



Managing Inclusive Education Services for Children with Special Needs: Evidence from Muhammadiyah Elementary School in Indonesia

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the management of inclusive education services for children with special needs in Muhammadiyah Elementary School in Bontang City, East Kalimantan. This research employed a qualitative exploratory approach involving observations, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. The participants consisted of school principals, teachers, shadow teachers, parents, and students with special needs selected through purposive sampling. The findings reveal four main aspects of inclusive service management: policy and planning, service organization and implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and challenges in implementation. The study found that effective inclusive education management requires strong collaboration among schools, parents, psychologists, and therapists, supported by adaptive curriculum and structured evaluation mechanisms. However, several challenges remain, including limited teacher training and insufficient disability-friendly infrastructure. This study contributes to the development of a practical management framework for inclusive education services in elementary schools.

Keywords: *children with special needs, inclusive education, inclusive services management, muhammadiyah elementary school,*

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INTRODUCTION

The poor quality and limited accessibility of educational services for children with special needs in Indonesia continue to reinforce deep educational inequalities, leaving this group among the most marginalized in society (Group, 2024; Unicef Indonesia, 2023). As noted by R. Group (2024), nearly 30% of children with special needs in Indonesia do not have access to education, and many who do attend school fail to receive adequate services. This problem is made worse by the lack of disability-friendly facilities in schools and the shortage of specially trained teachers to support these children (Smith, 2020). Besides, social stigma and discrimination against children with special needs severely limit their ability to participate in the formal education system (Jones, 2022). Comprehensive policies that have been introduced are often

applied inconsistently across the country. Enhancing educational services for children with special needs necessitates a stronger commitment from both the government and society, which includes providing adequate facilities, training for teachers, and financial assistance for families in need. Without important improvements in these areas, children with special needs will continue to encounter challenges in obtaining appropriate and equitable education.

All children are entitled to adequate educational services. The right to education encompasses the provision of improvements in quality across all domains, guaranteeing that each student, whether a regular student or a student with special needs, receives essential services and makes meaningful educational progress. The government has adopted a policy aimed at promoting educational equity, which has been implemented through the practice of inclusive education. This approach represents a major advancement in the educational sector. Inclusive education ensures that all children, including those with special needs, have the opportunity to access educational services, as outlined in the Regulation of Minister of National Education of the Republic of Indonesia No. 70 of 2009 regarding Inclusive Education.

Inclusive education is adopted to guarantee all children access the quality and rights to education (Subotić, 2014; United Nations, 2016). Inclusive education presents as the new advancement in educational sector, providing opportunities for all children to have the access of educational services, including for children with special needs (Direktorat Jenderal Mandikdasmen Departemen Pendidikan Nasional, 2007; Hernández-Torrano et al., 2022; Kebudayaan, 2011; Nilholm, 2021). According to the basic data of education (*Dapodik*) by December 2022, 40,928 schools have adopted inclusive education for all levels of private and public schools, in elementary schools, junior high schools, senior high schools, and vocational high schools (Kemdikbud, 2023). By September 2023, reaching 44,477 schools spread to all provinces in Indonesia. This shows a significant improvement for applying inclusive education, providing positive impacts for children with special needs. However, inclusive education still encounters challenges due to limited support on human resources and infrastructure. As a result, inclusive education in Indonesia is still unable to provide inclusive services for children with special needs (Kriswanto et al., 2023). As bullying occurred, both to children with special needs and regular students, presenting severe problems for students in the educational institutions in Indonesia (Suratno et al., 2022; Suratno et al., 2023).

The state of inclusive education management in Indonesia currently faces significant challenges. Various efforts have been made to promote the accessibility and availability of inclusive education, however, constraints to implement the effective inclusive practices appear in school levels, especially in elementary schools (Andriyan et al., 2023). One of the primary challenges is the lack of training and the availability of educators to fulfill and implement effective inclusive approaches. Meanwhile, this is inconsistent with the theory of inclusive education discussing the importance of a learning environment accommodating all students. However, in its practice, there is discrepancy between theory and its practice in fields (Lestari et al., 2022). In addition, the adequacy of disability-friendly education infrastructure becomes significant barriers as well. Though some steps have been taken to improve infrastructure, the

reality is that many schools are inadequately equipped with facilities for physical activity and accessibility for students with special needs. This inadequacy leads them to receive education which does not meet their needs and potential (Hanifah et al., 2022).

