still understaffed with

qualified personnel. The moderate mean scores seem to suggest that while there is an increasing level of awareness among educators about the inclusion imperative, the level of capacity building across institutions has not reached an adequate level.

The infrastructure dimension that encompasses the least amount of weakness is, unfortunately, the weakest area of inclusive education implementation. More than 40% of schools are in the “Very Less” category, and only a small percentage reach the status of “Good” or “Very Good” This discrepancy is clearly exemplified by structural problems that revolve around lack of accessibility, learning resources, and physical adaptations to fit students with disabilities. The low average scores in this dimension exemplify the schools' inability to provide a learning environment that is physically inclusive.

Community participation ranges from moderate to low in performance levels. While a few schools enjoy high levels of community participation in addition to community support, a significant number of schools sit within the “Not Enough” and “Currently” status categories. This indicates that the community-school-parent partnership has not been sufficiently or fully developed.

The dimension of financing also displays a number of limitations. Most schools sit within the lower performance categories indicating, this then shows, inadequate and irregular financing of inclusive learning programs. While a limited number of schools reach a high score in financing, the overall distribution continues to evidence the systemic complexities of funding and funding use for inclusion at the lower level, even with reference to the local area.

Composite Index Scores and Internal Consistency Analysis

Scores from all seven dimensions were merged into composite indices to create a complete and holistic assessment of the implementation of inclusive education. This composite score captures the variable dimensions of the inclusive education framework and, at the same time, provides a

complete picture of the assessment of the institution's effectiveness. To provide an explanation of the psychometric analysis of the measurement tool's reliability and the evaluation of the levels of achievement, this study also assesses the measurement tool's reliability and provides an explanation of achievement levels.

Table 4. Composite Scores and Psychometric Properties of the Inclusive School Index

Dimensions	Percentage (%)	Cronbach's alpha (α)	Corrected Item	Elementary School	Mean	Skewness	Kurtosis
School Management	58	0.90	0.880	9.07	21.63	-0.45	-1.05
Curriculum and Learning	52	0.92	0.810	13.81	34.94	-0.37	-0.74
Student Affairs	77	0.83	0.779	5.45	20.91	-1.75	4.12
Human Resources	63	0.85	0.884	7.00	19.63	-0.55	-0.06
Facilities and infrastructure	23	0.81	0.752	5.37	6.44	0.61	-0.10
Community Participation	47	0.72	0.749	3.47	7.06	0.36	-0.65
Financing	36	0.72	0.763	3.39	5.44	0.08	0.06

The seven aspects of inclusive education reflected differing composite accomplishment ratings that are captured in Table 4. At the highest rating (77%), the Student Affairs dimension denotes that the institution has the most capability in managing student services and in the identification and provision of student support across the spectrum of need. The remaining dimensions of Human Resources (63%) and School Management (58%) reflect levels of moderate institutional preparedness. Overall, the results suggest that schools have made outlines in the support of inclusive education in the streamlining of governance and the distribution of support personnel. However, the gaps in the support system are in the primary aspects of the distribution of roles, the provision of training in the specialized areas, and the consolidation of managerial leadership.

The Curriculum and Learning dimension level of achievement is moderate at 52%. This suggests that the incorporation of inclusive education and pedagogy is, at best, partially integrated into the

system. It is noted that while differentiation in instruction is evident in a number of schools, the most has yet been achieved and, therefore, is a reflection of the most poor implementation in the system.

The dimension of Facilities and Infrastructure shows the lowest composite rating (23%) which indicates the most substantial barriers to the achievement of inclusive education. The results continue to illustrate a lack of adequate the shortfalls in structural availability, accessibility, and assistive the environment of learning to support the inclusion of students with disabilities.

Financing (36%) and Community Participation (47%) have the lowest performance levels. These findings show that the distribution of funding for inclusive education still needs to be improved and the partnership among schools, parents, and the community is still not formalized.

The instrument shows a good degree of internal consistency for all dimensions from a psychometric perspective. The range of Cronbach's

alpha values of 0.72 to 0.92 is above the accepted alpha value of 0.70 in educational research, marking the reliability as acceptable to excellent (Izah et al., 2024). Furthermore, high corrected item-total correlations indicate that the individual items represent their respective dimensions well. The values for skewness and kurtosis generally reflect good distributive characteristics, although for some dimensions, particularly those related to student affairs and school management, there is negative skewness which indicates the presence of a high concentration of scores at the upper end.

