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## Managing and Overcoming Barriers to Inclusive Education: A Case Study

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### Abstract

Private early childhood education encounters significant challenges in delivering inclusive education. This study investigates management strategies in these institutions, focusing on RA Ulumul Qur'an Al-Madani in South Kalimantan, a pilot for inclusive education. Using a case study approach, data was gathered through interviews, observation, and document analysis. The findings indicate a structured approach to management across various aspects. Admission procedures involve engaging parents, assessing children's special needs, and forming suitable groups. Curriculum management includes modifications, substitutions, and providing individualized education programs. Strategies to enhance teacher competency include selection, training, and expert support. Facility management focuses on planning, maintenance, and procurement of necessary resources with external support. Public relations utilize social media for community engagement and Whatsapp group for effective communication. Effective management positively impacts student learning, parent involvement, and children's rights. The study underscores collaboration among government, experts, and communities to bolster inclusive education quality, particularly in private ECE institutions.

### Keywords

Case Study, children with special needs, education management, inclusive education

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## Introduction

Inclusive ECEC programs pay attention to children's developmental needs holistically by offering adequate nutrition, health care, consistent care, protection, psycho-social support, and opportunities to learn with encouragement from social stimulation (Weldemariam et al., 2022). Inclusive ECEC programs promote values, attitudes, and behaviors such as equality, social justice, respect for all, celebrating diversity, and differences, as well as lifelong learning opportunities (Kurian, 2023). Teachers believed that this type of service gave students the opportunity to interact with their typical peers in the regular education system. Inclusion was then introduced to promote social recognition and familiarity with students with special needs. The transformation towards inclusion focuses on changes in the regular education system that enable the management of education for all students (Engelbrecht et al., 2016). Teachers and children can work together, help each other, and learn from each other, thus creating an inclusive and child-centred educational environment (Walton et al., 2022). The principle of social justice must be applied in planning, implementing, and evaluating inclusive programs in ECEC, including managing resources, accessibility, classroom management policies, and learning approaches that are equitable for all children, including those with special needs (Ackah-Jnr, 2022; Sandoval et al., 2021).

The interaction of regular children with children with special needs (CWSN) in inclusive ECE is also a vehicle for learning multiculturalism from an early age, which emphasizes the importance of appreciating and respecting the diversity of cultures, ethnicities, religions, and social backgrounds in education. In the management of inclusive education in ECEC, multiculturalism theory is used to ensure that every child, including CWSN, can feel accepted, valued, and recognized in an educational environment that respects diversity (Kurian, 2023). Teachers must have a good understanding of the culture and background of children and apply learning approaches that are responsive to that diversity (Warren, 2018). The ecological theory of development, put forward by Bronfenbrenner, suggests that children's development is influenced by complex interactions between individuals and their environment, ranging from micro, meso, exos, to macro systems (Guy-Evans, 2020). In the management of inclusive education in ECEC, the developmental ecology theory is used to understand that CWSN are unique individuals and need to be considered in their interactions with the educational environment, including relationships with teachers, peers, families, and the surrounding community.

The research of management in inclusive Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, it helps to identify effective management practices that can support inclusive education in ECEC settings, which is essential for ensuring that all children, including those with special needs, can receive equal and equitable education. Secondly, research in this area can provide insights into the challenges and barriers that ECEC institutions and their staff may face in implementing inclusive practices, and how these challenges can be addressed. This information can be used to develop targeted training and professional development programs for ECEC staff, which can help to improve the quality of inclusive services. Raudatul Athfal as the context in this study has

special characteristics. Raudatul Athfal (RA) is an early childhood education institution managed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. RA focuses on Islamic religious education and often offers educational programs that integrate religious values with the general curriculum. Its goal is to provide children with a foundation in religion from an early age. However, all Raudatul Athfal schools are managed by private foundations, which means they rely heavily on foundation management for educational development. The implementation of inclusive education in Raudatul Athfal is seen to have greater challenges due to limited financial support and training. The research on inclusive education in RA is urgent because it not only ensures compliance with legal requirements but also promotes equality, improves educational outcomes, fosters a supportive school culture, and facilitates professional development for teachers. By addressing the challenges and barriers faced by students with disabilities, RA can create an inclusive learning environment where all students have an equal opportunity to thrive and succeed. Based on the problem identification provided above, the researchers have formulated the following research questions.

