

**Analysis Of The Implementation Of Inclusive Education In Realizing Equitable Access To Education For Children With Special Needs In Public Elementary Schools In Urban And Rural Areas**

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**Abstract**

*This study aims to analyze the implementation of inclusive education in realizing equitable access to education for children with special needs (CSN) in public elementary schools located in urban and rural areas. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis at two elementary schools with distinct geographic contexts. The findings indicate that schools in urban areas are generally more prepared to implement inclusive education in terms of internal policies, teacher competencies, and the availability of facilities. In contrast, rural schools face limitations in nearly all supporting aspects, including teacher understanding, physical infrastructure, and social environment support. The study concludes that a significant gap still exists between regions in the implementation of inclusive education, resulting in unequal access for CSN. Therefore, more context-sensitive policies and comprehensive interventions are required to ensure inclusive education can be effectively realized across all regions.*

**Keywords:** *Inclusive Education, Educational Equity, Children With Special Needs, Elementary School, Urban And Rural Areas.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental right of every citizen guaranteed in the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia Article 31 paragraph (1), which states that every citizen has the right to education. In the framework of full human development, education not only aims to educate the life of the nation, but also to realize a just and inclusive society, without discrimination, including for those with special needs (Ridho, 2023). Therefore, the national education system is required to be able to guarantee equal access and educational services for all children of the nation, regardless of their background, physical, mental, intellectual, social, or economic conditions (Anita Puspa Meilina, 2025).

Inclusive education exists as an educational approach that emphasizes the equality and diversity of students in the regular classroom. In this context, children with special needs (ABK) have the same right to study with their peers in public schools, with support that suits their individual needs. This concept is in line with the global commitment contained in the *Salamanca Statement* 1994 and the 2006 United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), both of which emphasize the importance of implementing inclusive education as a means to realize social justice and the elimination of discrimination in education (Pertiwi et al., 2025).

In Indonesia, the implementation of inclusive education has been regulated through various regulations, such as Permendiknas No. 70 of 2009 concerning Inclusive Education for Students with Disabilities and Have Potential Intelligence and/or Special Talents (Ridho, 2019). However, in its implementation, inclusive education still faces various challenges, especially in areas with limited resources, such as rural areas. The problem of inequality of access, lack of competent educators, lack of supporting facilities and infrastructure, and social stigma against children and women are significant obstacles to the optimal implementation of inclusive education (Husna et al., 2019).

The difference in conditions between public elementary schools in urban and rural areas is an important aspect in assessing the effectiveness of the implementation of inclusive education. Schools in urban areas generally have better access to educational resources, teacher training, and adequate support facilities. In contrast, rural schools often face limitations in various aspects, which impacts their ability to provide equal educational services to children with disabilities. This inequality directly affects the equity of access to education that should be enjoyed by all students, including those with special needs (Akbar et al., 2024).

Internationally, the concept of inclusive education is strengthened through *Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education* (1994), which calls for regular schools to accept all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, or linguistic condition. In addition, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) ratified by Indonesia through Law No. 19 of 2011 emphasizes that the state must ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and educational environments. At the national level, this commitment is realized through

Permendiknas No. 70 of 2009 concerning Inclusive Education for Students with Disabilities and/or Potential Intelligence and/or Special Talents (Amiruddin & Widihastrini, 2021).

However, in practice, the implementation of inclusive education in Indonesia has not been completely equitable and effective. Data from the Directorate of Special Education and Special Services (PKLK) of the Ministry of Education and Culture shows that until 2023, of the approximately 300 thousand school-age children with special needs, only about 20% will be served in formal education both in special schools and in inclusive regular schools. This shows a significant access gap, exacerbated by differences in geographical, social, and economic conditions between urban and rural areas (Salsabila & Rachman, 2025).

Public elementary schools as the spearhead of the implementation of basic education have a strategic role in the success of inclusive education. However, schools in urban areas tend to have advantages in terms of the availability of facilities and infrastructure, better trained educators, and access to training and policy support (Ridho, 2024). Meanwhile, schools in rural areas often face various limitations, ranging from the lack of educators who understand the inclusive learning approach, the limited number of supporting facilities such as therapy rooms or learning aids, to strong social stigma against children with special needs that can hinder their acceptance in the school environment (Tanggur et al., n.d.).

This inequality raises important questions about how the implementation of inclusive education is carried out in real terms in both contexts. Have schools in urban areas implemented the principles of inclusivity optimally? What about schools in rural areas that face limited resources? Have the policies that have been established effective in bridging the gap in access to education for children with special needs?