Comparative Analysis of Inclusive Education Across School Locations

Elementary schools in urban and suburban settings were compared in order to look at spatial differences in the application of inclusive education. In inclusive education, where access to resources, professional capacity, and institutional support frequently differ across geographic areas, spatial context is widely acknowledged as a crucial driver of educational quality. It is possible to evaluate whether inclusive education policies are applied fairly or whether structural inequities endure across locales by comparing urban and suburban schools.

Table 6. Urban–Suburban Differences in Inclusive Education Performance

Dimensions	Urban (M±SD)	Suburban (M±SD)	F	t	p	95% CI of the Difference	
						Lower	Upper
School Management	27.30 ± 5.23	13.97 ± 7.35	4.02	11.00	0.00	10.92	15.72
Curriculum and Learning	40.64 ± 11.23	13.31 ± 1.96	2.95	5.65	0.00	8.69	18.07
Student Affairs	23.51 ± 3.14	5.93 ± 0.87	7.90	6.93	0.00	4.37	7.87
Human Resources	23.56 ± 4.97	14.32 ± 5.73	0.35	8.94	0.00	7.18	11.28
Facilities and infrastructure	9.58 ± 4.49	2.21 ± 3.06	5.00	9.56	0.00	5.83	8.88
Community Participation	8.53 ± 3.49	5.06 ± 2.24	11.81	5.88	0.00	2.29	4.63
Financing	7.03 ± 3.07	3.28 ± 2.50	0.71	6.76	0.00	2.64	4.84

The findings in Table 6 show empirical differences in each of the 7 dimensions of the implementation of inclusive education between urban and suburban elementary schools, with t-test results showing $p < 0.05$ in all cases. The large t-values and the narrow confidence intervals suggest that the differences reported are non-robust and will not be corroborated by random sampling errors, affirming the evidence for the systematic spatial disparity in inclusive education.

The largest spatial disparity is found in the dimension of school management. Urban schools' mean scores ($M = 27.30$, $SD = 5.23$) are

significantly higher than those of suburban schools ($M = 13.97$, $SD = 7.35$). This implies that systems of governance, educational leadership, and administrative integration surrounding inclusive education are more sophisticated in urban settings.

There is evidence of significant positive differences for the dimension of curriculum and learning, with urban schools having a better position than suburban schools. This suggests that suburban schools do not have the requisite organizational capacity that urban schools have for curriculum and instruction adaptation and inclusive assessment. Urban schools are better placed because of the

abundance of educational resources, professional development, and instructional innovations, so most of these benefits are tied to the educational context of the urban area (Wang et al., 2017).

The differences revealed here within the Student Affairs dimension likewise show the impact of the availability and quality of student support services. Urban schools are implementing more robust practices in the identification of special educational needs, individualized case support, and student welfare services.

The differences in the human resources dimension reinforce the impact of geography on the uneven implementation of inclusive education. Urban schools have significantly better human resources scores, reflecting the uneven availability of trained inclusive education teachers and support personnel. The uneven distribution of specialized teachers and the limited presence of qualified personnel in inclusive schools remains an issue in Indonesia (Somad et al., 2024).

Urban schools are also more advantaged in the facilities and infrastructure dimension, particularly in the availability of physically accessible teaching and learning environments. This illustrates the uneven provision of the basic structures of inclusive education, such as accessible teaching and learning spaces, assistive learning technologies, and flexible learning environments. Despite policies promoting inclusive education in Indonesia at every level, the availability of the basic supportive infrastructure remains uneven (Syafii et al., 2025).

There exists a considerable difference in the dimensions of community participation and financing. Schools in urban areas experience greater levels of community participation and more reliable funding sources, which are essential for the maintenance of inclusive education initiatives. The results indicate that social and financial resources have a supportive role in the implementation of inclusive education, particularly in the areas of external support and sustained funding for programs (Meijer & Watkins, 2019).

DISCUSSION

The empirical data presents significant insights into both the achievements and the ongoing

structural challenges that constrain progress. The frameworks whether from the respective country or international bodies include inclusive education as one of their mandates. In this regard, the Student Affairs dimension has the most positive results, confirming that schools, in their effort to support diversity among their learners most, have instituted mechanisms to identify learners, as well as support services, and facilitate their active participation. This correlates with previous findings that student-focused initiatives are the first and most visible steps in the implementation of inclusive education, as they are responsive to the initiatives and demands of the social services to regulate and ensure equitable access (Sánchez et al., 2019).

