

Evaluation of Inclusive Education Services at Muhammadiyah 1 Kartasura Junior High School

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

inclusive education;
special teacher assistants;
special needs students;
adaptive learning;
Islamic schools

Article history:

Accepted 2025-11-09

Revised 2026-07-02

Accepted 2026-07-24

ABSTRACT

Inclusive education aims to provide equitable learning opportunities for all students regardless of their abilities. Despite increasing policy support in Indonesia, limited evidence exists regarding the implementation of inclusive education in Islamic schools. This study evaluated the Muhjitos Inclusion Program at SMP Muhammadiyah 1 Kartasura as a model of inclusive education integrating academic excellence with humanistic and religious values. A qualitative case study was conducted using purposive sampling. Participants included the school principal, the inclusion program coordinator, Special Assistant Teachers (*Guru Pendamping Khusus*/GPK), subject teachers, and students with special needs. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. The data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, while source and method triangulation and member checking were employed to ensure trustworthiness. Four major themes emerged: (1) adaptive implementation of inclusive learning through full inclusion and pull-out instruction; (2) the pivotal role of GPK in differentiated instruction and emotional support; (3) a collaborative ecosystem involving teachers, parents, and psychologists; and (4) students' holistic development encompassing academic, social, emotional, and character growth. The findings indicate that the program has been effectively implemented for three years, primarily serving students with mild disabilities through individualized support and collaborative educational practices. The study proposes an Inclusive Excellence Model comprising adaptive instructional flexibility, collaborative ecosystem synergy, and the integration of humanistic-spiritual values. The findings suggest that inclusive education and academic excellence can be achieved simultaneously through adaptive pedagogy, sustained stakeholder collaboration, and institutional commitment to educational equity, offering practical implications for the development of inclusive education in Islamic schools.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Education is a basic right for every citizen, regardless of background, ability, or physical or mental condition. This principle is affirmed in Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, which states that every citizen has the right to quality education. Therefore, the inclusive education policy is a manifestation of the Indonesian government's efforts to achieve equal access and learning opportunities for all students, including those with special needs (Leksmiani, Suherman, & Hanafi, 2024). Inclusive education is not only defined as the policy of integrating students with special needs into regular schooling, but also as a humanistic approach that positions diversity as a strength in the learning process (Nadhiroh & Ahmadi, 2024).

Each child has different developmental characteristics. Understanding children needs to start from the awareness that each individual is unique with their own characteristics (Rodiyana & Puspitasari, 2021). In this context, inclusive education is crucial because it provides space for every child to develop according to their potential and needs without exception, including children with special needs (ABK). The biggest obstacle that often arises in the development and success of children with special needs does not lie in their physical or mental limitations, but in low social acceptance in society and at school. This reality shows that the main challenge of inclusive education lies not only in the technical aspects of learning, but also in changing attitudes, empathy, and inclusive culture among educators and students (Astuti, Nita, & Putri, 2024; Salsabillah & Selian, 2025).

Inclusive education in public schools in Indonesia is still a relatively new phenomenon. For many years, education for children with special needs has tended to be segregated through the Special School (SLB) system. The paradigm shift towards inclusive education in regular schools requires fundamental changes in the education system. These changes can start from curriculum and teaching methods to assessment and the social environment of schools. This change requires readiness and commitment from all parties to create a school that truly welcomes diversity.

In this context, schools labeled as "flagship programs" are in a very interesting position to study. On the one hand, a top school is synonymous with high academic standards, selectivity, and a focus on achievement (Widjaja, 2022). On the other hand, they are expected to be pioneers in implementing inclusive values in education. SMP 1 Muhammadiyah is one of the schools that strives to integrate academic excellence with Islamic values and openness to student diversity. The presence of students with diverse abilities and needs in this school provides an opportunity to explore how inclusion principles are effectively applied in a competitive educational environment.

Evaluating inclusive education services in these schools is essential to assess the extent to which learning policies and practices truly support student diversity. A qualitative approach is used because it allows for an in-depth exploration of the experiences and perceptions of teachers, principals, students, and parents regarding the implementation of inclusive services. Through this exploration, this research is expected to identify strategies, obstacles, and good practices that can be a reference for other schools in developing a more adaptive and equitable education system.

This research is expected to make a theoretical contribution to the development of an inclusive excellence model, an approach that emphasizes that the quality and inclusiveness of education are not contradictory but rather mutually reinforcing. Practically, the results of this research are expected to inspire schools, especially Islamic-based educational institutions, in building a learning ecosystem that respects diversity, fosters empathy, and expands access for all students. Ultimately, inclusive education is not just about providing equal opportunities, but also about creating an environment that empowers every individual to grow, learn, and contribute according to their potential without the limitations of stigma and discrimination.

2. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design to evaluate the implementation of the Muhjitos Inclusion Program at SMP Muhammadiyah 1 Kartasura. A qualitative

case study was chosen because it enables researchers to explore a contemporary educational phenomenon in depth within its real-life context and to gain a comprehensive understanding of the implementation of inclusive education from multiple perspectives (Scott, 2020; Fadli, 2021).

The study was conducted at SMP Muhammadiyah 1 Kartasura, an Islamic junior high school that has implemented an inclusive education program for approximately three years. The participants were selected using purposive sampling, as this technique allows researchers to identify individuals who possess rich information and direct experience related to the implementation of the inclusion program. The informants consisted of the school principal (1 person), the Inclusion Program Coordinator (1 person), Special Assistant Teachers (*Guru Pendamping Khusus/GPK*) (2 persons), subject teachers involved in inclusive classrooms (2 persons), and students with special needs (ABK) (4 persons) representing different educational needs, including speech delay, slow learner, and mild Down syndrome. These participants were selected because they were directly involved in planning, implementing, and experiencing inclusive education services.

Data were collected using three complementary techniques, namely semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain participants' experiences, perceptions, and evaluations regarding the implementation of inclusive education. Classroom and school environment observations focused on instructional practices, interactions between students with special needs and their peers, teacher support, and the implementation of pull-out learning sessions. Document analysis included the review of school inclusion program documents, Individual Learning Plans (PPI), assessment records, meeting reports, and other supporting administrative documents.

The collected data were analyzed using the interactive model developed by Miles and Huberman (2014), which consists of four interconnected stages: data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. During data condensation, interview transcripts and field notes were coded to identify meaningful units related to the implementation of inclusive education. Similar codes were subsequently grouped into broader themes, including instructional adaptation, teacher professionalism, collaborative support, and student development. These themes were continuously compared across different data sources before final conclusions were drawn.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, several validation strategies were employed. Method triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from interviews, observations, and document analysis, while source triangulation involved comparing perspectives among principals, GPK teachers, subject teachers, and students with special needs. In addition, member checking was carried out by confirming interview summaries and preliminary interpretations with several key informants to ensure that the findings accurately represented their experiences. The researchers also maintained detailed field notes throughout the research process to enhance the credibility and dependability of the study.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Findings

The analysis of interviews, observations, and document reviews generated four major themes that explain the implementation of the Muhjitos Inclusion Program at SMP Muhammadiyah 1 Kartasura: (1) adaptive implementation of inclusive learning, (2) the professionalism of Special Assistant Teachers (GPK), (3) collaborative support among stakeholders, and (4) holistic development of students with special needs. The thematic analysis also identified several subthemes, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Themes and Subthemes Generated from Data Analysis

Theme	Initial Codes	Categories	Main Findings
Adaptive implementation of inclusive learning	curriculum adaptation, pull-out learning, classroom inclusion, individualized instruction	Flexible learning strategies	Inclusive learning is implemented through the integration of regular classroom instruction and adaptive pull-out sessions according to students' individual needs.
Professionalism of Special Assistant Teachers (GPK)	empathy, patience, positive reinforcement, differentiated instruction	Teacher competence	GPK play a central role in providing individualized learning support while fostering students' confidence and social participation.
Collaborative support among stakeholders	parent communication, psychologist consultation, teacher collaboration, quarterly evaluation	Collaborative ecosystem	Continuous collaboration between school personnel, parents, and psychologists strengthens educational services for students with special needs.
Holistic student development	social interaction, independence, extracurricular participation, religious values	Academic and non-academic development	Inclusive education promotes not only academic achievement but also social skills, independence, creativity, and character development.

3.1.1 Theme 1. Adaptive Implementation of Inclusive Learning

The first theme identified from the analysis concerns the adaptive implementation of inclusive learning. The findings indicate that the Muhjitos Inclusion Program combines a full inclusion classroom model with pull-out learning sessions tailored to students' individual needs. Students with special needs attend regular classes together with their peers while receiving additional instructional assistance from Special Assistant Teachers (GPK) whenever necessary.

Observations revealed that learning materials, classroom assignments, and assessment strategies were modified according to students' learning profiles and functional abilities. The school currently serves six students with mild disabilities, including speech delay, slow learners, and mild Down syndrome, reflecting the institution's policy of providing inclusive education within its available human and infrastructural capacity.

