



Analysis of Inclusive Learning Characters at Elementary School

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Abstract

Background: Inclusive education emphasizes equitable learning opportunities for children with special needs within regular elementary classrooms by addressing academic, social, and emotional diversity through adaptive pedagogical practices. Despite increasing policy support, many schools continue to face challenges in translating inclusive principles into practical classroom strategies, particularly in resource constrained environments where teachers must rely on creativity, empathy, and contextual adaptation.

Aims: This study aimed to analyze the characteristics of inclusive learning implementation that enhance participation and holistic development of children with special needs at the elementary school level.

Methods: A qualitative descriptive case study was conducted at SD Negeri Bumirejo 1 involving classroom teachers and the school principal selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi structured interviews, and document analysis, then analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key patterns of inclusive educational practice.

Result: The findings reveal that inclusive learning is characterized by adaptive classroom arrangements, varied instructional strategies, individualized mentoring, and flexible assessment adjustments supported by empathetic communication and child friendly school programs. However, challenges remain, including limited inclusive training, behavioral regulation issues, and the absence of special assistant teachers.

Conclusion: Inclusive education is sustained through teacher adaptability, collaborative school culture, and humane assessment practices, offering practical implications for strengthening inclusive learning environments and guiding future research toward sustainable, context responsive educational innovation.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental right for every individual, without exception. In this context, children with special needs have the same right to receive educational services tailored to their potential, needs, and abilities. Children with special needs refer to individuals who experience obstacles in physical, intellectual, emotional, social development, or a combination of these aspects, and therefore require special and individualized educational treatment or services. Inclusive education has become a global imperative for supporting children with diverse learning needs, including those with developmental disorders, sensory impairments, or behavioral differences, by promoting equitable access and participation in mainstream classrooms. Research shows that understanding the characteristics of learners with special educational needs (SEN) is essential for designing inclusive pedagogical strategies that address academic, social, and emotional domains of development (Liu & Potmesil, 2024).

Understanding the diverse characteristics of children with special needs is a fundamental requirement for building an inclusive education system that responds to individual differences in

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abilities, cognition, communication, behavior, and social participation. Inclusive education aims to provide equitable learning opportunities for all students, including those with developmental and neurodiverse conditions such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (Alassaf, 2025). Research shows that teachers' knowledge and attitudes toward inclusion significantly influence implementation quality, with many educators reporting varying levels of understanding and preparedness when supporting children with autism in mainstream classrooms. Additionally, the integration of adaptive educational technologies has been shown to enhance learning engagement and tailor instruction to the strengths and needs of diverse learners, contributing to more equitable educational environments (Navas-Bonilla et al., 2025).

Children with special needs encompass a wide range of conditions, including sensory impairments, physical disabilities, intellectual disabilities, communication disorders, learning disabilities, emotional and behavioral disorders, ADHD, and ASD. Each category presents distinct strengths and challenges that require differentiated educational strategies. For example, autistic children often display unique social-communicative patterns, sensory sensitivities, and specific interests that influence how they engage with learning environments. Inclusive education is not merely the physical placement of students with special needs within mainstream classrooms, but involves pedagogical, social, and technological adaptations that facilitate participation and academic progress for all learners. Recent systematic reviews of educational technologies demonstrate that digital tools and adaptive learning technologies can remove barriers and personalize instruction, fostering accessible and equitable learning environments for students with diverse needs.

Furthermore, understanding the characteristics of children with special needs is not only crucial in formal educational contexts but also in social life and within families. Families play a primary role in supporting and motivating the child and serve as a bridge between the child and the outside environment. In many cases, emotional and social support from the family has proven to boost the child's confidence and drive them to develop optimally. However, the challenges in understanding and addressing the characteristics of children with special needs remain significant, especially in developing countries such as Indonesia. Limited public literacy about special needs, the lack of trained professionals, insufficient facilities for special education, and societal stigma against individuals with disabilities are major barriers to achieving an ideal inclusive education system. Therefore, continuous public education about the existence and characteristics of children with special needs is essential to fostering a more inclusive, friendly, and supportive environment.

From a policy standpoint, Indonesia has recognized the importance of education for children with special needs through various regulations, such as Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, which affirms that education must be conducted democratically and fairly, without discrimination, and by upholding human rights, religious values, cultural values, and national diversity. This law also opens the door for inclusive education, where children with special needs learn alongside regular students in the same educational setting.

