

Implementation of Inclusive Early Childhood Education Policies by Local Governments: A Comparative Case Study of Pontianak City and Mempawah Regency, Indonesia

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

inclusive early childhood education;
policy implementation;
local government;
educational equity;
qualitative case study

Article history:

Received 2026-02-09

Revised 2026-07-02

Accepted 2026-07-26

ABSTRACT

Inclusive Early Childhood Education (ECE) is a key strategy for ensuring equitable educational access for all children, including those with special needs. Although Indonesia has strengthened the regulatory framework for inclusive education, evidence on how local governments implement these policies remains limited. This study examines the implementation of inclusive ECE policies in Pontianak City and Mempawah Regency, Indonesia, and identifies factors contributing to differences in implementation outcomes. A qualitative comparative case study was conducted in two local government contexts. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with education office officials and school principals, field observations, and document analysis. The data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Trustworthiness was enhanced through triangulation and member checking. The findings reveal substantial differences in policy implementation between the two regions. Pontianak City demonstrates stronger regulatory frameworks, institutional support, and coordinated implementation mechanisms, resulting in more systematic inclusive ECE practices. In contrast, Mempawah Regency remains at an early implementation stage, where practices depend largely on individual institutional initiatives. Major implementation challenges include limited teacher competencies, inadequate professional support, insufficient inclusive facilities, and monitoring systems focused primarily on administrative compliance. The study demonstrates that effective implementation of inclusive ECE depends not only on regulatory commitment but also on the alignment of institutional capacity, human resources, professional support, and quality-oriented monitoring systems. These findings contribute to the literature on local education governance by explaining how variations in implementation capacity influence equitable and sustainable delivery of inclusive early childhood education.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental human right that must be fulfilled without discrimination. In Indonesia, the right to education is guaranteed by Law Number 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, which emphasizes that education must be implemented in a democratic, equitable, and non-discriminatory manner while upholding human rights and the nation's cultural diversity (Shofa, 2018). This principle forms the foundation for the development of inclusive education as a strategy to ensure that all children, including children with special needs, have access to quality and equitable educational services, particularly at the Early Childhood Education (ECE) level. Inclusive education places all learners in the same educational environment without discrimination (Ilahi, 2013; Kustawan, 2012), while requiring adjustments in curriculum, teaching methods, and learning environments to respond to diverse learner characteristics (Smith, 2006; Fauzan et al., 2021). Within the context of early childhood education, this approach plays a strategic role because early childhood represents a critical period for holistic child development and for fostering inclusive attitudes toward diversity from an early age (Farhan Alfikri & Nyayu Khodijah, 2022).

Globally, the commitment to inclusive education has been reinforced through international agreements such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), which emphasize that all children have the right to quality education within inclusive learning environments. In Indonesia, this commitment has been strengthened through Law Number 8 of 2016 on Persons with Disabilities, which guarantees the right to quality education at all levels of the education system. Technical regulations such as Minister of Education and Culture Regulation Number 48 of 2023 further mandate educational institutions to provide reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. At the regional level in West Kalimantan, both Pontianak City and Mempawah Regency have issued supporting regulations to facilitate the implementation of inclusive education. However, the existence of regulatory frameworks does not necessarily ensure effective implementation at the operational level.

Previous studies have indicated that the implementation of inclusive ECE continues to face significant challenges, including the limited availability of special assistant teachers, insufficient teacher competencies in adaptive learning, inflexible curricula, and inadequate disability-friendly infrastructure (Yunitasari et al., 2022; Kustiningrum et al., 2024). Nevertheless, most existing studies primarily focus on classroom-level practices within ECE institutions and rarely examine the policy implementation dimension at the level of local educational governance. In other words, there remains an empirical gap between micro-level analyses of teaching practices and macro-level examinations of the role of local education authorities as policy implementers.

Furthermore, there is a conceptual gap in the literature, as inclusive education is often analyzed mainly from a pedagogical perspective without integrating broader frameworks of public policy implementation, social justice, and educational governance. In practice, the success of inclusive education is not determined solely by teacher readiness but also by institutional capacity, budgetary support, coordination mechanisms, and effective monitoring and evaluation systems.

From a methodological perspective, research on inclusive ECE in Indonesia is still largely dominated by descriptive studies conducted within single regional contexts. As a result, limited attention has been given to comparative analyses across regions with different levels of regulatory readiness and institutional capacity. This condition reveals a methodological and contextual gap, particularly in understanding how inclusive education policies are implemented in decentralized education systems where local governments possess varying degrees of capacity and commitment.