- How is the management strategy for overcoming challenges in implementing inclusive education at private Raudatul Athfal?
- How is the impact of management on improving the implementation of inclusive education at private Raudatul Athfal?

### **Literature Review**

There are three general principles of inclusive practice in the early childhood literature, namely: learning must be individualized for each child (Hornby & Hornby, 2014), services must be provided in inclusive settings including at home (Zagona et al., 2017) and there must be systemic support for inclusive practice through government policies and professional support (Hardy & Woodcock, 2015; Mulholland & O'Connor, 2016). The principle that learning must be individual for each child refers to the recognition that each child has unique and different learning needs. Therefore, the learning approach must be adapted to the individual needs of each child, so that all children have equal opportunities to learn and develop. The principle that services should be provided in inclusive settings emphasizes the importance of ensuring that children with special needs can receive equal and equitable educational services within and outside the ECEC setting. This means that support must be provided in inclusive settings, including in the home environment, so that children with special needs can learn and develop at their own pace. In addition, inclusive education cannot be successful without strong systemic support, including government policies and professional support. Government policies that support inclusive education will help create an inclusive environment throughout the education system.

Inclusive quality ECEC can be promoted by establishing a vision of making it a government priority, providing parenting programs and intervention programs for at-risk children, encouraging inclusive pedagogy through teacher training, and establishing multi-sectoral collaboration. It is important to begin inclusion in education during early childhood as inequalities in learning and other child development outcomes appear before elementary school (Pantić & Florian, 2015). Addressing educational inequality from its roots by acting as early as possible is more effective (García & Weiss, 2017).

Quality early childhood inclusive education settings require supportive leadership for the program (Movahedazarhouligh et al., 2022). It is crucial for leaders in organizations and systems to provide support for staff development focused on individual program planning, adaptation, and evaluation. Inclusion is not only the responsibility of supervisors in early childhood programs, but also of policy makers. Several policies can promote inclusive education practices, including agency commitments to open enrollment that includes a subset of children with disabilities based on the level of prevention in the population, interagency collaboration and communication, and a dedication to a transdisciplinary team approach (Hayes & Bulat, 2017). The importance of an integrated service system in the health sector to ensure that children with special needs receive the appropriate support they need. It is important to note that the success of inclusive education also depends on the involvement and commitment of parents, families, and the community as a whole.

Therefore, it is crucial to invest in high-quality, inclusive ECEC programs that prioritize individualized learning, provide services in inclusive settings, and receive systemic support from policymakers and professionals (Love & Horn, 2021). This multi-sectoral collaboration is essential for ensuring that all children, including those with disabilities or from disadvantaged backgrounds, have access to quality ECD programs. In addition to these efforts, governments must also invest in the professional development of early childhood teachers and promote policies that support inclusive education practices, such as open enrollment policies and interagency collaboration (Hardy & Woodcock, 2015; Madani, 2019).

In general, the model of inclusive education described in this text takes a holistic approach, considering the school system as a whole. This approach includes three key elements: input (environmental management), process (learning management), and output (development of the quality of students) (Loreman, 2014). Environmental management involves managing the physiological, physical, and psychological aspects of the learning environment, which can have a significant impact on the behavior of both students and teachers (Monsen et al., 2014). Therefore, it is important to carefully analyze any instructional setting to ensure that it is conducive to learning. Learning management is a dynamic process that involves creating a balanced ecosystem where different elements of the environment are working together (Óskarsdóttir et al., 2020).

## **Methodology**

### ***Research design, site, and participants***

This research employed a qualitative approach, utilizing a case study method to investigate inclusive education and its implications in private Raudhatul Athfal institutions. The case study method was chosen to answer the research questions as it allows for a detailed exploration of phenomena within their specific contexts. The location of this research is Raudatul Athfal Ulumul Qur'an Al-Madani Banjarbaru which is a reference inclusive school for early childhood education under the Regional Office of the Ministry of Religion, South Kalimantan since 2017.

