

# Transformational Leadership for Inclusive Education: Principal Strategies in Building Child-Friendly School Cultures

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## Keywords:

Inclusive Education, Child-Friendly School, Principal Leadership, Differentiated Instruction, Teacher Professional Development

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## Abstract

Inclusive education and child-friendly schooling are crucial components of quality primary education, yet implementing these practices effectively remains challenging, particularly in managing diverse learners with varying abilities. This qualitative descriptive study examines the principal's role in leading inclusive education programs at SDN Sawah Besar 01, Semarang. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with the principal, two teachers, one parent, and one student, complemented by classroom observations and document analysis conducted in October 2025. Triangulation of these multiple sources ensured the credibility and comprehensiveness of the findings. The study found that the principal implemented transformational and participatory leadership in managing inclusive education through planning, organizing, implementing, and controlling functions. Key strategies included integrating inclusivity into the school vision, fostering collaboration with teachers and parents, and applying differentiated instruction. These efforts contributed to increased student participation, positive peer interactions, and a supportive learning environment. However, limited facilities, assistive devices, and the absence of a special education teacher remain significant challenges. This study contributes to the literature on educational leadership in Indonesia by demonstrating that the principal's moral and participatory leadership is pivotal in creating a truly inclusive and child-friendly primary school environment.

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## Abstrak

Pendidikan inklusif dan sekolah ramah anak merupakan komponen penting dari pendidikan dasar berkualitas, namun implementasi efektif praktik-praktik ini masih menantang, terutama dalam mengelola siswa dengan kemampuan yang beragam. Studi deskriptif kualitatif ini mengeksplorasi peran kepala sekolah dalam memimpin program pendidikan inklusif di SDN Sawah Besar 01, Semarang. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan kepala sekolah, dua guru, satu orang tua, dan satu siswa, dilengkapi dengan pengamatan kelas dan analisis dokumen yang dilakukan pada Oktober 2025. Triangulasi sumber-sumber ini memastikan kredibilitas dan kelengkapan temuan. Studi menemukan bahwa kepala sekolah menerapkan kepemimpinan transformasional dan partisipatif dalam mengelola pendidikan inklusif melalui fungsi perencanaan, pengorganisasian, pelaksanaan, dan pengendalian. Strategi utama meliputi integrasi inklusivitas ke dalam visi sekolah, mendorong kolaborasi dengan guru dan orang tua, serta menerapkan pengajaran yang dibedakan. Upaya ini berkontribusi pada peningkatan partisipasi siswa, interaksi positif antar teman sebaya, dan lingkungan belajar yang mendukung. Namun, fasilitas yang terbatas, kurangnya alat bantu, dan ketidakhadiran guru pendidikan khusus tetap menjadi tantangan yang signifikan. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi terhadap literatur tentang kepemimpinan pendidikan di Indonesia dengan menunjukkan bahwa kepemimpinan moral dan partisipatif kepala sekolah sangat penting dalam menciptakan lingkungan sekolah dasar yang benar-benar inklusif dan ramah anak.

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## Kata kunci:

Pendidikan Inklusif, Sekolah Ramah Anak, Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah, Pengajaran Berdiferensiasi, Pengembangan Profesional Guru

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## INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education represents a transformative approach that upholds every child's right to receive meaningful, equitable, and quality education without discrimination (Aziz et al., 2025; Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013; Jardinez & Natividad, 2024; M. Holili et al., 2025). (Apologia et al., 2024; Aziz et al., 2025; Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013; Jardinez & Natividad, 2024; Sunardianta et al., 2024; Vebrianto et al., 2025) Complementing these legal foundations, the Ministerial Regulation No. 70 of 2009 provides operational guidelines for inclusive education, while the Ministerial Regulation of the Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection No. 8 of 2014 promotes the concept of Child-Friendly Schools (Sekolah Ramah Anak, SRA). Both frameworks emphasize the importance of a learning environment that protects children from all forms of violence and discrimination, ensuring their participation and well-being (M. Holili et al., 2025). Within this framework, the principal holds a pivotal managerial role in ensuring that inclusive and child-friendly education policies are effectively implemented. Similarly, (Bush & Clark, 2020) argue that inclusive leadership requires principals to act as agents of change who bridge policy and practice, promoting justice and participation among all school stakeholders.