Achievement in the student parts does not always mean the inclusive system has been put into place. School Management, Curriculum and Learning, and Human Resources have lower scores, and this shows that there is always a gap between inclusive objectives and the systemic inclusive education components. The general consensus regarding inclusive education is that it is a systemic reform and not a one-off practice; therefore, insufficient governance, instructional and curricular flexibility, and lack of proficient teachers will adversely impact the sustainability and the overall quality of inclusive practices (Buabeng & Amodarko, 2025).

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the study is how it examines the differences in implementing inclusive education in urban and suburban settings. The findings indicate that urban schools outperform suburban schools in all areas, demonstrating the inequality of the educational system that results from the lack of structural changes to the system after the adoption of the national policy (Naghavi et al., 2017). These disparities represent a pattern of educational inequality that, because of geographic location, is attributable to the level of funding, professional connections, and institutional support in the area (Eden et al., 2024).

Urban schools are more likely to have inclusive education programs because they have the teaching staff, the professional development, the community partnerships, and the facilities, all of which build

their capacity to implement inclusive education. Suburban schools are limited by the availability of all those resources and by the community engagement (Michael et al., 2023). These findings are consistent with other studies in developing countries, such as Indonesia, that have documented the urban concentration of educational resources and expertise (Telaumbanua et al., 2024).

The existing disparity in human resources is especially underscored since studies show that only a fraction of inclusive schools hire fully qualified special or inclusive educators (Done & Andrews, 2019). Such a deficit impacts the quality of instruction and increases the stress placed on mainstream class teachers, who may then experience resistance, burnout, and minimal compliance to inclusive directives (Weiss et al., 2023).

The various findings, when considered in unison, indicate that, in Indonesia, inclusive education has made noteworthy developments, particularly in the area of access, but continues to be systematically and structurally constrained. The high degree of reliance between the factors indicates that there is little prospect of significant progress as a result of measures that are too narrow in focus (Norwich, 2022). The reform of inclusive education in Indonesia must be comprehensive and integrated to simultaneously address all aspects of the dominant systems of governance, curriculum, teaching, infrastructure, and community engagement (Warman, 2021).

The area of teacher professional development stands out as a key focus area. However, relevant training should encompass more than just the technical aspects and should also incorporate reflective practice, collaborative problem-solving, and the nurturing of inclusive mindsets and attitudes. As stated by Shaeffer (2019), inclusive education should not be viewed solely as a practice but as a philosophy of inclusion, diversity, equity, and social justice.

Addressing and overcoming spatial inequalities involves different policies, taking into account local limitations and local potential. Decentralized and context-sensitive policies, like gap financing for

infrastructure, subsidies for teachers in lacking areas, and strengthening school-community partnerships, are necessary to promote more equitable and inclusive education across regions (Raya, 2025).

CONCLUSION

The comprehensive report concludes that while there have been positive changes, especially in student-related services, the development of most key dimensions remains incomplete. There is a stark contrast between positive developments within student services and persistent gaps within school management, curricular changes, staffing, facilities, funding, and civic engagement. These gaps imply that systemic inclusive education in Indonesia continues to be mainly focused on the students, which is neither a viable nor a sustainable approach.

The index measuring inclusive education reveals a positive degree of internal consistency that demonstrates an effective and reliable system of measurement, justifying the use of the index as a diagnostic and monitoring system for developing inclusive education in schools. Furthermore, the strong inter-variable correlations among institutional capacity, curriculum and learning, and human resources exemplify the symbiotic interdependence of inclusive education. For example, the lack of institutional capacity is a strong predictor of the absence of curriculum and learning capacity, as well as of human resource capacity. This data underlines the absence of piecemeal solutions in favor of comprehensive, systemic changes to address inclusive education.

The significant disparities between urban and suburban areas further demonstrate systemic gaps. These include gaps in the distribution of resources, trained personnel, infrastructure, and community engagement. While inclusive education is a national policy, it is still the case that schools in suburban and rural areas encounter the most severe obstacles to implementation. Since the severity of obstacles is related to spatial location, it is necessary to ensure that inclusive education policies are accompanied by differentiated support to address the gaps in equity across the different regions.

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