Bontang city is one of the cities in East Kalimantan that have a sufficiently significant number of children with special needs, with a total of 142 children with special needs registered in 2016 (Mulawarman et al., 2016). This data shows that Bontang requires special attention to education services and support for students with special needs. According to a report from the Bontang City Education Office, the majority of children with special needs face difficulties to access education that meet with their needs (Harususilo, 2024). About 60% of children have not yet received adequate facilities for inclusive education. Meanwhile, only 30% of schools in Bontang are equipped with disability-friendly facilities and trained educators (LKIP, 2020). Other challenges come from strong social stigma against students with special needs, limited their participation in school events and socialization. Therefore, it is required joint efforts from several parties, such as government, community, and educational institutions to improve the quality of services and facilities for students with disabilities in Bontang, helping them enjoy equal rights of education. In this context, the selected school becomes particularly important as it is recognized as one of the pioneering schools implementing inclusive education in Bontang. The school not only provides access for students with special needs but also develops a distinctive approach to inclusive education management. This approach integrates inclusive education practices with the school's religious-based values, emphasizing compassion, respect for diversity, and social responsibility within the learning environment. Therefore, examining the management of inclusive education in this school provides valuable insights into how inclusive practices can be developed in regions with limited resources while maintaining strong institutional values, highlighting the novelty and relevance of this study.

Inclusive education in Bontang City, so far, has been relatively adequate, signed by the presence of schools at least one in the sub-district. One of schools that has implemented inclusive services is Muhammadiyah elementary school in Bontang City. In the context of the implementation of inclusive education, it is important for teachers to have a comprehensive understanding of their students with special needs (Sukadari, 2020). Involving the knowledge of individual characteristics and identity. By understanding this, it is expected for teachers to identify their students with special attention, both in school and beyond. The early identification is essential for ensuring that they get adequate services according to their needs from the early time. Various types of services, ranging from medical treatment to therapy and education, can be provided to optimize their potential (Iskandar & Supena, 2021; Kementerian Pendidikan, 2020). The process of this identification requires comprehensive understanding of various types of disorders experienced by children, including physical, mental, intellectual, social, and emotional disorders (Totsika et al., 2022). Although previous studies have examined inclusive education implementation in Indonesia, limited studies specifically explore the management of inclusive services at the elementary school level, particularly in local contexts such as Bontang City.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the management of inclusive services in Muhammadiyah Elementary School as a case study of inclusive education practices. This study aims to explore the management of inclusive services for children with special needs related to human resources in Bontang City encompassing the policy, planning, organization, and the implementation of service, monitoring and evaluation, challenge, and obstacle. This result of this study is expected to offer a management framework of inclusive education, either for school principals, educational offices, and all related parties.

METHODS

This study used an exploratory method with a qualitative approach to examine comprehensively on inclusive services management for children with special needs in Muhammadiyah elementary school of Bontang City, East Kalimantan. An exploratory method aims to figure out new insights and phenomena that has not yet been extensively studied or comprehensively understood (Morissan, 2018). This method is appropriate for this study as it aims to explore and identify best practices and challenges in the management of comprehensive services within educational institutions. The qualitative approach enables the gathering of comprehensive and detailed data through various techniques, including in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis.

This research focuses on various stakeholders, including school manager, principal, 3 teachers, 2 shadow teachers, 4 students with special educational needs to strengthen learning observation data, and their parents. The informant profile is shown in Table 1. The selection of subjects was carried out using purposive sampling, a method that involves identifying individuals who are deemed most knowledgeable and influential in the application of inclusive services within educational institutions (Miles, 2014). The criteria for the selection of research subjects are as follows that: 1) all subjects are regarded as having the requisite understanding of the necessary data; 2) they are actively involved in the comprehensive education services program; 3) they are believed to provide unbiased and objective data; and 4) they possess a minimum of five years of professional experience at the school, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the research topic.