Several studies have highlighted persistent challenges in the implementation of inclusive education at the elementary level. (Munajah et al., 2021; Tanzi & Hermanto, 2024) found that many principals lack comprehensive managerial understanding in inclusive settings, resulting in weak coordination between regular teachers and special education assistants. This is supported (Rismita et al., 2024), who reported that limited resources and a shortage of special assistant teachers remain significant obstacles, even when principals attempt to coordinate inclusive programs through instructional and team-building leadership. At the national level, similar constraints persist in Indonesian primary schools, where inclusive education policies are not always matched with adequate managerial capacity. Principals often face difficulties in translating policy mandates into daily instructional practices, particularly when dealing with coordination gaps, limited resource allocation, and reactive rather than reflective supervision. Globally, these challenges align with broader findings showing that inclusive education continues to encounter uneven implementation, with schools struggling to provide differentiated curricula, adaptive teaching methods, and supportive infrastructure (Amka, 2019; Hendayati et al., 2025; Adzkiya, 2018) (Enes et al., 2024). In addition, shortages of trained special education mentors, limited teacher expertise in inclusive pedagogy, and community misconceptions remain major obstacles across primary and early childhood settings (Latif & Paramita, 2023; Sari et al., 2025) (Ahwan & Karfida, 2025; Jensen & Thomsen, 2024).

The case of SDN Sawah Besar 01, Semarang, reflects these national challenges in a local context. Although the school has adopted inclusive education and promotes itself as a child-friendly school, internal evaluations reveal several managerial gaps. The planning of inclusive programs is not yet fully data-driven; coordination between regular teachers and special education facilitators remains inconsistent; and monitoring activities tend to be reactive rather than reflective. Moreover, indicators of multicultural and inclusive values, such as respect for diversity, have shown a decline, suggesting that the school's inclusive culture is not yet deeply internalized.

These conditions position the principal as a key actor in leading systemic improvement. Effective leadership is required not only to coordinate human resources but also to inspire collective responsibility for inclusion. Based on these realities, this

study aims to analyze the role of the principal in managing the implementation of inclusive education at SDN Sawah Besar 01 toward the realization of a child-friendly school environment. Specifically, it explores how the principal performs managerial functions planning, organizing, implementing, and controlling within the framework of inclusive and child-friendly education. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically to the discourse on inclusive school leadership and practically to the development of strategies that promote equity, participation, and protection for all learners.

Despite strong policy commitments to inclusive education, its implementation at the elementary level continues to face persistent challenges. Previous studies consistently indicate that school principals often encounter difficulties in managing inclusive settings, particularly in coordinating regular teachers and special education support, as well as in addressing limitations related to resources and the availability of special assistant teachers (Munajah et al., 2021; Rismita et al., 2024; Tanzi & Hermanto, 2024). These challenges underscore the importance of strengthening principals' managerial and instructional leadership competencies to foster inclusive school cultures that genuinely support diversity.

At the national level, similar constraints are evident in Indonesian primary schools, where inclusive education policies are not always accompanied by adequate managerial capacity at the school level. Principals are required not only to administer inclusive programs but also to translate policy mandates into daily instructional practices and collaborative school routines. However, gaps in planning, coordination, and reflective supervision often limit the effectiveness of inclusive initiatives.

These national challenges are reflected in the local context of SDN Sawah Besar 01, Semarang. Although the school has formally adopted inclusive education and promotes itself as a child-friendly school, internal observations reveal several managerial shortcomings. Inclusive program planning has not been fully data-driven, coordination among teachers remains inconsistent, and monitoring practices tend to be reactive rather than reflective. Moreover, indicators of inclusive and multicultural values, such as mutual respect and acceptance of diversity, suggest that inclusive principles have not yet been fully internalized within the school culture.