***Data collection***

Participants included various stakeholders involved in implementing inclusive education at RA Ulumul Qur'an al-Madani, such as chairman of the foundation, RA headmaster, inclusive education coordinator, special education teachers, homeroom teachers, administrators, experts, and parents. Their perspectives were gathered through semi-structured interviews, with each participant selected and interviewed according to their roles and contributions to inclusive education implementation.

The number of interview sessions varied depending on the role of each participant, with approximately 7 sessions for RA headmaster, 8 sessions for inclusive education coordinator, 4 sessions for each teacher, and 2 sessions for parents and experts. Each interview session lasted around 45-60 minutes and took place between August 10 and September 27, 2022, either in-person or via video call. Additionally, direct observations of inclusive classrooms and educational settings were carried out to observe interactions, instructional strategies, and support mechanisms. The documents such as Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), school policies and guidelines, curriculum materials, and assessment records were analyzed to gather information about the implementation of inclusive practices and student progress.

**Table 1.** *Participant demographic data*

No	Name	Age	Gender	Education	Position
1	Husnul Khatimah	45	F	Bachelor's	Headmaster
2	Linda Yani Pusfyaningsih	42	F	Master's	Inclusive Education Coordinator
3	Diah Sari Wijayanti	27	F	High School	Treasurer
4	Aina Shoufia	28	F	Bachelor's	Administrative Staff
5	Eka Sulistyani	45	F	Bachelor's	Teacher
6	Aya Sovia	36	F	Bachelor's	Teacher
7	Putri Rana Anggraini	29	F	Bachelor's	Teacher
8	Kamelia	27	F	Bachelor's	Teacher
9	Melda Luthfi Y.	25	F	Bachelor's	Teacher
10	Mahdiah	26	F	Bachelor's	Teacher
11	Nor Asiah	26	F	Bachelor's	Teacher
12	Tuti Hartini	25	F	Bachelor's	Teacher
13	Siti Jamilah	27	F	Bachelor's	Teacher
14	Tasya Riaunia Firda	24	F	Bachelor's	Special Education Teacher
15	Salsabila Musaratin	24	F	High School	Special Education Teacher
16	Yasa Widhi Asta Pramana	27	M	Bachelor's	Special Education Teacher
17	Anissa Salsabila Utami	24	F	Bachelor's	Special Education Teacher
18	Norkhalisa	24	F	Bachelor's	Special Education Teacher
19	Rina Febriana Auliany, S.Pd	23	F	Bachelor's	Special Education Teacher
20	Nor Syifa Raudhah	23	F	Bachelor's	Special Education Teacher
22	Hadi Purwanto, S.Pd.I, M.Pd	46	M	Master's	Committee Chairman
23	Ghea Amalia Arpandy, M.Psi	36	F	Master's	Expert
24	Iga Serpianing Aroma, M.Psi	33	F	Master's	Expert
25	MD	29	F	Bachelor's	Parent
26	SF	36	F	High School	Parent
27	AH	29	F	High School	Parent
28	MFR	34	M	Master's	Parent

### *Data analysis*

Data analysis followed [Miles and Huberman's model \(2018\)](#), consisting of three main stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the data condensation stage, relevant data related to management strategies in overcoming challenges of implementing inclusive education at RA institutions operated by private foundations were identified and streamlined. In the data display stage, collected data were organized into meaningful categories, such as management strategies used, challenges faced, actions taken to address them, and the impact of these actions. Themes emerging from categorized data, such as resource management, teacher training, and support for students with special needs, were also identified to facilitate conclusion drawing.

### *Data trustworthiness and ethical considerations*

The researchers collaborated with management and inclusive education experts to develop an interview guide, ensuring research credibility. Their rapport with participants strengthened study trustworthiness. Inclusion of diverse participants and repeated data collection increases research findings' trustworthiness. Triangulation via interviews, observations, and document analysis ensured comprehensive data collection. Member checking allows participants to validate interview transcripts, increasing research credibility. This process ensures accurate representation of participant perspectives.