In the context of West Kalimantan, data from the Education Quality Assurance Agency (BPMP) as of May 2025 indicate that Pontianak City has established 33 inclusive ECE institutions, while Mempawah Regency has 17 such institutions. However, the availability of special assistant teachers remains very limited and unevenly distributed. This situation suggests a potential gap between normative commitments to inclusive education, institutional readiness, and the actual implementation capacity at the local level. These conditions highlight the importance of examining not only the

challenges faced by inclusive education but also the relationship between regulatory readiness, institutional support, and resource capacity in shaping implementation outcomes.

Based on these gaps, this study aims to analyze the implementation of inclusive education policies and programs for Early Childhood Education conducted by local Education Offices in Pontianak City and Mempawah Regency and to identify factors influencing the effectiveness of their implementation. This research offers three primary contributions. First, it extends the analysis of inclusive education beyond classroom practices to the broader level of local policy implementation. Second, it integrates perspectives from public policy implementation, social justice, and educational governance into a unified analytical framework. Third, it employs a comparative regional approach to examine variations in policy implementation dynamics. Through this approach, the study contributes both empirically and conceptually to the literature on inclusive education policy implementation and provides strategic insights for strengthening inclusive ECE governance at the local level.

2. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach using a comparative multi-site case study design. A comparative case study was selected to identify similarities and differences in the implementation of Inclusive Early Childhood Education (ECE) policies and programs across two administrative contexts in West Kalimantan Province, namely Pontianak City and Mempawah Regency. The comparative design enabled the researcher to examine how policy implementation operates within different governance structures, resource conditions, and institutional environments while identifying factors that support or hinder policy effectiveness. The comparison focused on two levels of analysis: (1) local government educational administration represented by the Early Childhood Education Division of the Education Office, and (2) inclusive ECE institutions designated by local governments as providers of inclusive education. Through this multi-site perspective, the study sought to reveal determinants of successful implementation and challenges encountered in each setting (Yin, 2018).

The research was conducted at two pilot inclusive ECE institutions: TK Negeri Pembina Pontianak Tenggara in Pontianak City and TK Negeri Pembina Mempawah in Mempawah Regency. Site selection employed purposive sampling based on three criteria: (1) the institution had been formally designated as an inclusive ECE provider by the local government for at least two years, (2) the institution actively enrolled children with special needs, and (3) the institution provided sufficient accessibility for observation and document review. Pontianak City was selected to represent an urban context characterized by relatively greater access to educational resources and policy support, whereas Mempawah Regency represented a district-level context with different administrative arrangements and resource availability. These contrasting characteristics provided an appropriate basis for comparative analysis of policy implementation (Arikunto, 2010).

The study involved four key informants selected purposively based on their direct involvement in policy formulation and implementation. The informants consisted of: (1) the Head of the Early Childhood Education Division of the Pontianak City Education Office, (2) the Head of the Early Childhood Education Division of the Mempawah Regency Education Office, (3) the principal of TK Negeri Pembina Pontianak Tenggara, and (4) the principal of TK Negeri Pembina Mempawah. Teachers and parents were not included as interview participants because the focus of the study was policy implementation and institutional governance rather than classroom practices or parental perspectives.

Data were collected between September and October 2025 through semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis. Interviews explored policy formulation, implementation mechanisms, institutional support, and implementation challenges. Observations examined institutional facilities and inclusive education practices, while documentary analysis included local regulations, official decrees, and institutional reports related to inclusive education. The study complied with research ethics by obtaining formal permission, informed consent from participants,

ensuring confidentiality through anonymization, and allowing participants to withdraw at any stage without consequence. Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents were manually coded to identify themes related to policy implementation, supporting and inhibiting factors, and institutional responses. Findings from both sites were then compared using cross-case matrices to identify common patterns, contextual differences, and implementation gaps before drawing cross-case conclusions. Trustworthiness was ensured through source triangulation, method triangulation, and member checking (Sugiono, 2015). Information obtained from Education Office officials, school principals, observations, and policy documents was compared to enhance credibility, while interview summaries were returned to participants to verify the accuracy of interpretation, thereby strengthening the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the findings.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 *Implementation, Development, and Achievements of Inclusive Early Childhood Education (ECE) Programs*

This Based on the results of document analysis, interviews, and observations, the implementation of the inclusive Early Childhood Education (ECE) program in Pontianak City is supported by a clear legal framework. The program is implemented in accordance with Article 31 paragraph (1) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, and various regulations governing inclusive education and the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities. At the local level, the Pontianak City Government has strengthened policy implementation by designating inclusive ECE institutions, establishing the Disability Service Unit (Unit Layanan Disabilitas/ULD), and creating an Assessment Center to support educational services for children with special needs.