3.1.2 Theme 2. Professionalism of Special Assistant Teachers

The second theme highlights the central role of Special Assistant Teachers (GPK) in ensuring the effectiveness of inclusive education. Data indicate that GPK apply differentiated instructional strategies supported by empathy, patience, and continuous emotional support.

One teacher explained:

"The key is to be flexible and patient because each child's emotional condition changes. Sometimes I rewrite learning materials or dictate them slowly so they can follow the lesson. I also give praise or small rewards to maintain their motivation."

Observations further demonstrated that individualized assistance contributed positively to students' academic engagement, emotional regulation, and classroom participation. Rather than functioning merely as instructional assistants, GPK acted as facilitators of learning, emotional supporters, and mediators between students, teachers, and parents.

3.1.3 Theme 3. Collaborative Support Among Stakeholders

Another prominent finding concerns the collaborative ecosystem established among GPK, subject teachers, parents, school leaders, and psychologists.

The collaboration was reflected through:

- a. regular communication with parents,
- b. curriculum adaptation meetings,
- c. quarterly evaluations involving psychologists,
- d. monitoring students' academic and behavioural progress.

This multi-stakeholder collaboration enabled consistent educational interventions between school and home environments while facilitating early identification of students' learning and emotional needs.

3.1.4 Theme 4. Holistic Development of Students with Special Needs

The final theme demonstrates that the inclusion program contributes not only to academic development but also to students' social and personal growth.

Observations showed improvements in:

- a. classroom participation,
- b. communication skills,
- c. peer interaction,
- d. self-confidence,
- e. responsibility,
- f. independence.

The school also provides various experiential learning activities, including Cooking Class, Beading Time, visual arts competitions, and Outbound activities, which support life skills, creativity, collaboration, and character education.

One student stated:

"I enjoy Cooking Class and Outbound because my friends and teachers help me. I used to be afraid of crowded places, but now I feel more confident."

These findings suggest that inclusive education at SMP Muhammadiyah 1 Kartasura extends beyond academic inclusion by promoting students' holistic development within an Islamic educational environment grounded in humanistic and religious values.

Table 2. Example of Data Coding Process

Interview Excerpt	Open Code	Category	Theme
"I rewrite the material slowly..."	differentiated instruction	adaptive teaching	Professionalism of GPK
"Parents communicate every day..."	parent communication	collaboration	Collaborative ecosystem
"Students learn together..."	classroom inclusion	inclusive learning	Adaptive implementation
"Cooking Class makes me confident..."	confidence building	holistic development	Student development

3.2 Discussion

The findings indicate that the implementation of the Muhjitos Inclusion Program at SMP Muhammadiyah 1 Kartasura demonstrates that inclusive education extends beyond providing equal access to education. Instead, it represents a dynamic educational ecosystem that continuously adapts

instructional practices, collaborative support, and school culture to accommodate students' diverse needs. This finding supports the perspective that inclusive education should be understood as a process of increasing participation while simultaneously reducing barriers to learning and social interaction (Ainscow, 2020; UNESCO, 2020).

One of the most prominent findings concerns the implementation of adaptive instructional practices through the combination of full inclusion classrooms and individualized pull-out sessions. This instructional flexibility enables students with special needs to participate in regular classrooms while receiving personalized support according to their learning profiles. Such findings are consistent with Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011), who argue that effective inclusive pedagogy is achieved when teachers modify instructional strategies rather than expecting students to conform to standardized teaching approaches. Similarly, Loreman (2017) emphasizes that differentiated instruction and flexible classroom management are fundamental principles for ensuring meaningful participation of students with diverse abilities. Therefore, the adaptive instructional practices identified in this study illustrate how instructional differentiation can be operationalized within an Islamic school context without compromising students' social inclusion.

Another significant finding is the central role of Special Assistant Teachers (*Guru Pendamping Khusus*/GPK). Unlike previous studies that primarily describe teacher assistants as providers of academic support, this study reveals that GPK simultaneously function as instructional facilitators, emotional mentors, and communication mediators between schools and families. This expanded professional role appears to emerge because students with special needs require not only curriculum adaptation but also continuous emotional regulation and social encouragement throughout the learning process. This finding aligns with Sharma et al. (2018), who reported that teachers' beliefs, empathy, and professional competence significantly influence the effectiveness of inclusive education. Likewise, De Boer et al. (2011) found that positive teacher attitudes and supportive instructional relationships contribute substantially to students' academic engagement and social acceptance in inclusive classrooms.