Under these conditions, the principal emerges as a key agent of change in leading systemic improvement. Effective leadership is required not only to manage human resources but also to cultivate shared responsibility for inclusion among teachers, parents, and students. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the role of the principal in managing the implementation of inclusive education at SDN Sawah Besar 01 through the performance of managerial functions—planning, organizing, implementing, and controlling within the framework of inclusive and child-friendly education. The findings are expected to contribute both theoretically to the discourse on inclusive school leadership and practically to the development of strategies that promote equity, participation, and protection for all learners.

Globally, inclusive education is recognized as a fundamental human right, as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all by 2030 (UNESCO, 2020). In Indonesia, this aligns with the National Education System Law No. 20 of 2003, which mandates education for all citizens, including those with disabilities, and the Government Regulation No. 13 of 2020 on reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities (Indonesia, 2020; Indonesia, 2003). Despite these commitments,

implementation at the grassroots level remains uneven, with elementary schools often facing resource constraints, inadequate teacher training, and societal stigma that hinder full inclusion (Amka, 2019; Hendayati et al., 2025). Indeed, research in public primary schools has found persistent gaps in infrastructure, teacher preparedness, and stigma toward disability (Adzkiya, 2018). Moreover, constraints such as a shortage of special education mentors, limited teacher knowledge about inclusive pedagogy, and school environment issues remain major obstacles at the primary level (Latif & Paramita, 2023). Even in early childhood settings, problems like lack of trained staff, limited policy dissemination, and community support continue to hinder effective inclusion (Sari et al., 2025). For instance, studies indicate that only a fraction of schools in Indonesia have fully integrated inclusive practices, leading to disparities in educational outcomes for children with special needs (Ekowati, 2023; Putri & Akmal, 2019).

Although substantial research has addressed the challenges of inclusive education, gaps remain in understanding how principals operationalize managerial and instructional leadership within integrated policy frameworks. Previous studies have tended to examine inclusive education or child-friendly school policies separately, leaving limited insights into how both are implemented simultaneously at the school level. Furthermore, research has not sufficiently explored how principals apply the full range of managerial functions—planning, organizing, implementing, and controlling (POAC)—to address coordination issues, resource constraints, and the internalization of inclusive values. These gaps show the need for studies that analyze principal leadership more comprehensively, especially within school contexts where inclusive practices have been adopted but not yet fully embedded in daily culture. In urban settings experiencing increasing student diversity, such as those described in Indonesia's rapidly developing regions, these gaps become even more critical and highlight the need for leadership approaches that bridge policy ideals with practical realities.

This article examines the principal's role in managing the implementation of inclusive education within the framework of a child-friendly school. Specifically, it analyzes how the principal performs managerial functions planning, organizing, implementing, and controlling to translate inclusive and child-friendly education policies into effective school practices. The study adopts a qualitative case analysis to provide an integrated understanding of how POAC-based leadership supports the development of equitable, participatory, and protective learning environments. The novelty of this research lies in its dual-focus framework, which combines inclusive education and child-friendly school policies, an approach that remains underexplored in previous studies on Indonesian primary schools. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically to discussions on inclusive school leadership and practically to strategies that strengthen equity, participation, and well-being for all learners.

## **METHOD**

A qualitative design was chosen because it allows for an in-depth understanding of human experiences, meanings, and school management practices in their natural context (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). The intrinsic case study model was used since the school presents unique contextual characteristics and challenges in developing inclusive and child-friendly education (Harland, 2014) Thus, this design enabled a deep exploration of how the principal's leadership, organizational culture, and managerial strategies contribute to the sustainability of inclusive practices

(Leithwood et al., 2008). SDN Sawah Besar 01 was selected purposively as it operates simultaneously as an inclusive school and a child-friendly school, presenting unique contextual characteristics that align with the research focus. The research was carried out from June to October 2025, including preparation, data collection, analysis, and reporting. This approach enabled an in-depth examination of how the principal's managerial functions planning, organizing, implementing, and controlling were translated into inclusive and child-friendly educational practices.