Interview findings with representatives from the Pontianak City Education Office indicate that the policy has been implemented gradually through the designation of inclusive ECE institutions, the dissemination of information to professional organizations such as HIMPAUDI and IGTKI, and the enhancement of teachers' capacities through training and professional development programs. According to the informants, these initiatives reflect the local government's commitment to ensuring that children with special needs have equal access to educational services within regular ECE settings without discrimination.

At the institutional level, the implementation of the inclusive ECE program involves the development of standard operating procedures (SOPs) for the admission of children with special needs and the adaptation of instructional strategies to accommodate individual learning needs. As explained by one school principal:

"At our institution, the admission of children with special needs follows the procedures established by the school. We have developed standard operating procedures to ensure that every child receives services that meet their individual needs. Teachers who have completed inclusive education training are assigned to support these children throughout the learning process." (School Principal, Interview, 2025).

The principal further explained that children with special needs learn alongside their typically developing peers in the same classroom using differentiated instructional approaches. Teachers continuously monitor children's developmental progress and coordinate with parents whenever additional educational support or follow-up interventions are required.

Despite these positive developments, interview findings also revealed several challenges in implementing the program. Human resource readiness remains uneven, as not all teachers possess specialized competencies for supporting children with special needs. Furthermore, the availability of facilities and infrastructure to support inclusive learning varies across institutions and largely depends

on each school's financial and organizational capacity. Observational findings demonstrated that children with special needs participated in classroom learning alongside their peers in inclusive classroom environments. Teachers attempted to adapt instructional strategies according to each child's needs; however, the effectiveness of these practices largely depended on teachers' competencies and the availability of supporting facilities within each institution. Overall, the findings indicate that the implementation of inclusive Early Childhood Education in Pontianak City has been carried out in accordance with the direction of local government policy through regulatory support, institutional development, and implementation at the school level. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of the program continues to be influenced by the readiness of human resources and the availability of adequate facilities and infrastructure to support inclusive education.

Based on document analysis and interview findings, the implementation of the inclusive Early Childhood Education (ECE) program in Mempawah Regency is still in the early stages of development. The Mempawah Regency Government has demonstrated its commitment by issuing Regent Regulation Number 74 of 2023 concerning the Implementation of Inclusive Education and the Decree of the Head of the Department of Education, Youth, Sports, and Tourism of Mempawah Regency Number 400.3.2/168/Dikporapar/2024 concerning the Designation of Inclusive ECE Reference Schools. However, these policies have not yet been fully supported by technical guidelines and operational mechanisms specifically regulating the implementation of inclusive ECE.

Interview findings with representatives of the Mempawah Regency Education Office revealed that the implementation of inclusive ECE services largely depends on the readiness of individual educational institutions, particularly those designated as reference or pilot schools. As one informant explained:

"At present, the implementation of inclusive ECE still depends heavily on the readiness of each institution. The schools that are most actively implementing inclusive education are generally those designated as reference or pilot schools. Not all ECE institutions are ready yet because human resources and facilities remain limited." (Mempawah Regency Education Office, Interview, 2025).

The informants further explained that only a limited number of ECE institutions are actively providing inclusive education services, and these efforts have not yet been supported by a structured system of mentoring, monitoring, and evaluation. As stated during the interview:

"Currently, only a small number of ECE institutions are actually implementing inclusive education services. We also do not yet have a regular mentoring and monitoring system. Program evaluation is still conducted in a general manner and has not specifically focused on inclusive education services." (Mempawah Regency Education Office, Interview, 2025).

The findings indicate that the implementation of inclusive Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Pontianak City and Mempawah Regency has reached different stages of policy implementation. In Pontianak City, the implementation of inclusive ECE is supported by a comprehensive regulatory framework at both the national and local levels. The enactment of the Mayor Regulation, the designation of inclusive ECE institutions, and the establishment of the Disability Service Unit (Unit Layanan Disabilitas/ULD) and the Assessment Center demonstrate the local government's commitment to operationalizing inclusive education policies through concrete institutional support. These findings indicate that policy implementation has progressed beyond the normative stage toward operational implementation through the provision of institutional mechanisms and educational services that support inclusive ECE.