Table 1. The Informan Profile

No	Code	Status
1	P1	School manager
2	P2	Principal
3	P3	Teacher
4	P4	Teacher
5	P5	Teacher
6	P6	Shadow teacher
7	P7	Shadow teacher
8	P8	Parent

This study ensured the validity of the data through triangulation by comparing information obtained from multiple sources and methods (Natow, 2020). In addition, member checking was conducted by returning the findings to participants to confirm the accuracy and credibility of the interpretations. Furthermore, peer

debriefing was applied to enhance the trustworthiness of the analysis through critical discussion with fellow researchers. The technique of data analysis consists of three key components: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion (Miles, 2014). In the data reduction phase, the process entails coding and categorizing the data to reveal the principal themes. Data presentation is achieved by arranging the data into clear narratives or tables that are easy to comprehend. Conclusions are formulated based on the analyzed data while considering the context and objectives of the research, along with pertinent literature.

RESULTS

According to results of study and data analysis, four important themes, regarding inclusive services management for children with special needs in schools, has been identified as follows: policy and planning, organization and implementation of services, monitoring and evaluation, challenges and obstacles as well. Every theme is supported by relevant codes as depicted in Figure 1.

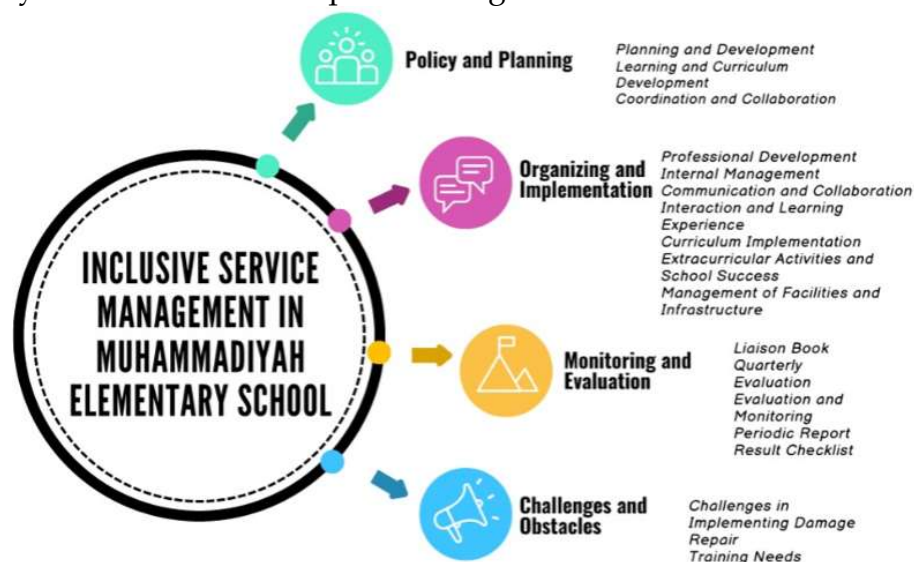


Figure 1. Results of Research Data Analysis

Policy and Planning

The main focus in this discussion covers several important aspects, such as the planning and development, learning and curriculum development, and coordination and collaboration as well. Every aspect is a crucial component supporting the implementation of the effective and sustainable inclusive program in this school. The planning and development involve various strategies and efforts to ensure the necessity of children with special needs can be fulfilled optimally, including the cooperation with external parties and training for teachers and shadow teachers. As displayed by P2 from interviews, "For collaboration, we work with UMKT in the psychology department by inviting lecturers and students (P2)". According to P2, the involvement of external parties is important for developing inclusive services. This aligns with P8 that, "this training involves the adaptive instruction method, the use of learning aids, and the comprehensive understanding about several individual needs of students (P8)". The importance of the training for teachers is recognized as parts of the planning and development for inclusive services.

The learning and development of school curriculum are emphasized for the adaptation and innovation for suitable learning methods and materials for children with special needs. The schools also integrate learning materials tailored to them. P5 mentioned that the materials taught by teachers must align with the needs of students with special needs, reflecting the school's understanding and application of inclusive practices. Meanwhile, coordination and collaboration focus on the synergy among schools, parents, and several parties to create a support and comprehensive learning environment. This role ensures communication and coordination to run smoothly, moreover, the individual needs of students can be fulfilled as mentioned by P6 in which "if there is a structure, there is a coordinator for children with special needs and shadow coordinator themselves (P6)".

Organization and Implementation of Services

The organization in implementing inclusive learning services in Muhammadiyah elementary school in Bontang City is the crucial aspect to create a supporting learning environment, including children with special needs. Various strategies and practices implemented by schools in ensuring the effectiveness of services, and the initial step of professional development, in which the school provides a training and workshop for teachers and shadow teachers to improve teaching competency. As mentioned by P1 in the interview, "Before this, educators received training and preparation. Following this training, they outlined their roles and responsibilities in educational activities (P1). For P1, the central emphasis is on the professional development of educators through training and workshops.