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, observations, and document reviews. Participants were purposively chosen for their ability to provide rich information regarding inclusive school practices, consisting of the principal, teachers, special education teachers, parents, and students. Interviews explored leadership directions, instructional coordination, and school support systems. Classroom and school observations were conducted to examine learning interactions, adaptive teaching strategies, and school culture that support inclusivity and protection. Document analysis involved reviewing school policies, program reports, meeting records, and other materials related to inclusive and child-friendly initiatives. All instruments including interview guides, observation checklists, and document review sheets were validated through expert judgment to ensure credibility and field relevance.

Data analysis followed the interactive model, beginning with data condensation through organizing and categorizing interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents into meaningful thematic units. The data were then displayed in narrative descriptions and matrices to identify emerging patterns related to the principal's leadership and school inclusivity. Conclusions were drawn through triangulation of sources and methods, complemented by member checking to confirm the accuracy of interpretations. Trustworthiness was further strengthened through peer debriefing, audit trails, and adherence to qualitative verification standards, ensuring credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the findings. Ethical procedures were fulfilled by obtaining consent and ensuring confidentiality for all participants.

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## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Result

This study aims to explore the role of the principal in managing inclusive education programs at SDN Sawah Besar 01, Semarang. The qualitative descriptive approach was employed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the principal's managerial functions namely planning, organizing, implementing, and controlling in fostering an inclusive and child-friendly school environment. At the time of the study, SDN Sawah Besar 01 served a total of 28 students, including 5 students with special needs, providing contextual background for interpreting the implementation of inclusive education practices.

The data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with two teachers (AB, L and RS), one parent (EI), and one student (SAT), conducted in October 2025. One teacher stated,

*"While I was teaching in an inclusive class, I did need a lot of adaptation... the strategies I used included modifying the material, using visuals, and frequently discussing it with parents."*

Another teacher added,

*"There are students who have to sit in the front because they're easily distracted. I have to create different lesson plans to accommodate their abilities."*

A parent emphasized,

*"I frequently communicate with teachers and the principal about my child's development, both academically and socially."*

These triangulated perspectives strengthened the validity of the findings, allowing for a more holistic picture of inclusive practices at the school.

Results revealed that the principal plays a transformative, facilitative, and participatory leadership role, emphasizing collaboration, empathy, and inclusive culture-building. While significant progress has been achieved in teacher training, differentiated instruction, and community involvement, challenges remain in facilities, special needs support, and curriculum adaptation.

### The Principal's Role in Planning Inclusive Education Programs

Planning forms the foundation of effective inclusive education management. At SDN Sawah Besar 01, the principal demonstrates a participatory planning approach involving teachers, parents, and local education stakeholders.

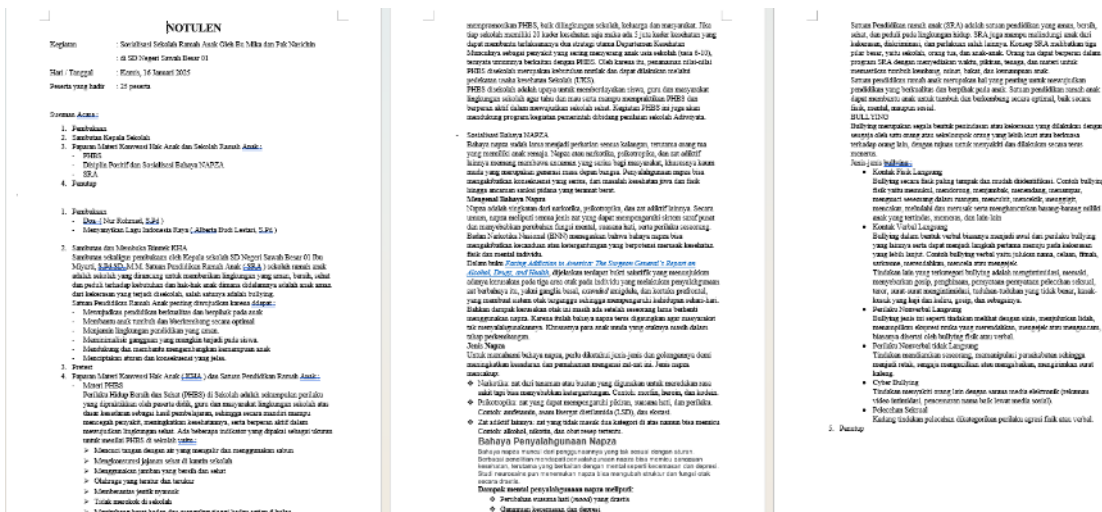
Teachers reported that they had attended several training sessions initiated by the principal, such as Child-Friendly School and Anti-Bullying workshops and Convention on the Rights of the Child seminars. These training sessions, often conducted in collaboration with the Education Office of Semarang City and the Rumah Duta Revolusi Mental (RDRM), equipped teachers with a deeper understanding of inclusive principles and child protection frameworks.

