



Exploring the Management of Inclusive Education at Sekolah Kebangsaan Ayer Hitam

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Abstract

This study aims to explore and analyze the management of inclusive education at Sekolah Kebangsaan Ayer Hitam, Malaysia. The research focuses on the strategies implemented in the practice of inclusive education, the challenges faced by the school, and the impact of inclusive education management on the academic and social development of students with special needs. A qualitative case study approach was employed, utilizing in-depth interviews, participant observations, and document analysis as data collection techniques. The findings indicate that Sekolah Kebangsaan Ayer Hitam adopts two inclusion models full and partial in accordance with students' physical and cognitive conditions. Key strategies include differentiated instruction, collaboration between mainstream and special education teachers, continuous teacher training, and support from parents and external communities. Despite supportive government policies, such as the "No-Reject Policy," limited resources and the shortage of trained educators remain significant challenges in the implementation process. The study concludes that effective inclusive education management requires synergy between policy, teacher competency, family support, and community engagement. These findings are expected to contribute to the development of more effective inclusive education policies and practices in the future.

Keywords: *Educational Management, Inclusive Education, Special Needs.*

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has become a central agenda in contemporary educational reform, driven by the recognition that education is a fundamental right for all individuals, regardless of physical, intellectual, social, or emotional differences. The inclusive education approach emphasizes the integration of students with special needs into mainstream educational settings, ensuring equal access, participation, and learning opportunities within a supportive environment (UNESCO, 2020). This paradigm aligns with global commitments such as the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which promotes inclusive and equitable quality education for all.

In many countries, including Malaysia, inclusive education has been formally adopted as a national policy to address educational inequality and to improve learning outcomes for students with diverse needs. The Malaysian Education Act 1996 and subsequent policies issued by the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE) mandate that all children, including those with special educational needs, are entitled to compulsory education in public schools. One of the key policy instruments supporting this commitment is the *No-Reject Policy*, which prohibits schools from denying admission to students with special needs. Despite these strong policy frameworks, the implementation of inclusive education at the school level continues to face significant managerial and practical challenges.

The successful implementation of inclusive education depends not only on policy directives but also on effective inclusive education management at the school level. Inclusive education management involves systematic planning, organization, implementation, and evaluation of educational programs that accommodate student diversity and remove barriers to participation (Mulawarman & Hidayanto, 2023). Schools are required to adapt curricula, develop teacher competencies, allocate appropriate resources, and foster collaboration among teachers, parents, and communities. Without strong management practices, inclusive education risks becoming symbolic rather than transformative.

Previous studies have highlighted various challenges in implementing inclusive education, including limited teacher preparedness, insufficient training in special education, inadequate facilities, and persistent social stigma toward students with special needs (Supriyadi & Rohmat, 2019; Pokhrel, 2024). While numerous studies have examined inclusive education policies and classroom practices, fewer have focused on how inclusive education is managed at the institutional level, particularly in primary schools within the Southeast Asian context. This gap suggests the need for in-depth case studies that explore inclusive education management in real school settings.

Sekolah Kebangsaan Ayer Hitam, located in Kubang Pasu District, Kedah, Malaysia, has implemented inclusive education programs since 2007, making it a relevant and significant case for examination. The school applies both full inclusion and partial inclusion models to accommodate students with different types of special needs. Despite resource limitations, the school has demonstrated commitment to inclusive practices through teacher training, curriculum adaptation, and collaboration with parents and external stakeholders. However, systematic analysis is needed to understand how these management strategies are implemented, the challenges encountered, and their impact on students' academic and social development.