In this study, participants consented to the use of their school's name, as well as their name and facial appearance in photos for publication. They were informed of their rights, including confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation. These steps were taken to maintain participant confidentiality and privacy throughout the research process to reduce potential risks. This approach aims to ensure full understanding and voluntary consent from participants, without external coercion or pressure.

### **Findings**

#### ***RQ1: Management strategy for overcoming challenges in implementing inclusive education at Raudatul Athfal (RA) Ulumul Qur'an Al-Madani***

##### ***Student enrollment and management***

The registration of children with special needs at RA Ulumul Qur'an Al-Madani (hereinafter referred to as RA Al-Madani) faces several significant challenges. According to the RA headmaster, Husnul Khatimah, parents are reluctant to enroll their children in early childhood education institutions for several reasons. These reasons include fear of their child being ostracized and not receiving adequate educational services, embarrassment because their child is different, lack of belief that their child can develop with interventions, acceptance of their child's condition as fate, and a lack of understanding regarding inclusive services. Before determining managerial steps in admitting new students, the RA headmaster, inclusive education coordinator, and special education teachers conduct socialization

activities in various forms, such as seminars with another ECE teachers in region, conducting surveys of special needs children in the school's vicinity with neighborhood officials, from local community heads to district heads, conducting door-to-door socialization, and conducting surveys of special needs children who cannot be accommodated in other early childhood education institutions to encourage them to enroll at RA Al-Madani. Here's a quote from the RA headmaster,

“The struggle for inclusive education is tough, if I recall from the beginning. Back then, parents didn't want to send their special needs children to school because of embarrassment, considering it fate, and doubting they would be served in public schools. So, we conducted socialization involving village and neighborhood officials, going from house to house. There were also neighborhood officials who didn't want to provide data on special needs children in their area, out of embarrassment. It was strange. We also requested data from teacher friends; if there were special needs children not accepted in their institution, we were ready to accommodate them. We even waived the fees if their families couldn't afford it. Additionally, we promoted through activities with the Indonesian Early Childhood Education Association (HIMPAUDI) or Association of Raudhatul Athfal Teachers (IGRA), seminars, and through social media. At that time, government support was minimal. The Ministry of Religious Affairs only paid attention after I was nominated for the Astra Tempo Award 2013. However, since the Banjarbaru city government promoted inclusive cities, the socialization of inclusive education has gradually increased.”

Based on the presentation by the RA headmaster, the management of new student admissions is conducted in several stages. First, a committee is formed each year to handle the admission of new students, involving all teachers. The committee analyzes the needs and determines the format of new student admission socialization, class capacity, and student-teacher ratio. The teacher council also discusses previous learning activities and considers feedback from teachers, students, and parents to explore potential innovations. Managing children at RA Al-Madani involves additional complexity compared to regular schools. After the process of admitting new students is completed and the number of registered students is known, students are identified and assessed. Here's a quote from inclusive education coordinator, Linda Yani, *“This assessment is done in two stages, medical or psychological diagnosis by a doctor or psychologist, followed by a diagnosis of the student's learning needs.”*

The initial assessment is standardized for all students in the school. However, for students with special needs, identifying and assessing them early on is crucial to determine the type and level of their needs. This information helps develop personalized learning plans and interventions. Here's a quote from special education teacher, Tasya Riaunia Firda,

“If a child already has a previous diagnosis, the school will conduct a separate assessment to account for their specific needs. The assessment results are used to evaluate and provide guidance to parents of special needs students. Follow-up programs may include individual counseling, collaboration with external therapy institutions, home visits, or incorporating assessment results into an Individual Education Programs for the child.”

Figure 1. Flowchart of CWSN Handling



After the assessment and identification process, students at RA Al-Madani are grouped based on their needs and abilities. Relevant information is recorded in the main book and displayed on the student statistical board to facilitate effective management and service provision. The school accepts students with various special needs, excluding the deaf and blind, as they lack the necessary facilities and resources for those students. Here's a quote from a special education teacher, Yasa Widhi Asta, *"We don't accept students with special needs who are deaf or blind because we cannot provide the needed interventions. However, low vision students may still be considered."* However, grouping based solely on diagnosis is not always the best approach. Individual strengths and weaknesses should be considered, and grouping should be based on the unique needs and abilities of each student. Inclusive education aims to provide personalized and flexible learning opportunities that meet the diverse needs of all students.