This study aims to comprehensively analyze the implementation of inclusive education in realizing equitable access to education for children with special needs in public elementary schools, by comparing urban and rural areas. The focus of the analysis is not only on the aspects of administrative policies and procedures, but also on real practices in the field, teacher perceptions, school readiness, and structural and cultural barriers that affect the success of inclusive education programs.

Through this analysis, it is hoped that a more accurate picture of the challenges and opportunities in the implementation of inclusive education can be found, as well as policy recommendations that can support the strengthening of an inclusive and equitable education system, especially at the basic education level.

Against this background, it is important to analyze the implementation of inclusive education in public elementary schools, both in urban and rural areas, to see the extent to which the principles of equitable access to education can be realized. This research will not only examine policies and their implementation at the level of education units, but will also evaluate the obstacles and potentials that exist in each region. The results of this analysis are expected to contribute to more equitable education policy

making, as well as strengthen the commitment of all stakeholders to create a truly inclusive and diversity-friendly education system.

## **METHOD**

### **1. Design and Research Approach**

This study uses the **Descriptive Qualitative** with an exploratory case study design. This approach was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of inclusive education in real context in public elementary schools in urban and rural areas. Case studies allow researchers to explore the various dimensions of inclusive education implementation intensively, comprehensively, and contextually (Ishtiaq, 2019).

### **2. Location and Research Participants**

The research was conducted in two purposively selected locations based on geographical characteristics and the availability of inclusive education services, namely:

- a. one public elementary school in an urban area, and
- b. one public elementary school in a rural area.

The selection of the location is based on consideration of the diversity of the context of the implementation of the inclusion policy and the potential for disparities in access to education for children with special needs (ABK).

Participants in this study consisted of:

- 1) Principal
- 2) Regular classroom teacher
- 3) Special Assistant Teacher (GPK), if available
- 4) Parents of children with special needs
- 5) Children with special needs (as observation subjects)

The technique of determining participants is carried out through **purposive sampling**, with criteria of active participation in the process of implementing inclusive education and having relevant experience with the research subject.

### **3. Data Collection Techniques**

Data collection is carried out through the following techniques (Aveling et al., 2015):

- a. In-depth interviews:

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner to explore the perceptions, experiences, and challenges faced by education actors in implementing inclusive education.

- b. Non-participatory observations:

Observations were made on the learning process in the classroom, social interaction between students, and the availability and utilization of supporting facilities for ABK.

- c. Documentation:

Data were obtained from school policy documents, curriculum, records of individualized learning programs (IEPs), and teacher training archives related to inclusion.

#### **4. Data Analysis Techniques**

The data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consisted of three main stages:

- a. Data reduction: the process of selecting and simplifying relevant data from interviews, observations, and documentation.
- b. Data presentation: visualization of data in the form of thematic narratives, tables, or charts to make it easier to interpret meaning.
- c. Conclusion drawing and verification: identification of patterns and meanings emerging from the data, followed by verification through triangulation between sources and techniques.

#### **5. Test of Credibility and Data Validity**

To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, several data validity check techniques are used, including:

- a. Triangulation of sources and techniques, to confirm the consistency of information from various participants and data collection methods.
- b. Member checking, which is the clarification of the results of interpretation to the main informant to ensure the accuracy of the meaning.
- c. Trail audit, by documenting in detail the process of collecting and analyzing data as a form of scientific accountability.

#### **6. Research Ethics**

This research is guided by the principles of research ethics, including:

- a. Informed consent: all participants are given a full explanation of the objectives and process of the research and agree to their participation voluntarily.
- b. Confidentiality and anonymity: the identity of participants is disguised in the final report to protect privacy.
- c. Non-discrimination: the interaction of researchers with participants is carried out with respect for the dignity, diversity, and rights of every individual, including children with special needs.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. School Policy and Commitment to Inclusive Education**

The results of the study show that public elementary schools in urban areas already have policy documents that support the implementation of inclusive education, such as individual learning programs (PPI), the preparation of differentiated learning implementation plans (RPPs), and the involvement of special assistant teachers (GPK). Principals in the region have also shown a strong commitment by providing adaptive learning spaces and forging partnerships with outside institutions, such as SLB and the Disability Services Centre.

