

THE IMPACT OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IMPLEMENTATION ON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS BY THE YOGYAKARTA CITY DISABILITY SERVICES UNIT

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Abstract

The execution of inclusive education in Indonesia continues to encounter obstacles, particularly concerning limited human resources, complex bureaucracy and public awareness. This research investigates the effects of inclusive education policy implementation via the Technical Implementation Unit for Disability Services in Education and Resource Center (ULD) of Yogyakarta City, which is a pioneering local institution in Indonesia. Employing a qualitative case study methodology, data were gathered through interviews with key ULD officials, document analysis, and questionnaires distributed to special assistant teachers. The results reveal that the ULD has produced sustained positive effects across various stakeholders. At the community level, heightened public awareness has fostered greater acceptance of children with disabilities and improved access to formal education through affirmative pathways. At the school and teacher levels, the ULD has bolstered institutional capacity by increasing the number of special assistant teachers and enhancing teachers' competencies through ongoing training. At the student level, inclusive practices have facilitated positive academic, social, and emotional development among students with disabilities. This research adds to the body of literature on inclusive education policy implementation by illustrating the strategic role of local technical institutions in connecting national policy frameworks with inclusive practices at the school level.

Keywords: *inclusive education; elementary school; policy*

Abstrak

Pelaksanaan pendidikan inklusif di Indonesia menghadapi berbagai kendala, terutama terkait dengan terbatasnya sumber daya manusia, birokrasi pelayanan yang rumit, dan kesadaran publik. Penelitian ini menyelidiki dampak dari implementasi kebijakan pendidikan inklusif melalui Unit Pelaksana Teknis Layanan Disabilitas dalam Pendidikan dan Pusat Sumber Daya (ULD) Kota Yogyakarta, yang merupakan lembaga teknis pendidikan inklusi di Indonesia. Dengan menggunakan metodologi studi kasus kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara dengan pejabat kunci ULD, analisis dokumen, dan kuesioner yang disebarakan kepada guru pendamping khusus. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ULD telah menghasilkan dampak positif yang berkelanjutan di berbagai pemangku kepentingan. Tingkat masyarakat, meningkatnya kesadaran publik telah mendorong penerimaan yang lebih besar terhadap anak-anak dengan disabilitas dan meningkatkan akses ke pendidikan formal melalui jalur afirmatif. Tingkat sekolah dan guru, ULD telah memperkuat kapasitas institusi dengan meningkatkan jumlah guru pendamping khusus dan meningkatkan kompetensi guru melalui pelatihan berkelanjutan. Tingkat siswa, praktik inklusif telah memfasilitasi perkembangan akademik, sosial, dan emosional yang positif di antara siswa dengan disabilitas. Penelitian ini menambah literatur tentang implementasi kebijakan pendidikan inklusif dengan menggambarkan peran strategis lembaga teknis lokal dalam menghubungkan kerangka kebijakan nasional dengan praktik inklusif di tingkat sekolah.

Kata Kunci: pendidikan inklusif; sekolah dasar; kebijakan

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Introduction

Disability encompasses long-term physical, intellectual, mental, or sensory impairments that, when combined with environmental and social obstacles, can impede full societal participation (Ahadiyah & Herawati, 2024; UNICEF, 2023). This definition is consistent with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which underscores the notion of disability as a social issue rather than solely a medical one. In Indonesia, this viewpoint is further supported by Law No. 8 of 2016, which ensures equal rights for individuals with disabilities, including access to education. On a global scale, around 240 million children are living with disabilities, many of whom face discrimination and restricted access to quality educational opportunities (UNICEF, 2021, 2023). On a national level, significant disparities persist, as a considerable number of school-aged children with disabilities continue to be excluded from formal education (Girsang et al., 2024). The Special Region of Yogyakarta reports the highest prevalence of individuals with disabilities in Indonesia, emphasizing the critical need for effective inclusive education policies at the local level (Ikawati et al., 2024).

Inclusive education is broadly acknowledged as a strategic method for ensuring equitable educational opportunities and fostering social engagement for students with disabilities (Murtadlo et al., 2025; Zega et al., 2025). Research demonstrates that inclusive practices applied at the elementary school level can diminish stigma, improve social interactions, and facilitate students' cognitive, social, and emotional growth (Albay & Pradana, 2025; Sundeen & Alsarawi, 2024). Nevertheless, despite robust regulatory frameworks, the execution of inclusive education in Indonesia continues to encounter significant obstacles, particularly concerning limited teacher proficiency, a shortage of special assistant teachers, and insufficient institutional backing (Andriyan et al., 2023; Melinda et al., 2024; Mulyawan et al., 2024). Current research on inclusive education in Indonesia primarily concentrates on identifying barriers to implementation or assessing adherence to national regulations (Andriani et al., 2024; Sitanggang et al., 2025). Although these studies offer valuable insights, there is still a notable absence of empirical research investigating how local technical institutions enact inclusive education policies and create lasting impacts across various stakeholders. In light of this deficiency, several local governments have initiated the establishment of technical support units to enhance inclusive education services (Naeemy & Yoneda, 2025). A prominent example is the Technical Implementation Unit for Disability Services in Education and Resource Center (ULD) of Yogyakarta City, which stands as a pioneering entity that connects national policy frameworks with inclusive practices at the school level.