At the institutional level, schools have developed standard operating procedures for the admission of children with special needs, assigned teachers who have received inclusive education training, and adapted instructional strategies to accommodate diverse learning needs. These initiatives reflect schools' commitment to implementing the principles of inclusive education by providing equitable educational services for all children. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of these practices

continues to depend on the availability of qualified human resources and adequate educational facilities within individual institutions. These findings are consistent with those of Yuniarni et al. (2023), who reported that kindergarten teachers in Pontianak City hold positive perceptions toward inclusive education. These positive perceptions are reflected in the implementation of admission procedures for children with special needs, the assignment of trained teachers, and the gradual provision of assessment services within ECE institutions. The present study also supports the findings of Rusli et al. (2025), who emphasized that the successful implementation of inclusive education is strongly influenced by the commitment of local governments to provide appropriate regulations, institutional support, and continuous professional development for educational institutions.

The implementation of inclusive ECE in Mempawah Regency demonstrates that the local government has established an initial policy framework through Regent Regulation Number 74 of 2023 concerning the Implementation of Inclusive Education and the Decree of the Head of the Education Office regarding the designation of Inclusive ECE Reference Schools. These policies reflect the local government's commitment to expanding educational access for children with special needs. However, policy implementation remains largely focused on regulatory and administrative aspects, as it has not yet been supported by comprehensive technical guidelines, structured mentoring systems, or systematic monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Consequently, the implementation of inclusive ECE services continues to rely heavily on the readiness and initiative of individual educational institutions, particularly those designated as reference or pilot schools.

These findings are in line with Yanti (2025), who argued that the early stages of inclusive education policy implementation are generally characterized by a normative orientation and are not adequately supported by operational guidelines. As a result, policy implementation largely depends on the readiness of individual educational institutions, leading to uneven implementation across schools. The present study also found that limited teacher competencies, inadequate educational facilities and infrastructure, and the absence of continuous mentoring and evaluation systems remain significant barriers to the implementation of inclusive ECE. These findings support the study of Mustabsyirah and Yuspiani (2025), who concluded that inclusive education tends to be implemented only partially when coordination, mentoring, and supervision systems are insufficiently developed. Similarly, Pratiningsih and Wirawan (2025) emphasized that teacher competence is a critical determinant of the quality of inclusive educational services, particularly in early childhood education settings.

The findings suggest that the implementation of inclusive ECE is determined not only by the existence of regulatory frameworks but also by the extent to which these policies are operationalized through institutional support, the readiness of human resources, and continuous mentoring and evaluation systems. From the perspective of Van Meter and Van Horn's policy implementation model, successful policy implementation is influenced by several key variables, including clear policy standards and objectives, adequate resources, communication among implementing organizations, the characteristics of implementing agencies, the dispositions of policy implementers, and the social, economic, and political environment. In the context of this study, the implementation of inclusive ECE demonstrates that stronger institutional support, greater human resource readiness, and well-established implementation mechanisms contribute to more effective policy implementation. Therefore, strengthening teacher competencies, improving the availability of inclusive educational facilities and infrastructure, developing comprehensive technical guidelines, and establishing sustainable mentoring, monitoring, and evaluation systems are essential strategies for enhancing the quality of inclusive Early Childhood Education implementation.

3.2 Government Support through the Education Office in the Implementation of Inclusive Early Childhood Education (ECE) Policies

Based on document analysis and interview findings, the Pontianak City Education Office has provided substantial support for the implementation of inclusive Early Childhood Education (ECE)

policies through the development of local regulations, institutional strengthening, budget allocation, and the gradual capacity building of educational institutions. This support has been institutionalized through the issuance of Pontianak Mayor Regulation Number 89 of 2019 concerning the Establishment of the Disability Service Unit (Unit Pelaksana Teknis Layanan Disabilitas) and Assessment Center, as well as Mayor Regulation Number 85 of 2020 concerning the Implementation of Inclusive Education. The Disability Service Unit functions as a center for assessment, consultation, mentoring, and referral services for ECE institutions enrolling children with special needs, thereby enabling schools to provide educational services that are responsive to individual learning needs.

Interview findings further revealed that the local government supports inclusive ECE through teacher training, assessment services, the provision of inclusive educational play equipment (*Alat Permainan Edukatif*—APE), and therapeutic services for ECE institutions serving children with special needs. As stated by one informant:

"We have allocated funding for teacher training and assessment services through the Disability Service Unit. However, not all ECE institutions have received regular mentoring." (Pontianak City Education Office, Interview, 2025).