On the other hand, in rural areas, the implementation of inclusive education policies is still formalistic and has minimal real implementation. The school does not have adequate supporting documents, and the principal admitted that he has not received comprehensive training or socialization from the education office. This shows that there is a gap in understanding and implementing inclusive education policies between the two regions, as emphasized by Booth & Ainscow (2011) that the implementation of inclusion is not enough to be document-based, but must be rooted in inclusive school culture and policies.

The implementation of inclusive education is highly determined by the school's internal policies and the commitment of education stakeholders, especially principals and teachers. The results show that public elementary schools in urban areas tend to have a clearer and more targeted policy structure in supporting the implementation of inclusive education. This is shown through the existence of inclusion policy documents at the school level, the implementation of individualization programs for children with special needs (ABK), and the allocation of special resources to support the success of the adaptive learning process (Masrurah et al., 2024).

The commitment of school principals in urban areas is also strong, reflected in their efforts to provide teacher training on inclusive learning strategies, build cooperation with special service institutions (such as SLB or Therapy Centers), and encourage the formation of a school culture that is friendly to diversity. This is in accordance with the view of Booth & Ainscow (2011) who stated that the implementation of inclusive education requires integration between school policies, culture, and practices in order to run sustainably.

In contrast, in rural areas, inclusion policies are generally not well documented and have not become a priority in school planning. The principal admitted that the understanding of inclusive education is still limited, and there has been no special training given to teachers regarding the handling of ABK. Institutional commitments to inclusion tend to be formal and symbolic, limited to the acceptance of ABK without systematic and sustainable support.

This lack of commitment is also reinforced by external factors such as the lack of supervision from the education office and the absence of technical regulations that encourage rural schools to actively implement inclusion principles. This situation indicates that national policies related to inclusive education have not been fully internalized into the school management system, especially in areas with limited access to information and resources (Hilda et al., 2025).

Thus, it can be concluded that the difference in policy readiness and commitment between schools in urban and rural areas is one of the main determinants in the successful implementation of inclusive education. Without strong internal policy support and committed leadership, inclusivity tends to be just a normative slogan that has no real impact on the learning lives of children with special needs.

## **2. Availability and Quality of Educational Resources**

In urban schools, there are teachers who have participated in inclusive education training and have a basic understanding of learning adjustments for children. In addition, adaptive learning media, assistive devices (such as wheelchairs and hearing aids) are also available, as well as modifications of physical facilities such as ramps and accessible toilets.



However, in rural schools, limited resources are a significant obstacle. Teachers have not received training, learning is still carried out uniformly without considering the diversity of student needs, and the school's physical facilities have not supported accessibility. This is in line with the findings of Simons & Masschelein (2006), who stated that exclusion in education often occurs not because of explicit rejection, but because of a system that does not provide adequate support for student diversity.

The availability and quality of educational resources are fundamental components in supporting the effective implementation of inclusive education. These resources include competent educators, disability-friendly facilities and infrastructure, and ongoing administrative and technical support. The results of the study show that there is a striking disparity between public primary schools in urban and rural areas in this case (Aini et al., 2024).

In urban areas, most teachers have undergone basic training on inclusive education, although it is still limited to theoretical approaches. Teachers show an initial understanding of the principle of learning differentiation, and try to make simple adjustments in the teaching and learning process to accommodate the needs of children with special needs (ABK). In addition, some schools already have special assistant teachers (GPK) or have established partnerships with outside parties to provide these services.

Physical facilities for schools in urban areas are also relatively supportive, such as the availability of ramps for wheelchair users, accessible toilets, and adaptive learning media such as textured flashcards or audio devices. Some classes even provide individual aids such as special desks and magnifying devices for mildly blind students. This is in line with UNESCO's (2009) recommendation that successful inclusion requires a physical environment and learning that is structurally and functionally inclusive.

In contrast, in public elementary schools in rural areas, conditions are very different. The majority of teachers have never received training on inclusive education, and not a few of them do not even know basic terms such as "curriculum modification" or "individualization of learning." This has a direct impact on learning practices that tend to be uniform and not adaptive to the diversity of students. Teachers in rural schools also face a double burden due to the lack of educators, so attention to ABK is limited.

In terms of facilities, schools in rural areas are generally not equipped with infrastructure that supports special needs. Classrooms are not designed for limited mobility, there are no disability-friendly toilets available, and learning media are still conventional. Teachers only rely on lecture methods without visual or audio aids that can bridge the limitations of students.