The study also demonstrates that collaboration among school leaders, classroom teachers, GPK, parents, and psychologists constitutes one of the primary factors supporting the sustainability of inclusive education. This collaborative ecosystem facilitates continuous monitoring of students' academic progress, behavioural development, and emotional well-being through regular communication and periodic evaluations. Similar findings have been reported internationally, where family-school partnerships are considered essential components of successful inclusive education because they ensure consistency between educational interventions implemented at school and support provided at home (Epstein, 2018; UNESCO, 2020). Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory further explains that children's development is shaped through interactions among multiple environmental systems, suggesting that educational success depends not only on classroom instruction but also on effective collaboration between schools, families, and community professionals (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

An interesting issue emerging from this study concerns the school's policy of admitting only students with mild disabilities due to limited human and infrastructural resources. At first glance, this policy appears contradictory to the philosophical principles of inclusive education, which advocate equitable educational opportunities for all learners regardless of disability. However, the findings suggest that this policy reflects a pragmatic institutional response to capacity limitations rather than ideological resistance to inclusion. Similar challenges have been documented internationally, where schools often struggle to balance inclusive aspirations with shortages of qualified personnel, instructional resources, and specialized facilities (Slee, 2018; UNESCO, 2020). Consequently, this finding illustrates an inclusion-capacity dilemma, in which schools attempt to maintain educational quality while progressively expanding access to students with increasingly diverse educational needs.

The findings further indicate that inclusive education contributes substantially to students' holistic development beyond academic achievement. Improvements in students' confidence, peer interaction,

responsibility, communication skills, and participation in extracurricular activities demonstrate that inclusive education promotes broader developmental outcomes. Experiential learning activities such as Cooking Class, Beading Time, and Outbound programs provide authentic opportunities for students to develop life skills, creativity, collaboration, and independence. These findings support Kolb's (2015) Experiential Learning Theory, which argues that authentic learning experiences facilitate cognitive, social, and emotional development through active participation. Moreover, UNESCO (2020) emphasizes that the success of inclusive education should be evaluated not only by academic performance but also by students' well-being, participation, and sense of belonging within the school community.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the development of an Inclusive Excellence Model specifically situated within Islamic educational institutions. Existing frameworks of inclusive education predominantly emphasize structural accessibility, differentiated instruction, or collaborative practice as independent dimensions (Ainscow, 2020; Booth & Ainscow, 2011). The present findings suggest that these dimensions become substantially more effective when integrated with humanistic and spiritual values embedded within the school's educational philosophy. Accordingly, the proposed model comprises three interconnected pillars: Adaptive Instructional Flexibility, Collaborative Ecosystem Synergy, and Humanistic-Spiritual Internalization. Unlike previous inclusive education frameworks that focus primarily on removing structural barriers, this model conceptualizes inclusivity as a holistic educational ecosystem where academic excellence, social justice, and moral development reinforce one another. Consequently, the study extends existing theories of inclusive education by demonstrating that religious values may function as institutional capital for fostering empathy, reducing stigma, and strengthening collaborative educational practices within inclusive schools.

Overall, the findings suggest that successful inclusive education should be understood as an ongoing institutional transformation rather than merely the implementation of educational policies. The experience of SMP Muhammadiyah 1 Kartasura demonstrates that educational excellence and inclusivity are complementary objectives that can be achieved through adaptive pedagogy, professional teacher support, collaborative stakeholder engagement, and the integration of humanistic-spiritual values. This conceptual contribution provides an alternative framework for Islamic educational institutions seeking to strengthen educational quality while promoting equitable learning opportunities for all students.

4. CONCLUSION

The Inclusion Program at SMP Muhammadiyah 1, Kartasura, has succeeded in providing effective educational services for students with special needs (ABK) with mild disabilities such as speech delays, slow learning, and mild Down syndrome. The success of this program is supported by careful planning, the professionalism of special assistant teachers (GPK), and close collaboration between teachers, parents, and psychologists. The learning process is implemented using an inclusion and withdrawal system in the classroom, tailored to the needs of each student through a personalized and empathetic approach. In addition, the school also emphasizes the development of non-academic potential through activities such as Cooking Class, Time Beads, and Outbound, which support students' independence, creativity, and social skills.

This study concludes that SMP Muhammadiyah 1 Kartasura has succeeded in developing an inclusive excellence model that integrates academic quality with humanistic and religious values. This success rests not only on the administrative aspect, but on a personalized mentoring model and solid multi-stakeholder collaboration between schools, parents, and experts. Theoretically, this research contributes to the importance of adaptability of learning strategies based on empathy and social justice values in creating an equal educational ecosystem.

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