Emerging frameworks that link inclusive education with broader educational goals, such as sustainable development and ethical principles of empowerment, underscore the importance of creating learning environments that respect human rights, dignity, and learner autonomy (Rončević & Rieckmann, 2025). In resource-constrained contexts, teachers must adapt curricula and instructional strategies to effectively support autistic learners and other students with complex needs, highlighting the need for context-sensitive inclusive pedagogies (Sepadi, 2025). Finally, research on universal design learning (UDL) shows that framework approaches can better accommodate neurodiversity across educational levels, which is foundational for promoting true inclusivity (Taylor et al., 2025).

Every child, including those with special needs, deserves opportunities to grow within supportive and respectful educational environments that nurture dignity, character, and future potential. Inclusive education therefore extends beyond knowledge transmission toward empowerment and equitable participation. However, a critical gap remains between inclusive policy discourse and its practical realization in resource constrained elementary classrooms. Existing studies often emphasize theoretical or large-scale perspectives while overlooking teachers' lived experiences in adapting instruction, assessment, and classroom management. In Indonesia, limited professional training, insufficient institutional support, and uneven teacher preparedness continue to challenge the effective implementation of humane and sustainable inclusive learning practices.

To address this gap, the present study focuses specifically on the characteristics of inclusive learning implementation within a single public elementary school, with particular attention to three interconnected aspects: adaptive learning strategies, flexible assessment practices, and the challenges along with solutions experienced by teachers. By establishing these boundaries, the research aims to provide a contextualized and in depth understanding of how inclusive education is enacted in real classroom environments. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to analyze how inclusive learning practices enhance participation and support the holistic development of children with special needs, while also identifying contextual barriers and adaptive responses that shape sustainable inclusive education practices. The findings are expected to bridge theoretical discourse and practical implementation, offering meaningful insights for educators, researchers, and policymakers seeking to strengthen humane and equitable learning environments.

METHOD

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore phenomena in depth and to understand meanings, experiences, and contexts from the participants' perspectives. Qualitative research is particularly appropriate for educational studies that aim to capture complex social interactions and contextual realities rather than numerical generalizations (Braun & Clarke, 2021). In qualitative inquiry, the researcher serves as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis. The researcher actively engages with the research setting, participants, and data through observation, interviews, and reflective interpretation. This role requires sensitivity, reflexivity, and methodological awareness, as the researcher's perspectives and interactions influence the construction of meaning throughout the research process (Yoon & Uliassi, 2022).

Data were collected using observations and semi-structured interviews. Observation was employed to document behaviors, interactions, and situational dynamics within the natural setting, while semi-structured interviews enabled participants to express their experiences and viewpoints in a flexible yet focused manner. Interview and observation guidelines were developed based on established qualitative research principles and adapted to the objectives of the study, allowing for depth, openness, and contextual relevance. To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, this study applied strategies such as data triangulation, member checking, and reflexive field notes. These techniques are widely recognized in qualitative educational research as effective means to ensure credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the data.

Participant

The objects of this study were grade 1 teacher, grade 2 teachers, and the principal of SD N 1 Bumirejo. Grade 1 teachers and grade 2 teachers of SD N 1 Bumirejo are class teachers of students with disabilities. Participants in this study were selected by applying purposive sampling. The purposive sampling technique is a method of selecting and taking samples carried out by researchers based on previously determined criteria or special considerations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The considerations used in the purposive sampling technique can vary, depending on the research's objectives and needs. In this study, the sample taken was 3 participants.

Instrument

In qualitative research, the primary instrument is the researcher. The researcher plays a central role in planning, collecting, interpreting, and analyzing data through direct engagement with participants and the research context. This role requires flexibility, sensitivity, and reflexivity, as the researcher actively interprets meanings and constructs understanding based on interactions and observations in the field (Yoon & Uliassi, 2022). This research instrument has been validated by 4 experts who are competent in the research theme. Observation and interview instruments in this study were developed in the form of semi-structured observation and interview guidelines. These guidelines were designed to provide a clear focus while allowing participants the freedom to express their experiences in depth. The development of these instruments followed established qualitative research standards, emphasizing clarity of questions, alignment with research objectives, and ethical sensitivity. Such an approach supports credibility and transparency in qualitative data collection (Ehrlich, 2020).

Procedures

In qualitative research, the primary instrument of data collection is the researcher. The researcher plays an active role in designing the study, collecting data, interpreting meanings, and ensuring flexibility throughout the research process. This approach allows researchers to respond dynamically to participants' perspectives and the research context, which is a fundamental characteristic of qualitative inquiry (Busetto et al., 2020).