In addition to teacher training and assessment services, the Education Office provides ongoing guidance to ECE institutions to facilitate the gradual implementation of inclusive education according to each institution's level of readiness. Nevertheless, the findings indicate that these support mechanisms have not yet been distributed evenly across institutions. The capacity-building of Special Assistant Teachers (*Guru Pendamping Khusus*—GPK) remains limited, intensive mentoring has not yet reached all ECE institutions, and the availability of supporting facilities varies considerably among schools. Furthermore, the existing monitoring and evaluation system primarily emphasizes administrative compliance and program implementation rather than systematically assessing the quality of instructional practices or the developmental progress of children with special needs.

The implementation of inclusive Early Childhood Education (ECE) policy in Mempawah Regency remains in the early stage of development. The local government's commitment is reflected in the enactment of Regent Regulation Number 74 of 2023 concerning the Implementation of Inclusive Education and the Decree of the Head of the Department of Education, Youth, Sports, and Tourism regarding the designation of Inclusive ECE Reference Schools. These regulations provide the initial policy framework for expanding access to early childhood education for children with special needs. Interview findings indicate that the support provided by the Education Office is currently focused on disseminating inclusive education policies to educators through professional organizations such as HIMPAUDI, IGTKI, and the Teacher Working Group (*Pusat Kegiatan Guru*—PKG). As one informant stated:

"At present, our support is mainly provided through policy dissemination to teachers via HIMPAUDI and IGTKI. We have also designated reference schools; however, we have not yet provided specialized training or regular mentoring." (Mempawah Regency Education Office, Interview, 2025).

Resource limitations were also identified as a major challenge in the development of the inclusive ECE program. As explained by another informant:

"We do not yet have a dedicated budget for inclusive ECE, nor do we have professional support personnel. Implementation in the field still depends heavily on the readiness of each institution." (Mempawah Regency Education Office, Interview, 2025).

The findings suggest that the implementation of inclusive Early Childhood Education (ECE) policy has been supported by the establishment of regulatory frameworks, institutional mechanisms, and various support programs that reflect local governments' commitment to promoting inclusive education. The development of local regulations, the establishment of the Disability Service Unit, and the provision of teacher training, assessment services, and institutional support represent important

steps toward strengthening the implementation of inclusive ECE. These findings are consistent with Rusli et al. (2025), who argued that the successful implementation of inclusive education requires clear regulatory frameworks, strong institutional leadership, and sustained technical support

Despite these positive developments, the findings further reveal that the implementation of inclusive ECE has not yet been fully supported by comprehensive operational mechanisms. At the time of this study, technical implementation guidelines, specialized teacher training programs, professional support personnel, and dedicated budget allocations for the development of inclusive facilities and infrastructure were still limited. Consequently, the implementation of inclusive services continues to depend on the capacity and readiness of individual ECE institutions. In addition, monitoring and evaluation systems have not yet been conducted in a systematic and sustainable manner. Existing evaluation indicators primarily focus on the number of children with special needs receiving educational services rather than assessing the quality of instructional practices, children's developmental outcomes, or the long-term sustainability of inclusive education programs.

These findings indicate that, although a regulatory framework for inclusive education has been established, its implementation has not yet been fully supported by operational guidelines, qualified human resources, adequate financial resources, or structured mentoring systems. This finding is consistent with Fahmi (2025), who argued that successful policy implementation depends not only on the existence of regulations but also on the availability of adequate resources, operational guidelines, and consistent monitoring mechanisms. Similarly, the findings highlight that equitable access to teacher professional development, the strengthening of Special Assistant Teachers' competencies, and the establishment of quality-oriented monitoring and evaluation systems remain essential for improving the effectiveness of inclusive education. Such efforts are necessary to ensure that inclusive education policies not only expand access to educational services but also improve the quality of learning experiences and developmental outcomes for children with special needs.

The findings demonstrate that the implementation of inclusive ECE policy has made meaningful progress in terms of regulatory and institutional development. However, further efforts are required to strengthen human resource capacity, develop comprehensive technical implementation guidelines, provide dedicated financial support, expand the availability of professional support personnel, and establish sustainable quality assurance mechanisms. These improvements are essential to ensure that the implementation of inclusive ECE becomes more effective, equitable, and sustainable.

3.3 Stakeholders' Roles in the Implementation of Inclusive Early Childhood Education Programs

⁽¹⁾The findings indicate that the implementation of the Inclusive Early Childhood Education (ECE) program in Pontianak City has been supported by relatively adequate local government policies. This support is reflected in the existence of local regulations governing inclusive education, a well-defined institutional structure, and the establishment of the Disability Service Unit (*Unit Pelaksana Teknis [UPT] Layanan Disabilitas*) and the Assessment Center, which provide assessment, mentoring, and coordination services for educational institutions implementing inclusive education. The Disability Service Unit and the Assessment Center constitute important institutional mechanisms supporting the implementation of inclusive ECE in Pontianak City. These service units provide technical assistance to schools through initial assessments of children with special needs and recommendations for instructional strategies that can be implemented by classroom teachers. According to interviews with officials from the Pontianak City Education Office, the assessment services assist schools in understanding children's individual needs and determining appropriate learning approaches.