Teacher RS noted: *"The training helped us understand the basic concepts of inclusion, differentiated learning strategies, and how to provide appropriate services for students with special needs."*

This finding indicates that the principal not only plans for structural compliance with national inclusion policies but also integrates human values and rights-based education principles into the school's vision. The principal's approach at SDN Sawah Besar 01 exemplifies this, as inclusivity becomes embedded in both the School Work Plan (RKS) and Annual Activity Plan (RKT). One teacher explained, *"While I was*

*teaching in an inclusive class, I did need to adapt a lot... the strategies I used included modifying the material and using visuals."*

This reflective statement illustrates how planning translates into concrete classroom adjustments. The principal's planning approach ensures that inclusivity becomes embedded in both the School Work Plan (RKS) and Annual Activity Plan (RKT), as supported by meeting documentation and planning notes recorded in the school's internal coordination records.



**Figure 1.** Minutes of socialization activities with parents and stakeholders

However, planning still faces constraints in the area of resource allocation, particularly regarding the provision of assistive devices and the recruitment of special education support teachers (GPK). The principal continues to advocate for these resources from local authorities and community partners.

### The Principal's Role in Organizing Inclusive Education Programs

The organizing function reflects how the principal structures human resources, materials, and collaboration networks to ensure effective implementation. Findings show that the principal fosters collaborative team-based management, involving classroom teachers, parents, and educational psychologists in supporting children with special needs (ABK). Teacher Alberta Budi Lestari highlighted that she works closely with parents and other teachers to adapt teaching strategies:

*"I modify materials and provide visual aids. I also coordinate with parents and other teachers to make sure the strategies fit the students' abilities."*

Another teacher emphasized the importance of this collaboration, stating,

*"I coordinate with parents to ensure strategies are tailored to their child's abilities."*

Organizationally, the principal has established an inclusive education team responsible for identifying student needs, monitoring progress, and maintaining communication with external agencies. This organizational effort is supported by documentary evidence, as seen in the school's activity documentation dated 4 February 2025, which shows teachers collaborating with parents during school coordination activities related to inclusive services.



**Figure 2.** Child-friendly school declaration

This structure aligns with the inclusive education management model proposed, emphasizing distributed leadership and participatory decision-making.

Despite these positive efforts, the school still lacks a full-time special needs educator (GPK), resulting in teachers taking on dual roles. This situation requires teachers to possess advanced pedagogical adaptability, as noted [7], who argue that digital and inclusive school leadership must balance administrative duties with empathetic engagement}

### **The Principal's Role in Implementing Inclusive Education Programs**

Implementation is where the school's inclusive philosophy becomes tangible in classroom practices. At SDN Sawah Besar 01, the principal's leadership encourages teachers to adopt differentiated instruction and flexible learning methods that accommodate the diverse needs of students. Both interviewed teachers confirmed that they routinely modify curriculum content and employ varied learning media. RS explained:

"For students with special needs, I simplify learning objectives and use more visual and practical activities."