The steps of data collection in this study are first preparing a research instrument in the form of an interview guide containing questions that have been adjusted to the needs of the study, then visiting an inclusive school, namely Bumirejo 1 Public Elementary School which will be studied to collect data, participants to be studied are gathered in one place, then the researcher begins to conduct interviews with participants. During the interview, the author records the data that will be used as the results of the study. After conducting the interview, the researcher documents the facilities and infrastructure that support the inclusive learning process.

Data Analysis

The data analysis technique in this study followed a systematic qualitative process that involves three core, interconnected stages: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. These stages are consistent with contemporary qualitative analysis frameworks that emphasize iterative engagement with the data to produce meaningful interpretations grounded in participants' experiences.

First, data reduction refers to the process of selecting, simplifying, and focusing the raw data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation. In this phase, irrelevant or redundant materials are separated from the essential information that addresses the research questions, enabling the researcher to sharpen focus on emerging patterns and themes. This process is ongoing and occurs concurrently with data collection and initial interpretation, helping the researcher manage large volumes of textual and field data by coding and categorizing into meaningful units. Data reduction is fundamental to thematic analysis, which facilitates deeper interpretive engagement with qualitative data and supports subsequent analytical stage (Ahmed et al., 2025).

Second, data presentation involves organizing the reduced data into coherent and accessible formats such as narratives, thematic tables, matrices, and visual displays. Presenting data in a structured way helps researchers and readers see patterns, relationships, and contextual connections that may not be immediately apparent in raw transcripts. Effective data presentation supports transparency in the research process and makes the emerging insights easier to understand and evaluate. It also forms the basis for identifying meaningful interpretations that contribute to answering the research questions.

Third, conclusion drawing consists of synthesizing and interpreting the patterns and themes identified during reduction and presentation to formulate conclusions. This interpretive phase is reflective and iterative, as researchers constantly revisit the data, refine themes, and ensure that conclusions are grounded in evidence. The conclusions aim to answer the research questions and meet the study's objectives. Researchers also ensure the trustworthiness of findings by integrating validation strategies such as source and method triangulation, which enhances credibility by comparing information from interviews, observations, and documentation. By integrating these analytical steps with rigorous interpretive strategies, qualitative data analysis becomes both systematic and sensitive to participants' lived realities, enabling rich, contextually meaningful insights.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Based on the findings at Bumirejo 1 Public Elementary School, this study identified three main aspects that characterize the implementation of inclusive education: (1) learning strategies, (2) assessment practices, and (3) obstacles and solutions in inclusive classrooms.

The results show that teachers implemented various adaptive learning strategies to support students with diverse needs in inclusive classrooms. Prior to instruction, teachers prepared lesson plans, learning materials, and instructional media that were adjusted to the characteristics and

abilities of students, particularly those with special needs. Classroom management was also adapted by arranging seating positions strategically, placing students with special needs closer to the teacher to enhance focus, interaction, and access to instructional support.

"I usually place children with special needs in the front seats so I can easily monitor them and give help when needed. It helps them stay focused during lessons" (Mr. A).

In addition to seating arrangements, teachers provided individualized academic support during classroom activities and, when necessary, offered additional learning sessions outside regular class hours. Teachers emphasized that individual assistance allowed them to better understand students' difficulties and respond more empathetically. Learning materials were also modified into visual, practical, and hands-on formats to increase accessibility and engagement.

"If the material is only explained verbally, some children struggle. So, I use pictures, objects, or simple demonstrations so they can understand better" (Mr. B).

Overall, these findings indicate that inclusive learning strategies were characterized by flexibility, responsiveness, and continuous adjustment to students' needs. Teachers' adaptive practices played a crucial role in promoting participation and meaningful engagement for students with special needs in inclusive classrooms.

The results indicate that assessment practices in inclusive classrooms followed a uniform structure but were implemented flexibly for students with special needs. Teachers adjusted assessment procedures by allowing students to respond orally, through drawings, or with teacher assistance, depending on individual abilities. This approach was intended to ensure that assessment remained fair and humane rather than rigidly standardized.

"Some children cannot write well, so I let them answer orally or explain using pictures. What matters is that they understand the lesson" (Mr. A).

Teachers also reported adjusting assessment benchmarks for students with special needs to align with their learning capacities. Alternative forms of assessment, such as quizzes, practical activities, and performance-based tasks, were frequently used to complement written tests. These strategies were perceived as reducing pressure and helping students demonstrate their understanding more comfortably.