In addition, communication and collaboration among educators are essential components in promoting effective collaboration within the learning process. This perspective was reinforced by P8, who remarked: "Effective collaboration between teachers, shadow teachers, and parents is the key to success in educating children with special needs (P8)." By engaging in effective collaboration, students have the opportunity to achieve their maximum potential within an comprehensive and supportive educational environment. Also, structured internal management and coordination are the foundational pillars that support the delivery of comprehensive services at this institution, guaranteeing that all programs and policies are executed in accordance with the established plans and objectives.

Monitoring and Evaluation

This is the foundation of the school's initiatives to guarantee the effectiveness and sustainability of its inclusion program. As said by P1 during an interview: "Following the assessment of the student's level and skills, a communication log or information is shared between the shadow teacher and the parents, which is also recognized by the homeroom teacher" (P1). This emphasizes the significance of organized communication between the shadow teacher and parents during regular evaluations. P8 said, "Communication between parents and the shadow teacher typically includes regular face-to-face meetings, written progress reports, and communication tools such as a logbook (P8)." This reflects the monitoring practices involving regular evaluation over inclusive educational context for students' development.

P3 emphasized the importance of the evaluation component, which occurs every three months: "Subsequently, an assessment will take place. Every three months, the learning outcomes of the student along with their assistant will be evaluated, and thi

will function as a mechanism for evaluating and monitoring the learning process (P3)." This assessment encompasses a systematic review of the learning progress of students with special needs. *Challenges and Obstacles*

Challenges and obstacles in the context of inclusive education, dealing with practical barriers regularly emerging within inclusive program implementation. One of them is the challenges of structured training for teachers and companions. As said by P5, as an informant, "In my opinion, colleagues require organized training programs. Nevertheless, time limitations and the many activities in creative schools frequently relegate such training to the background (P5)." This indicates, however it is important, often the structured training to support inclusive education obstructed by schedule for school activities. P8 highlighted the importance of regular training and workshops focused on inclusive education and particular instructional techniques, that is an integral part of how to manage these challenges.

Based on the findings, inclusive education management can be conceptualized through four interconnected components: policy and planning, organizational structure, implementation strategy, and monitoring and evaluation systems. These components form an integrated framework that supports the effective implementation of inclusive education for children with special needs. First, policy and planning provide the foundational direction for inclusive education through regulations, institutional commitments, and strategic planning. These policies guide schools in allocating resources, adapting curricula, and preparing teachers to support inclusive learning. Second, organizational structure ensures coordination among stakeholders, including school leaders, teachers, special education staff, and external professionals. A clear structure facilitates collaboration and effective decision-making in addressing students' diverse needs. Third, implementation strategy refers to the practical application of inclusive practices, such as differentiated instruction, individualized learning support, and teacher capacity development. Finally, monitoring and evaluation systems function to assess the effectiveness of inclusive education practices, identify challenges, and provide feedback for continuous improvement. Together, these components form a dynamic management model that explains how inclusive education can be systematically organized and implemented in educational institutions.

DISCUSSION

This study aims to explore inclusive services management for children with special needs in Muhammadiyah elementary school of Bontang City, involving the planning and policy, organization and services implementation, monitoring and evaluation as well as monitoring and challenges. The data analysis shows the planning and policy for inclusive learning in Muhammadiyah elementary school of Bontang City requires close collaborative among schools, psychologists, and therapists that play a significant role to arrange the effective program. Organization and implementation of inclusive services through clear structure and the role of coordinator of children for special needs as well as companion teachers that is well defined. However, its implementation accepts the differentiated learning methods and uses suitable facilities and infrastructure. Monitoring and evaluation in organizing inclusive schools emphasizes the importance of continuous evaluation and active participation for all stakeholders. The results of this study provide a substantial

contribution to the existing literature on comprehensive education and may be a valuable reference for other educational institutions seeking to enhance their inclusion programs.