In practice, another teacher added,

*"There are students who have to sit in the front because they're easily distracted. I have to create different lesson plans to accommodate their abilities."*

These teaching practices embody the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which emphasizes multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression. Further supports these findings, showing classroom activities where teachers provide individualized support, use visual learning tools, and adjust seating arrangements to help students with concentration difficulties.



Figure 3. Signatory of the child-friendly school declaration

This visual evidence illustrates how differentiated strategies are applied consistently in daily learning routines.

In addition, the principal promotes a culture of empathy and collaboration among students. Teacher Alberta noted that social interaction between students with and without special needs has become more natural through group work and guided peer activities. Student S's testimony illustrates the outcome of these practices: *"We study together, there's no difference. Everyone is treated fairly. I like it when we play sports together."*

### **The Principal's Role in Controlling Inclusive Education Programs**

Control in inclusive education refers not only to supervision but also to reflective evaluation and continuous improvement. The principal at SDN Sawah Besar 01 applies supervisory visits, class observations, and feedback sessions as tools to ensure the inclusivity of learning processes. Parents play a key role in this monitoring process.

As one parent explained,

*"I often communicate and discuss with teachers and the principal about my child's development, both academically and socially."*

Parents play a key role in this monitoring process. As stated by parent respondent EI:

*"I often communicate and discuss with teachers and the principal about my child's progress, both academic and social. This helps us coordinate better."*

This statement reflects collaborative accountability, where monitoring is not top-down but shared among all educational partners. The principal's control function emphasizes motivation, moral support, and participative reflection rather than mere administrative compliance. However, the monitoring process still lacks systematic documentation tools, which limits data-driven decision-making. The study recommends developing inclusive progress portfolios and digital supervision logs to strengthen future evaluations.

The findings reveal a cohesive but evolving inclusive education management model characterized by four interrelated roles of the principal planner, organizer, implementer, and controller all centered on empathy, collaboration, and continuous development.

Below is a visual representation summarizing these relationships:

The Principal's Managerial Roles in Inclusive Education

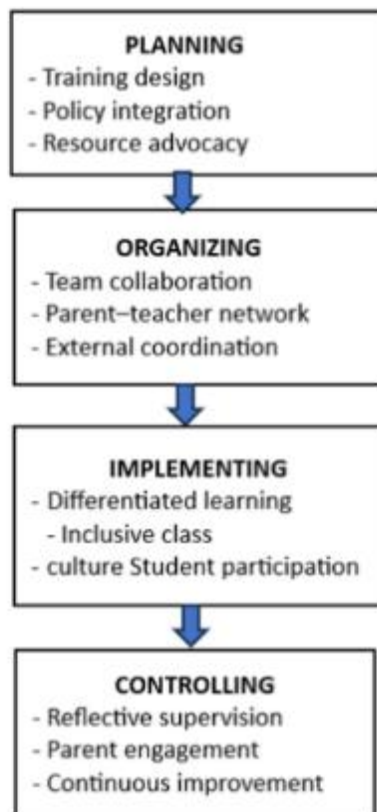


Figure 4: The Principal's Managerial Roles in Inclusive Education

This framework demonstrates that inclusive leadership at SDN Sawah Besar 01 is multidimensional, involving policy implementation, human relations, and ethical stewardship. The results align with (Dardiri et al., 2017), who emphasizes that teacher professionalism and leadership synergy are critical in sustaining inclusive educational transformation.