"When the assessment feels too heavy, the children become anxious. With practical tasks, they are more relaxed and confident" (Mr. B).

In conclusion, the assessment practices adopted by teachers supported not only academic evaluation but also students' emotional well-being. Flexible and differentiated assessment approaches contributed to increased confidence, participation, and motivation among students with special needs in inclusive classrooms.

Despite the implementation of adaptive strategies, teachers identified several obstacles in inclusive education. One major challenge was the limited availability of teachers with specialized training in inclusive education. Teachers reported feeling overwhelmed when managing classrooms with diverse needs without sufficient professional support. Behavioral and emotional difficulties among students with special needs, such as lack of focus or sudden emotional outbursts, also posed daily challenges.

"Sometimes the children suddenly cry or walk around the class. We must be patient and calm, even though it can disrupt the lesson" (Mr. A).

Another challenge involved peer interactions that unintentionally disturbed students with special needs, including teasing or excessive joking. Teachers also highlighted the absence of a special assistant teacher as a significant limitation, as they had to manage all students independently.

"If there were an assistant teacher, it would really help. Handling children with special needs while teaching the whole class is not easy" (Mr. B).

To address these challenges, teachers and the school implemented several solutions, including encouraging participation in inclusive education training, applying empathetic communication strategies, and strengthening collaboration with parents. Teachers emphasized the importance of understanding students' emotional conditions and working closely with families to support learning.

"We often communicate with parents so we understand the child better and can work together to support them" (Mr. Principal).

In summary, while inclusive education at the school faced structural and human resource challenges, teachers demonstrated resilience and commitment through adaptive problem-solving. The combination of professional development, empathetic approaches, and collaborative efforts emerged as key strategies in sustaining inclusive educational practices.

Discussion

Based on the findings of the research at SD Negeri Bumirejo 1, it can be concluded that inclusive education practices in the school involve three main aspects: learning strategies, assessment systems, and various challenges that arise in the implementation of classroom inclusion. First, in terms of learning strategies, teachers have shown a strong commitment to creating a learning environment that is adaptive, inclusive, and responsive to the diverse needs of students. Teachers prepare customized lesson plans, arrange the seating of students with special needs near the teacher to improve focus and interaction, and apply varied learning methods to accommodate different learning styles. This kind of approach is in line with responsive learning practices advocated in the inclusive literature, where adaptive teaching strategies can help align individual needs with broader learning objectives (Rahmi et al., 2024).

Second, in terms of the assessment system, schools implement differential assessments that consider the conditions and potential of students with special needs. Adjustments to evaluation tools such as verbal responses, teacher assistance, and more realistic assessment standardization show that schools are trying to apply the principles of educational equity. This supports previous findings that diverse and flexible assessments tend to improve students' engagement, motivation, and emotional well-being in an inclusive context (Beltran et al., 2025).

Third, in terms of challenges and solutions, schools face several significant obstacles, including the lack of teacher training focused on inclusion, the behavior and emotional needs of students with special needs, and the lack of collaboration between teachers and parents. The absence of special assistant teachers also adds to the workload of regular teachers. Nevertheless, schools responded by encouraging advanced training, empathetic communication, and flexible and collaborative learning planning. Such efforts are in line with the strategic recommendations found in the inclusive education implementation study, namely the importance of increasing the professional capacity of teachers through continuous training and close collaboration between stakeholders to support the success of inclusion in primary schools (Sutrisno & Lberto Briganti, 2025).

Overall, this study confirms that inclusive education can run effectively when supported by teachers' diligence in adjusting learning strategies, holistic assessment, and strong cooperation between schools, teachers, and parents. With continued support from policymakers and the implementation of directed training, every student regardless of ability can thrive in an inclusive, humane, and appreciative learning environment for individual uniqueness.

Implications

The findings of this study offer significant pedagogical, institutional, and policy implications for the advancement of inclusive education at the elementary school level. First, the results demonstrate that inclusive learning effectiveness is strongly influenced by teachers' adaptive competencies rather than solely by the availability of sophisticated infrastructure. This highlights the importance of

strengthening teacher professional development programs that focus on differentiated instruction, inclusive assessment literacy, and empathetic classroom management. Second, the study emphasizes the role of collaborative relationships among teachers, families, and school leaders in sustaining inclusive practices. Schools are encouraged to cultivate inclusive cultures through continuous dialogue, reflective planning, and shared responsibility for supporting students with diverse needs. Third, from a policy perspective, the absence of special assistant teachers and limited inclusive training suggests an urgent need for systemic support mechanisms, including structured mentoring programs, inclusive education workshops, and the development of context sensitive learning resources that reduce teachers' professional burden while improving learning quality.