"Schools enrolling children with special needs are usually referred to the Disability Service Unit for an initial assessment. The assessment results help schools identify each child's needs and adjust their instructional approaches accordingly." (Pontianak City Education Office, Interview, 2025).

At the institutional level, inclusive ECE providers have expanded access for children with special needs through more flexible student admission procedures. Rather than applying discriminatory selection practices, schools conduct initial identification of each child's condition to determine the types of educational support that can be provided by the institution.

School principals play a crucial role in coordinating the implementation of inclusive education within their institutions. Principals generally appoint teachers who demonstrate readiness to participate in inclusive education training and assign them responsibility for supporting children with special needs throughout the learning process.

Teachers involved in inclusive ECE services also conduct initial assessments as the basis for planning instructional activities. These assessments are typically carried out through observations of children's social interaction, participation in classroom learning activities, communication skills, and motor development.

"We usually begin by observing the child's abilities, such as how they interact with classmates and whether they can participate in classroom play and learning activities. Based on these observations, we adapt the learning activities so that the child can continue learning alongside their peers." (Inclusive ECE Teacher, Interview, 2025).

In classroom practice, teachers adapt learning activities to accommodate the individual abilities of each child. These adaptations include simplifying learning tasks, utilizing appropriate educational play materials, and providing greater flexibility in learning time for children with special needs. The development of the inclusive ECE program in Pontianak City is also reflected in the increasing awareness and participation of the community in enrolling children with special needs in formal ECE institutions. Parents have shown greater confidence in ECE institutions' ability to provide appropriate educational services for their children, indicating a positive shift in public perceptions of inclusive education.

Furthermore, local government support is demonstrated through teacher capacity-building initiatives, including technical guidance (*Bimbingan Teknis* [BIMTEK]) on inclusive education and workshops for Special Assistant Teachers (*Guru Pendamping Khusus* [GPK]). These activities are designed to enhance teachers' understanding of inclusive education principles, the identification of children's special educational needs, and the implementation of adaptive instructional strategies. The Education Office also supports inclusive education through budget allocations for inclusive education programs. This support includes the provision of educational resources, such as inclusive educational play equipment (*Alat Permainan Edukatif* [APE]), as well as periodic therapy services for children with special needs.

The findings also reveal several challenges in the implementation of the inclusive ECE program in Pontianak City. The availability of human resources with specialized competencies in inclusive education remains limited, particularly at the early childhood education level. Most ECE teachers have not received formal educational training in supporting children with special needs. In addition, no specific incentives are currently provided for teachers who serve as Special Assistant Teachers in inclusive education settings. As a result, teachers are required to assume additional responsibilities without receiving adequate recognition or compensation.

In terms of facilities and infrastructure, not all ECE institutions have environments that are fully accessible and responsive to the needs of children with special needs. Several institutions continue to face limitations in providing adequate learning spaces, specialized service rooms, and educational play equipment specifically designed to support inclusive learning. Monitoring and evaluation of the inclusive ECE program have been conducted by the Education Office through reporting mechanisms and supervision by school inspectors. However, the evaluation process remains largely focused on administrative compliance and program implementation. Consequently, it has not yet comprehensively assessed the quality of instructional practices or the developmental progress of children with special needs.

The findings indicate that the implementation of the Inclusive Early Childhood Education (ECE) program in Mempawah Regency remains at an early stage of development. The local government has demonstrated its commitment through the enactment of local regulations on the implementation of inclusive education and the designation of several ECE institutions as Inclusive ECE Reference Schools. Nevertheless, the implementation of these policies at the institutional level remains gradual and has not yet been fully integrated into the regional early childhood education system. According to interviews with officials from the Mempawah Regency Education Office, current government support is primarily focused on disseminating inclusive education policies to teachers and ECE institutions.

"At present, we are still conducting policy dissemination activities for ECE teachers through professional organizations such as HIMPAUDI and IGTKI to improve their understanding of inclusive education. The implementation is still gradual because not all schools are ready." (Mempawah Regency Education Office, Interview, 2025).