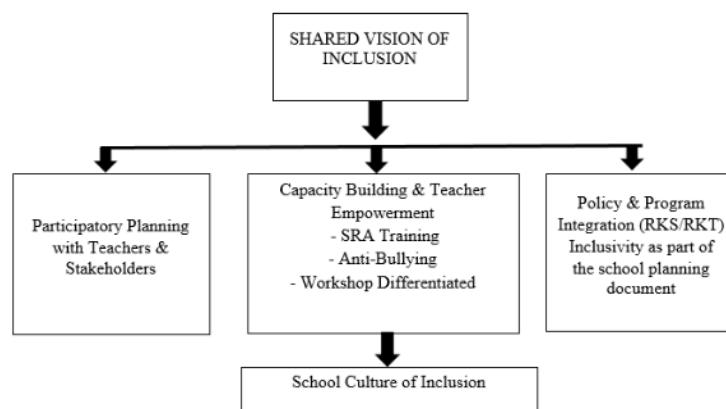
## DISCUSSION

The research findings presented in Chapter IV, connecting them to the theoretical foundations of educational leadership, inclusive education, and child-friendly schooling. The discussion highlights how the principal of SDN Sawah Besar 01 fulfills managerial roles planning, organizing, implementing, and controlling in accordance with inclusive and participatory values.

The principal's leadership practices demonstrate that inclusive education management is not merely administrative; it represents a moral and pedagogical commitment to uphold the rights and dignity of every child.

### The Principal's Role in Planning: Building a Shared Vision of Inclusion

Planning is the strategic entry point of inclusive education. The findings reveal that the principal engages teachers and stakeholders in participatory planning processes, integrating inclusivity into the school's strategic documents (RKS and RKT).



**Figure 5.** Diagram of the Principal's Role in Inclusive Education Planning

This approach reflects the transformational leadership model, where vision-building and capacity development become key. By initiating teacher training such as Sekolah Ramah Anak (Child-Friendly School) and Anti-Bullying programs, the principal ensures that inclusion is not only policy-based but also culture-based.

Planning Component	Key Findings	Impact on the School
Teacher & Stakeholder Participation	Active involvement in the development of RKS/RKT	The vision of inclusion becomes a shared commitment
Capacity-Building Programs	Training on Child-Friendly School (SRA), Anti-Bullying, and pedagogical workshops	Teachers are better prepared to address student diversity
Integration into Official Documents	Inclusivity is incorporated into strategic school planning	Program sustainability is more assured
Resource Limitations	Limited assistive technology (AT), absence of special needs educators	Planning is not yet fully optimized

**Table 6.** Components of Inclusive Planning by the Principal

The data from teachers confirm that the principal successfully creates an enabling environment where planning is dynamic and inclusive. However, limitations in resource availability (e.g., absence of assistive technologies and lack of special needs educators) indicate that planning is still constrained by systemic support.

**Organizing: Structuring Collaboration and Shared Responsibility**

The organizational structure established by the principal at SDN Sawah Besar 01 exemplifies collaborative leadership. Teachers, parents, and external specialists form a supportive ecosystem for learners with special needs. Teacher testimonies illustrate this cooperation. Both teachers reported active coordination with parents and colleagues to modify instructional materials and ensure equitable participation. This indicates that organizing functions extend beyond administrative hierarchies it encompasses building trust and mutual respect.

This pattern resonates with distributed leadership theory, where authority is shared to enhance the collective efficacy of school actors. The principal’s decision to establish an inclusive education team further illustrates how leadership decentralization supports shared accountability. Nevertheless, organizational challenges persist, particularly the absence of Special Education Teachers (GPK). This

gap forces classroom teachers to assume multiple roles, which could compromise the quality of individualized instruction.

### **Implementing: Transforming Vision into Classroom Practice**

The implementation phase marks the translation of inclusive policies into real classroom experiences. The study shows that the principal of SDN Sawah Besar 01 promotes pedagogical differentiation and flexible learning practices, enabling students with different needs to learn together harmoniously.

Teachers use simplified materials, visual aids, and multi-sensory activities strategies consistent with the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework, which advocates for multiple means of engagement and representation. The principal's encouragement of reflective discussions among teachers further strengthens collective learning and professional growth.

The testimonies of both teachers and students underscore the creation of an inclusive classroom culture. Student Samuel's remarks that "everyone is treated fairly" signify that inclusion has become normalized in peer interactions. This reflects the principal's success in cultivating a climate of empathy and respect, which corresponds with the Child-Friendly School (SRA) standards promoted by the Indonesian Ministry of Education.