Research Contribution

This research contributes to the growing body of inclusive education literature by presenting a contextualized and practice oriented analysis of inclusive learning characteristics in an elementary school setting. Unlike many previous studies that primarily examine inclusion through policy discourse or theoretical frameworks, this study offers empirical insights into how inclusive strategies are enacted through adaptive learning planning, flexible assessment practices, and empathetic classroom interactions. By integrating learning strategies, assessment adjustments, and classroom challenges into a unified analytical framework, the study highlights inclusive education as a dynamic and evolving pedagogical process rather than a static instructional model. Furthermore, the findings extend contemporary discussions on teacher agency by illustrating how reflective adaptation and professional commitment become central elements in sustaining inclusive practices within resource constrained environments.

Limitations

Despite providing valuable insights, several limitations must be acknowledged. The study was conducted within a single school context with a limited number of participants, which may restrict the transferability of the findings to broader educational settings. The qualitative design prioritizes depth and contextual richness rather than statistical generalization, and therefore the results should be interpreted as situational rather than universal. Additionally, the perspectives of students with special needs and their peers were not explored extensively, which may limit the understanding of inclusive learning experiences from multiple viewpoints. Another limitation lies in the relatively short duration of observation, which may not fully capture the long term evolution of inclusive practices and their sustained impact on students' academic, social, and emotional development.

Suggestions

Based on these limitations, several recommendations for future research are proposed. Future studies may adopt multi-site or comparative designs to examine variations in inclusive learning practices across diverse educational contexts. Integrating qualitative findings with quantitative measures of student engagement, participation, or developmental outcomes could provide a more comprehensive understanding of inclusive education effectiveness. Further research is also encouraged to include the voices of students with special needs, families, and peer groups to deepen relational perspectives within inclusive learning environments. Longitudinal studies that examine the long term impact of adaptive teaching strategies and differentiated assessment practices are particularly recommended to strengthen evidence based inclusive education models. Such future investigations will contribute to building more sustainable, human centered, and context responsive inclusive education systems.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the expectations formulated in the Introduction regarding the importance of understanding the characteristics of children with special needs as a foundation for inclusive education are empirically reflected in the Results and Discussion. The findings demonstrate that inclusive learning at Bumirejo 1 Public Elementary School is realized through adaptive instructional strategies, differentiated assessment practices, and reflective responses to classroom challenges. These practices confirm that inclusive education is not merely a conceptual or policy driven framework, but a dynamic pedagogical process shaped by teachers' empathy, professional

judgment, and continuous adaptation to diverse learner needs. The alignment between the research aims, empirical findings, and theoretical perspectives indicates a coherent trajectory in which inclusive learning strategies contribute to equitable participation and holistic development, as initially envisioned in the Introduction.

Furthermore, this study highlights that effective inclusive education emerges from the interaction between teacher agency, supportive school culture, and collaborative relationships with families. Although structural limitations such as limited training opportunities and the absence of special assistant teachers remain significant, the adaptive solutions developed by educators illustrate the potential for inclusive practices to evolve sustainably even within resource constrained contexts. These findings provide practical insights for educators and policymakers seeking to strengthen inclusive learning environments through flexible pedagogy, humane assessment systems, and ongoing professional development.

Looking forward, the results of this research open opportunities for further exploration of inclusive education practices across diverse school settings, including longitudinal studies that examine long term academic, social, and emotional outcomes for students with special needs. Future research may also investigate the integration of adaptive technologies, collaborative teaching models, and universal design learning frameworks to enhance inclusive classroom effectiveness. Ultimately, this study contributes to the growing understanding that inclusive education is a continuous and evolving process that requires reflective practice, institutional support, and sustained commitment to equity and dignity for every learner.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

CN conceptualized the research idea, designed the study framework, and conducted field data collection through classroom observations, semi structured interviews, and documentation analysis. CN performed data coding, thematic interpretation, and methodological validation to ensure the credibility and rigor of the qualitative findings. CN also prepared the original manuscript draft, revised the intellectual content critically, and approved the final version of the article for publication. The author assumes full responsibility for the integrity, accuracy, and ethical standards of the research process and the scholarly contribution presented in this manuscript.

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