At the institutional level, several ECE providers have begun enrolling children with special needs, although the educational services provided continue to depend on each institution's capacity. Teachers generally conduct initial observations of children's conditions before determining appropriate instructional approaches. However, limited teacher competence remains one of the major challenges in implementing inclusive ECE in Mempawah Regency. Most ECE teachers have not received specialized training in inclusive education, resulting in limited knowledge of the characteristics of children with special needs and the application of adaptive instructional strategies.

"We admit children with special needs, but we have never received specialized training in inclusive education. Teachers usually learn independently or exchange experiences with their colleagues." (ECE Teacher, Mempawah Regency, Interview, 2025).

Furthermore, professional support personnel, including Special Assistant Teachers (*Guru Pendamping Khusus* [GPK]), psychologists, and therapists, are not yet available in sufficient numbers. In many cases, classroom teachers are responsible for supporting children with special needs without assistance from qualified professionals.

"We do not yet have Special Assistant Teachers. Classroom teachers are responsible for directly supporting children with special needs during learning activities." (ECE Principal, Mempawah Regency, Interview, 2025).

From the perspective of facilities and infrastructure, most ECE institutions in Mempawah Regency have not yet developed learning environments specifically designed to support inclusive education. Facilities such as specialized service rooms, adaptive learning resources, and educational play equipment designed for children with special needs remain highly limited. Monitoring and evaluation of inclusive ECE implementation have also not yet been conducted specifically by the Education Office. Current evaluation practices focus primarily on the overall implementation of ECE programs and do not specifically assess the progress or quality of inclusive education implementation at the institutional level.

The implementation of Inclusive Early Childhood Education (ECE) has demonstrated considerable progress in expanding educational access for children with special needs through the strengthening of policies, institutional capacity, and instructional practices at the institutional level. The implementation of inclusive education in early childhood settings has gradually shifted from a predominantly normative policy approach toward a more operational stage of implementation. Within the context of educational policy, local regulations provide an essential foundation for promoting the implementation of inclusive education. Nevertheless, successful policy implementation depends not only on the existence of regulatory frameworks but also on the readiness of human resources, institutional support, the availability of adequate facilities and infrastructure, and the capacity of educational institutions to

translate policy into adaptive and responsive instructional practices that address the diverse needs of learners.

Institutional strengthening through the establishment of specialized service units and the designation of Inclusive ECE Reference Schools reflects the local government's commitment to developing a more structured inclusive education service system. The Regional Technical Implementation Unit (*Unit Pelaksana Teknis Daerah* [UPTD]) for Disability Services and the Assessment Center (LDAC) provide initial assessment services, mentoring, consultation, and educational recommendations for children with special needs. Likewise, the designation of Inclusive ECE Reference Schools represents an important step toward expanding educational access for children with special needs at the early childhood education level. These institutional arrangements demonstrate that effective implementation of inclusive education requires a support system capable of bridging educational policies with the practical needs encountered in schools. This finding is supported by Helmawati et al. (2025), who argued that inclusive education can be implemented more effectively when supported by an integrated service system involving government agencies, educational institutions, professional support personnel, and the wider community. Such an integrated system facilitates better coordination in identifying children's educational needs, planning instructional programs, and providing interventions that are appropriate to children's developmental conditions (Rozi & Fuadiy, 2025).

At the institutional level, policy implementation is reflected in the admission of children with special needs, the conduct of initial assessments, and the adaptation of instructional strategies to accommodate individual learners' abilities and educational needs. School principals play a central role in coordinating inclusive education by assigning teachers to participate in inclusive education training and to support children with special needs throughout the learning process. Teachers conduct initial assessments by observing children's communication skills, social interactions, and motor development, which serve as the basis for designing adaptive learning activities. These practices indicate a shift in educational paradigms in which learner diversity is increasingly recognized as a natural component of the learning process rather than as a barrier to education. This finding is consistent with the principles of inclusive education, which view diversity as a strength that enriches the educational process (Nur et al., 2025).

Teacher capacity development also constitutes a fundamental component of inclusive education implementation. Various professional development initiatives, including workshops, technical guidance (*Bimbingan Teknis* [Bimtek]), and policy dissemination activities, have been conducted to enhance teachers' understanding of the characteristics of children with special needs, assessment procedures, and adaptive instructional strategies. Capacity-building workshops for Special Assistant Teachers (*Guru Pendamping Khusus* [GPK]) and technical guidance programs for Inclusive Schools further demonstrate the local government's commitment to strengthening the competencies of educational personnel involved in inclusive education. As teachers are the primary actors responsible for implementing educational policies at the school level, enhancing their professional competence is a prerequisite for successful inclusive education. Hidayat et al. (2025) emphasized that without adequate pedagogical competence, inclusive education policies are likely to remain administrative initiatives that are difficult to implement effectively in classroom practice.