Therefore, this study aims to explore and analyze the management of inclusive education at Sekolah Kebangsaan Ayer Hitam. Specifically, the study seeks to: (1) identify the strategies implemented in managing inclusive education; (2) examine the challenges faced in implementing inclusive education management; and (3) analyze the impact of inclusive education management on the academic and social development of students with special needs. By providing empirical evidence from a school-level case study, this research is expected to contribute to the literature on inclusive education management and offer practical insights for policymakers, school leaders, and educators in improving inclusive education practices.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of inclusive education management at Sekolah Kebangsaan Ayer Hitam, Kubang Pasu, Kedah, Malaysia. A qualitative case study was considered appropriate as the research focused on exploring management processes, strategies, and challenges of inclusive education within a real-life school context, emphasizing meaning, experience, and institutional practices rather than numerical measurement (Creswell, 2021).

The research site was Sekolah Kebangsaan Ayer Hitam, a primary school that has implemented inclusive education since 2007 through both full inclusion and partial inclusion models. This school was purposively selected due to its long-term implementation of inclusive education and its relevance for examining inclusive education management at the primary school level. The research participants consisted of the school principal, special education teachers, regular classroom teachers, and other school personnel involved in the planning and implementation of inclusive education programs.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted to explore participants' perspectives on inclusive education management, including planning, implementation, coordination, and evaluation processes. Observations were used to examine inclusive education practices in natural

classroom and school settings, particularly teacher-student interactions and support provided to students with special needs. Document analysis involved reviewing relevant school documents, such as inclusive education policies, program plans, reports, and administrative records, to support and validate the interview and observation data.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, following the stages of familiarization with the data, coding, theme development, and interpretation. This method enabled the identification of recurring patterns and key themes related to inclusive education management strategies, challenges, and outcomes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, data triangulation was applied by comparing data from interviews, observations, and documents. This process enhanced the credibility and reliability of the research results.

Through this methodological approach, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive and contextualized understanding of how inclusive education is managed at Sekolah Kebangsaan Ayer Hitam, as well as to generate findings that may inform inclusive education management practices in similar primary school contexts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Inclusive Education Management Strategies at Sekolah Kebangsaan Ayer Hitam

The findings indicate that Sekolah Kebangsaan Ayer Hitam (SK Ayer Hitam) has implemented inclusive education management through structured policies, curriculum adaptation, teacher development, and collaboration with multiple stakeholders. These strategies reflect the core principles of inclusive education management, which emphasize planning, organizing, implementation, and continuous evaluation to meet diverse student needs (Asyiqoh et al., 2024; Mulawarman & Hidayanto, 2023).

One of the key strategies identified is the implementation of full inclusion and partial inclusion models. Students with mild physical disabilities and no cognitive impairments participate fully in mainstream classrooms, following the national curriculum alongside regular students. In contrast, students with cognitive or developmental challenges, such as autism, participate in selected subjects or activities in mainstream classrooms while receiving specialized instruction in special education classes (PPKI). This flexible placement approach allows the school to balance social integration with individualized academic support.

This finding aligns with the concept of differentiated instruction, which emphasizes adapting teaching methods, materials, and assessment based on learners' abilities and needs (ADB, 2022). Differentiated learning has been widely recognized as an effective strategy for promoting participation and achievement among students with special needs in inclusive settings (Woodcock et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the school promotes collaboration between regular teachers, special education teachers, and parents. Special education teachers provide guidance to mainstream teachers regarding instructional adaptations, while parents maintain active communication with teachers to monitor student progress. This collaborative approach supports previous studies highlighting the importance of multi-stakeholder involvement in successful inclusive education implementation (Almujab, 2023).

Policy and Regulatory Framework Supporting Inclusive Education

The implementation of inclusive education at SK Ayer Hitam is strongly supported by national regulations, particularly the Education Act 1996 and the No-Reject Policy issued by the Malaysian Ministry of Education (MOE). These policies ensure that all children, including students with special needs, have equal access to education without discrimination.

The No-Reject Policy obliges schools to accept students with special needs and provide appropriate educational services. This reflects the principles of equity and accessibility emphasized in inclusive education policies globally (Mulyadi, 2017; Tah et al., 2024). The findings demonstrate that SK Ayer Hitam actively adheres to these policies, reinforcing the school's commitment to inclusive practices.