Policy and planning

The significance of this findings is that the planning and policy of inclusive services management is influenced by the learning approach to consider the necessities and characteristics of students, including for those with special needs. This is affected significantly to the quality of management for inclusive services for children with special needs. The planning and policy cover the systematic process on organizing the learning approaches to consider the necessities and characteristics of every student. In Muhammadiyah elementary school of Bontang City, this is also affected by collaboration among schools, psychologists, and therapists. This multidisciplinary collaboration reflects a dynamic planning process in which policies are continuously refined to ensure responsiveness and effectiveness in addressing diverse student needs. This is suitable with the principal management of inclusive education emphasizing the importance of cooperation among stakeholders to develop responsive programs towards students with special needs (DeMatthews et al., 2020). In addition, teacher training is acknowledged as a fundamental component of policy and planning to guarantee that educators possess the skills and knowledge essential for promoting inclusion. The results of this study align with earlier research that emphasizes the significance of professional training and development in improving competency for inclusive educational context (Rodríguez et al., 2020). This research supports earlier findings indicating that educational institutions adopt differentiated learning strategies in alignment with Universal Design for Learning (UDL). These strategies illustrate how the curriculum is modified to address the unique needs of students (Meyer, 2014; Tomlinson, 2014). This also indicates that inclusion is embedded not only at the policy level but also at the instructional level, ensuring coherence between planning and classroom practices. Unlike previous research, this study highlights the critical role of coordinators in ensuring effective communication and smooth coordination (Graham, 2020).

Organization and Implementation of Services

Organizing and implementing inclusive services for children with special needs become the main highlight for this research. This finding confirms the organization and implementation of inclusive can be optimized through professional development, communication, and collaboration among student and the effective internal coordination and management. The presence of clearly defined roles, such as coordinators and shadow teachers, demonstrates that organizational clarity plays a crucial role in reducing ambiguity and enhancing service effectiveness. In elementary school of Bontang City, the organization and implementation of inclusive services for children with special needs is reflected by the holistic approach integrating to stakeholders, including for teachers, shadow teacher, parents, psychologists, and therapists to create supportive and inclusive learning environment. This method guarantees that the needs of each student are adequately addressed and encourages the attainment of their highest potential. These findings underscore the previous research, which is mentioned that collaborative and holistic approach in the curriculum application, learning interaction, extracurricular activities, and

infrastructure management can be significantly supported inclusive education. Therefore, effective implementation depends not only on individual teacher competence but also on institutional capacity to sustain teamwork and shared responsibility.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation become the main step to ensure the effectiveness of inclusive program. This finding performs the monitoring through structured communication between shadow teacher and parents, including general meeting and written report. This practice reflects a shift toward participatory and transparent evaluation processes in inclusive education. General evaluation towards the development of children with special needs are the essential to ensuring that inclusive program meets its purpose. Monitoring and evaluation that involve parents as a part of the process and crucial finding emphasize the importance of community participation in inclusive education. The use of adaptive curriculum in Muhammadiyah elementary school of Bontang City by the approach of *ATM (Amati, Tiru, Modifikasi - Observing, Imitating, Modification)* shows the flexibility and responsiveness to individual needs, that is important for the successfulness of inclusive program. This also indicates that evaluation mechanisms must be flexible enough to capture individual learning progress beyond standardized measures. The result of this finding is in line with the process of assessment conducted every three months, covering student's cognitive, psychology, and social aspects, picturing comprehensively evaluative approach (Mohan, 2023). Regular evaluation involving parents emphasizes community participation in the inclusive education and shows the commitment to a holistic inclusive education, ensuring every student obtain adequate program according to student's needs and potentials, which is a core of effective inclusive education (Kenny et al., 2023). Hence, monitoring and evaluation should function as continuous feedback loops that inform both instructional improvement and policy refinement.

Challenges and Obstacle

The management of challenges in the inclusive program covering several aspects, starting from structured program for teachers and the maintenance of infrastructures. These findings show, that, though training for teachers is crucial to conduct, it is limited to busy schedule of school activities. This indicates a gap between policy expectations and practical implementation, particularly in sustaining professional development. This research indicates the need for flexible planning of teacher training implementation for supporting inclusive program (Sailor, 2017). The involvement of parents, in monitoring and improving facilities and infrastructures through committee meeting and regular survey, reflects the approach of participative and inclusive management, emphasizing the importance of joint collaboration from schools and parents (Giampietro & Romiti, 2025). However, this also suggests the need for clearer frameworks to optimize stakeholder contributions and avoid dependency or inconsistency. The direct supervision through the learning process is the key element for managing the challenges. Through supervision, school ensures that every adjustment needed can be promptly implemented, supporting the successfulness of student with special needs. This highlights the importance of adaptive leadership in responding to emerging challenges in inclusive settings. This approach is likely to response the necessities of students better and maintain the