Despite these developments, the findings indicate that the implementation of Inclusive ECE continues to face several challenges. Teacher professional development programs have not yet reached all ECE institutions, resulting in disparities in teachers' understanding of the characteristics of children with special needs and their ability to implement adaptive instructional strategies. In several institutions, teachers have not received specialized training in inclusive education and continue to develop their competencies independently through teaching experience and professional discussions with colleagues. Consequently, the quality of educational services provided to children with special needs varies across institutions. This finding is consistent with Utfa and Harsiwi (2025), who identified limited teacher competence in designing differentiated instruction as one of the primary challenges in

implementing inclusive education in early childhood settings. Similarly, Khuru'Aini and Setiyatna (2025) argued that inadequate pedagogical competence in understanding the characteristics of children with special needs remains a significant barrier to the development of inclusive education.

Beyond teacher competence, the limited availability of professional support personnel also presents a significant challenge. The number of Special Assistant Teachers (GPK), psychologists, therapists, and other specialized professionals remains insufficient to meet the needs of all ECE institutions. Consequently, classroom teachers are frequently required to support children with special needs without assistance from qualified specialists. This challenge is further compounded by the absence of specific incentives for teachers who assume additional responsibilities as Special Assistant Teachers. According to Muzakki and Indriani (2025), increased workloads that are not accompanied by appropriate professional recognition may reduce teachers' motivation and ultimately affect the quality of inclusive education services.

The implementation of inclusive education also faces challenges related to facilities and infrastructure. Many ECE institutions have not yet established learning environments that are fully accessible and responsive to the needs of children with special needs. Limitations include the availability of specialized service rooms, adaptive learning resources, and educational play equipment specifically designed to support inclusive learning. These findings suggest that the success of inclusive education depends not only on providing access for children with special needs but also on the readiness of learning environments to facilitate meaningful participation and effective learning. This finding is consistent with Fajar Mudayanti and Faridhoh Sasmito (2025), who emphasized that adaptive learning environments are a key factor in supporting successful inclusive education.

From the perspective of coordination and partnerships, the implementation of Inclusive ECE indicates that local governments continue to play a central role in program development through the formulation of regulations, policy dissemination, assessment services, and guidance for educational institutions. However, stronger collaboration among parents, communities, healthcare professionals, psychologists, professional organizations, and social service agencies remains necessary to establish a more comprehensive and sustainable inclusive education support system. Wiya et al. (2025) demonstrated that the success of inclusive education is strongly influenced by community support and the active involvement of multiple stakeholders throughout the educational process.

Regarding monitoring and evaluation, the findings indicate that current mechanisms remain largely focused on administrative compliance and program implementation. Evaluation indicators primarily measure the number of children with special needs receiving educational services, whereas the quality of instructional practices, children's developmental outcomes, the effectiveness of instructional strategies, and program sustainability have not yet become primary components of the evaluation framework. These findings highlight the need to develop quality-oriented monitoring and evaluation systems capable of providing comprehensive evidence regarding the effectiveness of inclusive education implementation. In this regard, A. M. Putri et al. (2025) argued that the evaluation of inclusive education should extend beyond administrative compliance to include comprehensive assessments of educational service quality and their impact on children's developmental outcomes.

4. CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the implementation of Inclusive Early Childhood Education (ECE) policies and programs in Pontianak City and Mempawah Regency has developed unevenly, influenced by regulatory readiness, institutional support, and resource capacity. Pontianak City demonstrates stronger policy frameworks and institutional structures, resulting in more systematic implementation, while Mempawah Regency remains at an early stage with uneven practices dependent on individual institutional initiatives. Key challenges include limited teacher competencies, inadequate professional support, insufficient accessible facilities, and administratively oriented monitoring and evaluation systems, preventing inclusive ECE from being fully integrated into holistic learning practices. The study contributes theoretically and empirically by emphasizing the importance of alignment among

regulatory frameworks, institutional capacity, and resource support in local-level inclusive education policy implementation. Practically, local governments should strengthen operational regulations, strategic planning, and sustainable budgeting, while Education Offices need to enhance teacher training and mentoring, provide multidisciplinary professional support, and develop quality-oriented monitoring systems focused on child development outcomes. As this research is limited to two regions and employs a qualitative approach, the findings are not intended for broad generalization; future studies are recommended to adopt longitudinal, broader comparative, or mixed-method designs to deepen understanding of inclusive ECE implementation and its developmental impact.

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