However, despite strong policy support, the study reveals challenges in translating policy into practice, particularly related to limited human resources and infrastructure. These findings support earlier research suggesting that gaps often exist between inclusive education policies and their implementation at the school level (Wulandari et al., 2024).

The school follows the Inclusive Education Program Guidelines for Students with Special Needs (2018) issued by MOE, including the use of the Individual Education Plan (IEP) as a foundation for curriculum adaptation and student assessment. The use of IEPs reflects an individualized and student-centered approach, which is a core component of effective inclusive education management (Yusuf & Indrianti, 2017).

Challenges in Implementing Inclusive Education Management

Despite various strategic efforts, SK Ayer Hitam faces several challenges in implementing inclusive education. The most prominent challenges include a shortage of teachers with special education backgrounds, limited assistive facilities, and increased workloads for mainstream teachers.

Regular teachers reported the need for continuous professional development to enhance their competence in addressing diverse learning needs. This finding is consistent with previous studies emphasizing that insufficient training and support remain major barriers to inclusive education implementation (Supriyadi & Rohmat, 2019; Pokhrel, 2024).

Another challenge identified is the persistence of social stigma and misconceptions surrounding students with special needs. Although not dominant, such stigma can affect students' confidence and social interaction. This supports findings by Istigfarin et al. (2024), who argue that inclusive education requires not only structural changes but also cultural transformation within schools and communities.

Impact of Inclusive Education Management on Academic and Social Development

The study reveals that inclusive education management at SK Ayer Hitam has a positive impact on both academic and social development of students with special needs. Academically, students demonstrate improved engagement and learning participation, particularly those in full inclusion settings. The use of school-based assessment (PBD) and IEP-based evaluation allows teachers to monitor progress more accurately and continuously.

Socially, students with special needs show increased confidence, improved interaction skills, and greater participation in school activities. Interaction with mainstream peers fosters empathy, tolerance, and mutual respect among students. These findings align with previous research indicating that inclusive education contributes significantly to social development and emotional well-being (Pokhrel, 2024; Sains et al., 2024).

The findings suggest that, despite resource limitations, effective management strategies and collaborative practices enable inclusive education to function meaningfully and produce positive outcomes for students with special needs.

Discussion Summary

Overall, this study confirms that the success of inclusive education management depends not only on policy frameworks but also on schools' capacity to operationalize inclusive principles through adaptive instruction, professional development, collaboration, and ongoing evaluation. The findings reinforce existing literature emphasizing that inclusive education requires a holistic, flexible, and context-sensitive management approach (Tahsinia & Pujiaty, 2024; Woodcock et al., 2022).

CONCLUSION

This study examined the management of inclusive education at Sekolah Kebangsaan Ayer Hitam, Malaysia, focusing on management strategies, implementation challenges, and their impact on students with special needs. The findings indicate that inclusive education management at the school has been implemented through systematic planning, flexible instructional models, and collaborative practices involving school leaders, teachers, parents, and relevant stakeholders.

The study reveals that the application of full inclusion and partial inclusion models enables the school to accommodate diverse student needs while maintaining meaningful social integration. The use of differentiated instruction, Individual Education Plans (IEPs), and school-based assessment supports individualized learning and continuous monitoring of student progress. These management practices contribute positively to both the academic engagement and social development of students with special needs.

Despite these positive outcomes, the study also identifies several challenges, particularly the limited number of teachers with special education expertise, constraints in facilities and learning resources, and the persistence of social stigma. These challenges highlight the gap between inclusive education policy and its practical implementation at the school level, emphasizing the need for sustained institutional support and professional development.

Overall, this study underscores that the success of inclusive education depends not only on strong policy frameworks but also on effective school-level management that is adaptive, collaborative, and context-sensitive. The findings contribute to the growing body of literature on inclusive education management by providing empirical evidence from a primary school case study in the Malaysian context. Future research is recommended to involve comparative or multi-site studies to enhance generalizability and to further explore the long-term impact of inclusive education management on student outcomes.

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