quality if sustainable inclusive education. This finding supports the theory of inclusive leadership proposed by (DeMatthews et al., 2020), which emphasizes the importance of collaborative governance in developing inclusive schools. According to this perspective, effective inclusive education is not solely determined by formal policies or individual initiatives, but by the collective involvement of various stakeholders within the school community. The collaboration among school leaders, teachers, support staff, and external professionals plays a crucial role in ensuring that inclusive practices are implemented consistently and sustainably. Therefore, addressing these challenges requires long-term strategic planning, resource optimization, and sustained collaboration among all stakeholders. Therefore, the findings of this study highlight that inclusive education management requires not only structural arrangements and policies but also shared leadership and coordinated efforts to create an educational environment that accommodates the diverse needs of all learners.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study stated that the successfulness of the implementation of inclusive education is not only dependent on mature policy and planning, but also the holistic and collaborative organization, implementation, evaluation, and monitoring. The close collaboration among schools, psychologists, and therapists to arrange educational programs effectively, also the role of coordinator and companion teacher, emphasizes the importance of clear organizational structure and support of adequate infrastructure. Regular evaluation involving parents, and the use of responsive and flexible model-adapted curriculum shows the commitment holistic inclusive education. Using holistic and collaborative approaches, this study emphasizes the importance of professional training for teachers and the involved communities in supporting inclusive education. This finding not only strengthens the available structure but also provides the practical manual for other schools to implement effective inclusive programs. Hence, this study significantly contributes to developing the strategy of inclusive-services management ensuring every child with special need to obtain maximum potential in the supportive inclusive environment.

According to this study, some suggestions to improve inclusive education for children with special needs in Muhammadiyah elementary school of Bontang City are as follows: firstly, the importance of the increase of collaboration among schools, psychologists, and therapists must be encouraged. This collaboration is not only to ensure comprehensive planning, but also to likely adapt to more responsive programs over the necessities of children with special needs. In addition, teacher professional development is required to be conducted intensively through structured and flexible training, remembering the intensity of school schedule activities that often become barriers. Secondly, the structure of organization, the role of coordinator of children with special needs, and companion teacher must be strengthened and clarified to ensure the continuity of the implementation of inclusive education. The provision of adequate facilities should be improved to support inclusive and effective learning activities. Thirdly, monitoring and evaluation should be regularly done involving parents and communities. This is not only to increase transparency and accountability, but also to strengthen the participation of communities in the inclusive learning process. Comprehensive evaluation, including cognitive, psychological, and social aspects, must be applied to ensure that students receive education suitable with their needs and potentials. Fourthly, holistic and collaborative approaches should be

developed for implementing curriculum, learning interaction, and extracurricular activities. Integrating the national curriculum with specialized curricula, and using digital communication technology, can enhance interactions among teachers, parents, and students. Besides, schools should implement more comprehensive and participatory management approaches that involve parents in supervising and improving facilities. By holding committee meetings and conducting regular surveys, schools can recognize, and tackle challenges related to the execution of comprehensive programs. This approach ensures that every student with special needs is able to achieve their maximum potential within a nurturing and comprehensive setting. This study provides important implications for both theory and practice in the field of inclusive education. Practically, the findings highlight the need for schools to adopt holistic and collaborative management strategies that integrate stakeholders such as teachers, parents, psychologists, and therapists. Theoretically, this study enriches the existing literature on inclusive education by emphasizing the role of organizational structure, continuous evaluation, and adaptive curriculum in supporting students with special needs. These findings can serve as a reference for policymakers and educational institutions in designing more effective and inclusive educational frameworks. For further research, it is recommended to explore the implementation of inclusive education in different educational levels and diverse socio-cultural contexts to obtain more comprehensive insights. Future studies may also employ mixed-method or quantitative approaches to measure the effectiveness of collaborative strategies and training programs more objectively. Additionally, investigating the long-term impact of inclusive education practices on students' academic achievement, social development, and psychological well-being would provide deeper understanding and stronger empirical evidence.

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