These findings reinforce the opinion of Simons & Masschelein (2006) who stated that resource inequality between regions is a major structural obstacle in the implementation of inclusion. In this context, the presence of national policies is not effective enough without an equitable distribution of resources and sustainable capacity building programs, especially in remote and marginalized areas.

Thus, it can be concluded that the quality and availability of educational resources are still a major challenge in the implementation of inclusive education, especially in rural areas. This inequality has a direct impact on the quality of services received by ABK, thereby strengthening inequity in access to education. Therefore, improving teacher competence, providing supporting facilities, and equitable

distribution of educational resources must be the main focus in strengthening the inclusive education system in Indonesia.

### **3. Learning Strategies and Support for Children with Special Needs (ABK)**

In urban learning practices, teachers demonstrate relatively inclusive strategies, such as the use of multi-sensory learning methods, flexible seating arrangements, and the provision of additional time in assignments. In addition, crew members are encouraged to actively participate in classroom and extracurricular activities.

In contrast, in rural schools, learning is still conventional and teachers tend to generalize the treatment of all students. Children with special needs are often positioned as "passive spectators" in the teaching and learning process, without any modification or differentiation of learning. This shows that teachers have not applied the principle of universal design for learning (UDL), which in Tomlinson's (2014) view is an important basis for creating adaptive and inclusive learning.

Adaptive learning strategies and individualized support are key elements in the successful implementation of inclusive education. This strategy includes a pedagogical approach that considers the diverse needs of students, the use of differentiation methods, and the provision of academic and emotional support for children with special needs (ABK). The results of the study show that there are significant differences in the implementation of inclusive learning strategies between public elementary schools in urban and rural areas (Zulkarnaen et al., 2020).

In schools in urban areas, teachers show efforts to implement learning that is responsive to the needs of children with disabilities. Some teachers have integrated the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), such as providing variety in the presentation of materials (visual, audio, and kinesthetic), flexibility in time in working on assignments, and the use of customized learning aids. Teachers also make simple curriculum modifications, for example by simplifying learning objectives and adjusting evaluations based on individual students' abilities.

In addition to the pedagogical approach, social-emotional support is also provided through the formation of an inclusive and supportive classroom atmosphere. Teachers play an active role as facilitators, companions, and mediators of social interaction between ABK and other students. In some cases, schools also involve special assistant teachers (GPK) or external professionals such as educational psychologists to provide assistance to children with more complex special needs. This is in line with the view of Tomlinson (2014) who emphasizes the importance of instructional differentiation as the main strategy in creating inclusive and equitable learning spaces.

On the other hand, public elementary schools in rural areas still show considerable limitations in terms of learning strategies. Learning is still dominated by conventional methods such as one-way lectures and uniform assignments. Teachers have not been able to make adjustments to the characteristics of ABK, both due to lack of knowledge and limited time and resources. No meaningful learning differentiation practices or curriculum modifications were found. ABK is often not given the space to actively participate in the learning process, so they are at risk of hidden exclusion.

In addition, emotional and social support for ABK has also not been built systematically. Interaction between students is still influenced by stigma and stereotypes, while teachers do not yet have the capacity to be facilitators of healthy social interaction in the classroom. In fact, in some cases, ABK is passively placed in



the classroom without meaningful involvement, which is contrary to the spirit of inclusion that upholds active participation and appreciation for diversity.

This condition shows that inclusive learning strategies have not been implemented evenly and effectively in all regions. Schools in urban areas are relatively more progressive because they receive training support, information, and access to resources. Meanwhile, schools in rural areas require more intensive interventions in terms of strengthening teacher capacity, providing technical guidance, and developing inclusive school cultures.

Thus, adaptive learning strategies and systemic support for ABK are important prerequisites in realizing meaningful inclusive education. Without appropriate learning strategies, the existence of ABK in public schools will only be a form of symbolic inclusion (tokenism), not transformative inclusion.

#### **4. Social Acceptance and Attitude of the School Environment towards ABK**

Observation and interview data show that in urban areas, the school environment tends to be more open to the existence of ABK. Peers showed positive social interactions, although there were still some different forms of treatment. The school actively educates students about diversity through character values programs and inclusive classroom activities.

On the other hand, in rural areas, there is a tendency for subtle rejection, both from peers and some teachers. Some teachers stated that the existence of ABK "disrupted the rhythm of the class" and required special attention that was considered burdensome. This condition reflects the still strong stigma and low literacy of inclusion in rural communities, as stated by Florian & Black-Hawkins (2011) that the success of inclusive education is greatly influenced by the attitudes and perceptions of stakeholders.