This research seeks to investigate the execution of inclusive education policies within elementary schools, specifically through the involvement of the Yogyakarta City Disability Services Unit (ULD). The study emphasizes the effect of institutional support from the ULD on various factors, including community awareness, school preparedness, teacher proficiency, and the educational experiences of students with disabilities in inclusive elementary settings. Anticipated results of this research encompass a contextualized comprehension of the implementation of inclusive education policies, empirical data regarding the institutional influence at the elementary level, and insights pertinent to policy that can guide adaptive governance and service provision for inclusive education.

Research Methods

This research utilized a qualitative methodology with a case study framework to investigate the execution of inclusive education policies via the Technical Implementation Unit for Disability Services in Education and Resource Center (ULD) located in Yogyakarta City. A qualitative design was chosen to facilitate a thorough understanding of the experiences, perceptions, and institutional practices associated with the implementation of inclusive education policies in a natural environment (Waruwu, 2024). The case study approach permitted an extensive analysis of a singular institutional context over a defined timeframe (Abdussamad, 2021). The researchers took on the role of academic observers, demonstrating a scholarly interest in the policy of inclusive education. While they were not officially connected to the ULD, they employed reflexive practices to reduce interpretive bias, which included maintaining reflective field notes and engaging in peer debriefing (Abdussamad, 2021). Throughout the study, ethical principles were strictly adhered to. Participants were made aware of the study's objectives, granted informed consent, and assured of their confidentiality and anonymity.

The research was carried out at the Yogyakarta City ULD from August to October 2025. Participants were chosen through purposive sampling, focusing on their direct engagement in the implementation of inclusive education policies. This group included the Head of the Administrative Subdivision, Technical Policy Reviewers, and Data and Information Processors. Data collection involved semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, questionnaires, and documentation studies. The interviews and observations provided insights into the experiences of participants and the practices within their institutions, while the documentation studies analyzed pertinent policy and program reports. Questionnaires distributed to Special Assistant Teachers (Guru Pendamping Khusus/GPK) were utilized descriptively to enhance and triangulate qualitative findings, rather than for the purpose of statistical generalization (Miles et al., 2014). The analysis of data adhered to the interactive framework proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), which encompassed data reduction, data presentation, and the formulation of conclusions. To ensure trustworthiness, triangulation of data sources and methodologies was employed, alongside member checking, the preservation of an audit trail, and reflexive documentation, all aimed at bolstering credibility, dependability, and confirmability.

Result And Discussion

This section outlines the empirical results obtained from interviews, observations, questionnaires, and document analysis concerning the execution of inclusive education policies via the Yogyakarta City Disability Services Unit (ULD).

a. Impact on society

The results suggest that the execution of inclusive education policies via the ULD has played a significant role in enhancing public consciousness regarding disability and inclusive education. Respondents noted a gradual evolution in community perspectives, marked by a heightened acceptance of children with disabilities and a decrease in the denial of disability conditions among parents. This change was bolstered by ULD-led initiatives for information dissemination, support for schools, and public awareness campaigns carried out through social media and community involvement activities. The rise in public awareness has coincided with better identification and reporting of individuals with disabilities. Official data indicate an increase in the documented prevalence of disabilities in Yogyakarta City, which informants highlighted as primarily due to enhanced data collection methods rather than a surge in new

cases (Ikawati et al., 2024). This change has also been mirrored in the greater involvement of students with disabilities in formal education through the disability affirmation pathway.

The rise in community awareness noted in Yogyakarta City corroborates earlier studies that highlight the significance of parental acceptance and community participation in inclusive elementary education (Chairani et al., 2025; Mahrus, 2024). Nevertheless, the results reveal that the shifts in attitudes were not uniformly experienced across different communities. Elementary schools situated in regions with higher levels of parental engagement and better access to information witnessed more swift changes, indicating that the effects at the community level are influenced by local social dynamics rather than solely by policy measures (Pertiwi et al., 2025).



Figure 1. Prevalence of Type 3 Disabilities by Province in Indonesia
 Source: Central Statistics Agency, 2024

b. Impact on schools

At the school level, the research indicates that the ULD has significantly contributed to enhancing institutional capacity for the implementation of inclusive education. Analysis of documents has shown a steady rise in the number of Special Assistant Teachers (Guru Pendamping Khusus/GPK) in elementary schools over the last five years. This increase has paralleled the growth of inclusive schools and the rising enrollment of students with disabilities through affirmative admission pathways. Informants noted that the presence of GPK has aided schools in modifying learning environments and meeting the diverse needs of students. Nevertheless, the allocation of GPK among schools was inconsistent, with certain institutions exhibiting greater preparedness and commitment to inclusivity than others.