In theoretical alignment, The case of SDN Sawah Besar 01 demonstrates these dimensions coherently teachers are empowered, students feel accepted, and parents actively participate. Furthermore, the principal's role in implementation extends to fostering a supportive school culture that integrates inclusive values into extracurricular activities, such as inclusive sports and arts programs, which help build social skills and reduce stigma among students (Samsari et al., 2024). This holistic approach not only addresses academic needs but also promotes emotional and social development, aligning with UNESCO's guidelines on inclusive education that emphasize the importance of whole-school environments (Kenny et al., 2023).

Challenges in implementation, however, persist, particularly in adapting curricula for students with diverse abilities. Teachers often face time constraints in differentiating lessons, and without sufficient assistive technologies, some students may not fully benefit from inclusive practices. The principal mitigates this by facilitating peer mentoring programs, where advanced students assist their peers, thereby distributing the workload and enhancing collaborative learning (Fiftiyansyah & Ali, 2024; Kartini & Putra, 2024; Tihabsah et al., 2024). This strategy not only improves implementation efficiency but also instills a sense of community and mutual support, reinforcing the school's commitment to equity (Kiruthiga & Nithya, 2026).

Overall, the principal's implementation efforts demonstrate a balance between policy adherence and adaptive innovation, ensuring that inclusive education is not just a mandate but a lived experience that empowers all students to thrive. This transformative vision, when effectively implemented, sets a precedent for other schools striving to create child-friendly environments that prioritize dignity, participation, and well-being for every learner.

### **Controlling: Ensuring Sustainability through Reflective Supervision**

The principal's control function is characterized by participatory supervision and reflective evaluation. Regular observations, discussions, and parent-teacher meetings create an ongoing feedback loop that sustains program improvement. Parent respondent EI emphasized consistent communication with teachers and the principal

to monitor her child's progress. This form of cooperative monitoring represents shared accountability, where the school and family jointly evaluate learning outcomes and emotional development (Fahrudin et al., 2024; Husnaeni & Burga, 2024).

However, the school still lacks a systematic monitoring instrument to record inclusive progress longitudinally. Implementing digital supervision tools or student portfolios could enhance transparency and data-based decision-making. Such digital accountability systems are consistent with.

### The Interplay of Leadership Dimensions

The four managerial functions planning, organizing, implementing, and controlling interact dynamically in the inclusive management ecosystem of SDN Sawah Besar 01. The principal's leadership can be conceptualized as a cyclical and adaptive model, illustrated below:



**Figure 7.** Dynamic Cycle of Inclusive School Leadership at SDN Sawah Besar 01

This model reveals that inclusive leadership is non-linear, relying on continuous reflection and adaptation. Each stage strengthens the next, creating a sustainable cycle of improvement and collective commitment to inclusion.

### CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the implementation of inclusive education and the development of a child-friendly school at SDN Sawah Besar 01 have been effectively realized through the principal's strong, empathetic, and visionary leadership. The principal's role extends beyond administrative management to moral and pedagogical leadership that promotes inclusivity, equality, and mutual respect. Interview findings from teachers, parents, and students show that differentiated learning, curriculum modification, and collaborative classroom culture are consistently practiced. Although the school faces limitations such as insufficient facilities and the absence of a special assistant teacher its commitment to inclusion continues to grow through sustained communication, teacher training, and parent involvement.

The results reinforce previous studies emphasizing the importance of inclusive leadership in strengthening school practices while providing new empirical evidence on how the principal's managerial roles planning, organizing, implementing, and controlling—work cohesively within an inclusive and child-friendly framework. This study contributes to the scientific discussion by illustrating how moral leadership, empathetic engagement, and participatory decision-making shape inclusive cultures at the primary school level, thereby enriching current understandings of inclusive school leadership in Indonesia.

This study is limited to a single school context with a relatively small number of participants, making generalization difficult. The findings are also bounded by limited variation in demographic factors such as gender, age, and socioeconomic background. Future research involving larger samples, comparative studies across schools, or mixed-method approaches is recommended to gain a broader and more comprehensive understanding of inclusive leadership practices.

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