One of the important indicators of the success of inclusive education is the level of social acceptance of children with special needs (ABK) in the school environment. This acceptance includes a positive attitude from teachers, peers, and all school residents in supporting the existence and active participation of ABK in the educational process. The findings of this study show that social acceptance in public elementary schools in urban and rural areas still shows significant differences in aspects of attitudes, awareness, and social interaction.

In schools in urban areas, in general, there is a tendency to be more inclusive and open towards the existence of ABK. Teachers show a heightened awareness of the importance of building a welcoming learning environment and encouraging the participation of all students without discrimination. Some teachers even proactively convey the values of diversity to students in the classroom, as well as invite other students to support and interact positively with ABK. In class observation, it can be seen that ABK is involved in group activities, sports activities, and extracurriculars, although there are still limitations in the aspect of communication or emotional involvement.

In addition, some urban schools have implemented character values programs, such as *peer care*, aimed at fostering students' empathy for friends who have differences. This effort shows that changes in social attitudes cannot occur naturally, but need to be through a structured educational process. This is consistent with the opinion of Florian & Black-Hawkins (2011) who stated that acceptance in inclusive

education must be built through the development of a school culture that normalizes diversity as part of learning life.

On the other hand, in rural areas, social acceptance of ABK is still a big challenge. Although the school formally does not reject the presence of ABK, in practice there is still hidden resistance from some teachers and students. Teachers in rural schools have generally not received training on inclusive education, so they tend to treat children with emotional distance or put them in a passive position. Some teachers stated that the existence of ABK "hinders classroom learning" or "requires extra attention" that they find difficult to fulfill due to limited time and effort.

In terms of social relations, crew members in rural schools often experience social *isolation*. Interaction with peers is limited and even in some cases, ABK experiences discriminatory treatment or ridicule. The lack of understanding of other students about the condition of ABK is the main factor in the low quality of social acceptance. This situation shows that physical inclusion has not been fully followed by psychosocial inclusion.

This condition shows that the success of inclusive education is not only determined by structural aspects such as policies and infrastructure, but also highly dependent on school attitudes and culture. Without strong social acceptance and a collective awareness of the importance of diversity, ABK will remain on the fringes even though they are formally in the same classroom.

Therefore, a strategy to strengthen inclusive literacy is needed, both through teacher training, learning diversity values, and positive attitude habituation programs in the school environment. This effort is important to create a learning environment that is not only administratively acceptable, but also humanizes each student according to his or her existence.

The results of the study indicate that there is a real gap in the implementation of inclusive education between public elementary schools in urban and rural areas. These differences are not only related to physical and administrative aspects, but also include cultural, pedagogical and structural factors. This shows that equity access to education has not been fully realized equally, especially for children with special needs in rural areas.

These findings reinforce the opinion of Tilak (2015) who stated that "equity in education is not merely about access, but about effective participation and support within the system." In this context, inclusive education is not only about opening the door for all children to enter public schools, but also ensuring that every child has meaningful, facilitated, and valued learning opportunities.

Thus, a policy approach that is more responsive to regional inequality, strengthening teacher capacity through continuous training, and socializing inclusion values to all school communities is needed so that equity in access to education can truly be realized at all levels of society.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research that has been conducted, it can be concluded that the implementation of inclusive education in public elementary schools shows different dynamics between urban and rural areas. In urban areas, inclusive education has been pursued more systematically through the formulation of internal school policies, the availability of more trained human resources, and more adequate supporting facilities. The support of the principal, the involvement of teachers, and the positive attitude of the

school environment towards children with special needs (ABK) are the main driving factors in the implementation of inclusive education that is relatively effective.

On the other hand, in rural areas, the implementation of inclusive education still faces various fundamental obstacles, both in terms of policies, resources, teacher capacity, and public understanding of the importance of inclusivity in education. Schools generally do not have adaptive learning strategies, facilities are still very limited, and teachers have not received adequate training in handling ABK. This shows that the gap between regions is a real challenge in realizing equitable access to education nationally.

Overall, this study emphasizes that the success of the implementation of inclusive education is highly dependent on the internal readiness of schools, the support of local government policies, and the active role of the community in eliminating stigma against children with special needs. Efforts to realize equity in access to education cannot be done uniformly, but require a strategy that is contextual and responsive to local needs.

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