At the school level, the increase in the number of GPK illustrates the strategic importance of local technical institutions in facilitating the implementation of inclusive education in elementary schools (Meriska et al., 2025; Solihin & Rahmawati, 2025). However, the variability in GPK distribution reveals a significant limitation regarding institutional success. Elementary schools that exhibit strong leadership and possess prior experience in inclusive education have derived greater benefits from ULD support, whereas schools with restricted organizational capacity encounter difficulties in maintaining inclusive practices. This observation emphasizes the critical role of school readiness in influencing implementation outcomes.

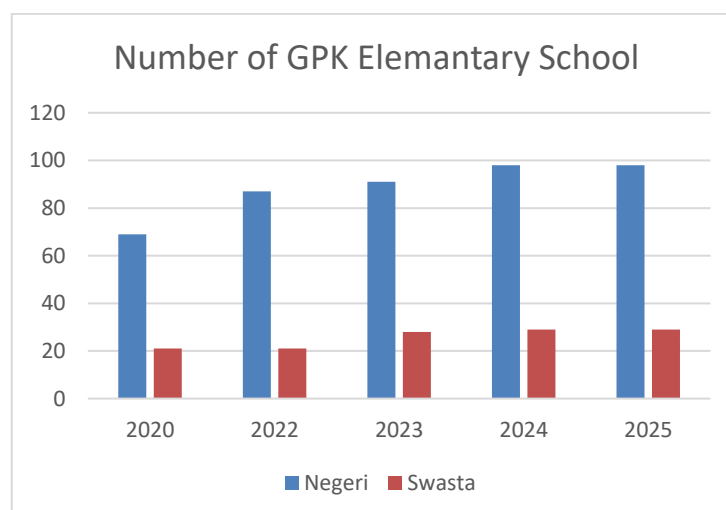


Figure 2. Number of GPK Elementary School

c. Impact on teachers

The results further indicate enhancements in teacher capabilities as a consequence of training initiatives organized by the ULD. Educators expressed a greater understanding and assurance in managing students with disabilities, especially concerning classroom management, instructional differentiation, and collaboration with GPK. Training sessions were held consistently and customized to meet the specific requirements of each school, thereby facilitating better execution of inclusive practices within the classroom setting (Saskia et al., 2024).

Teacher training programs have proven to be effective in improving the skills of elementary school educators, consistent with earlier research on professional development in inclusive education (Aktepe et al., 2025; Vincent & Shobha, 2020). Nevertheless, dependence on intermittent external training could result in unintended outcomes, including inconsistent implementation of inclusive strategies in different classrooms and a reliance on ULD-led interventions instead of fostering enduring internal capacity within elementary schools

d. Impact on students

Data obtained from questionnaires filled out by GPK, along with insights from interviews, suggest that students with disabilities demonstrated favorable academic and socio-emotional growth. The outcomes observed included heightened independence, enhanced self-esteem, improved social interactions with peers, and more seamless transitions to advanced educational stages. These results align with the goals of inclusive education and were noted in conjunction with positive character development in students without disabilities.

For elementary school students, the positive academic and socio-emotional outcomes underscore the significance of inclusive education during the critical early learning phase (Albay & Pradana, 2025; Sundeen & Alsarawi, 2024). However, these outcomes were affected by contextual elements such as class size, the availability of GPK, and the consistency of inclusive practices among schools. This indicates that successful institutional models cannot be presumed to be universally applicable across various elementary school environments.

In summary, the findings suggest that while the Yogyakarta City ULD serves as an effective institutional framework for facilitating the implementation of inclusive education policies at the elementary level, its effectiveness is contingent upon context. Differences in school capacity, community involvement, and resource allocation influence both the

advantages and challenges associated with inclusive education outcomes. These observations emphasize the necessity for flexible implementation strategies that consider contextual variations when expanding inclusive education initiatives throughout elementary schools.

Conclusion

This research investigated the execution of inclusive education policies via the Yogyakarta City Disability Services Unit (ULD) and its effects on elementary educational environments. Instead of merely restating empirical results, this conclusion integrates the academic contributions and contextual ramifications of the study. Theoretically, this research enhances the body of literature regarding the implementation of inclusive education by illustrating how local technical agencies act as policy intermediaries, translating national inclusive education frameworks into practices at the school level. The results underscore that inclusive education in elementary schools is influenced not only by adherence to regulations but also by the capacity of institutions, the preparedness of schools, and the involvement of the community. This broadens the scope of existing implementation studies by highlighting the interplay between governance frameworks and early educational settings. This research empirically demonstrates the complex effects of institutional support on inclusive education at the elementary level. The results indicate that the ULD has played a significant role in raising community awareness, bolstering institutional capacity in elementary schools, improving teacher skills, and fostering both the academic and socio-emotional growth of students with disabilities. Concurrently, the study highlights the variability in outcomes among different schools, emphasizing that the effectiveness of institutions is shaped by local factors, including leadership, resource allocation, and the consistency of inclusive practices. From a policy standpoint, this research suggests that inclusive education at the elementary level is bolstered by specialized technical units that offer targeted services, such as teacher training, the assignment of Special Assistant Teachers, and collaboration with schools. Nevertheless, the success of this support is contingent upon local social, institutional, and administrative circumstances. Consequently, inclusive education policies must be harmonized with local school environments and accessible support resources to guarantee sustainable and equitable results for students with disabilities.

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