The management of RA Al-Madani has implemented activities to ensure the quality of education and integration of all students, including those with special needs. This includes a pre-enrollment matriculation program introducing students to the school environment, curriculum, and teaching methods before the start of each academic year. The school also emphasizes respect for differences, tolerance, and acceptance of diversity. Students are invited to visit Special Needs Schools (SLB) so they can witness the achievements and potential of children with different abilities. These activities promote tolerance, acceptance,



and confidence-building for students with special needs, while also reinforcing commitment to inclusive education and student support. The RA headmaster stated,

“In inclusive schools, we must pay attention to both regular and special needs students. So, during the initial introduction to the school environment, we take students to SLBs or other places to show that students with special needs can develop, contribute, and achieve their aspirations. The goal is to instill appreciation and respect among regular students and confidence in students with special needs.”

The RA headmaster plays an active role in overseeing the student management process, from forming admission committees to recording student data, diagnosis results, grouping, monitoring progress, and providing appropriate stimulation during the learning process. The summary of student management is then submitted to supervisors and the school foundation for accountability. The school head ensures active supervision and support, transferring annual information to the foundation and supervisors for review and accountability. The committee chairman, Hadi Purwanto stated, *“The school head is very proactive in coordinating. Every stage of student admission is reported to the committee. Designed programs and challenges are also communicated so the committee can encourage parents to be more involved.”*

### ***Curriculum management***

The curriculum at RA Al-Madani follows a partial inclusive model and undergoes annual evaluations for necessary adjustments. The RA headmaster and the inclusive education coordinator involve all teachers in this evaluation process, seeking improvement suggestions based on the two-stage diagnosis conducted during student admission. The curriculum is based on relevant regulations from the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of National Education. Academic regulations are determined through school meetings, and curriculum adjustments are made based on recommendations from the teachers' council and the results of admission diagnoses. Once the curriculum concept is finalized, the RA headmaster distributes teaching schedules, determines materials for students, and assigns home rooms and companion teachers for students with special needs. All students, including those with special needs, learn in regular groups. However, students with special needs receive individual teaching from companion teachers at specific times. Special Education Teacher, Nor Syifa Raudhah, stated,

“Each child with special needs has a pull-out schedule, which contains specific interventions based on the detection of the child's special needs. Often, children are detected with the same special needs, such as ADHD, but the interventions differ because their levels are different.”

To meet the needs of students with special needs, modifications or replacements are made to the regular curriculum. These adaptations may involve changes in time allocation, materials, teaching processes, assessments, and learning media. Homeroom Teacher, Melda Lutfi Yanti, S.Pd, stated, *“For students with special needs, curriculum adaptations are made, whether in the form of modification or substitution. It can be in terms of objectives, materials, methods, or evaluations.”* The implementation of the curriculum is overseen by the school principal and the inclusive

education coordinator. Monthly meetings are held to monitor progress and address challenges faced by teachers. These meetings gather data on the obstacles encountered, allowing for necessary adjustments. Teachers also report students' learning outcomes and propose the need for learning media to enhance students' mastery of the material.

### ***Human resource management***

The RA headmaster, Husnul Khatimah, emphasizes the importance of continuous learning and openness to criticism for teachers, especially when dealing with CWSN. At RA Al-Madani, the process of selecting teachers and staff involves several stages, including administrative selection, psychological tests, interviews, and microteaching sessions for teaching staff. The school management recognizes the importance of improving the quality of teachers and staff to provide inclusive education for CWSN. They actively encourage participation in various training programs offered by local governments, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Ministry of Education and Culture, NGOs, and other institutions related to inclusive services. In-house training programs are also conducted to ensure that teachers always receive the latest information on current teaching methods. The RA headmaster expressed,

“Training for teachers of children with special needs is indeed rare, so we facilitate it with our own funds. If there is training, even if it's off the island, we facilitate the teachers. We also bring in experts like Dr. Tri Gunadi, the founder of the Child Development Center for Special Needs, and Mrs. Anne Gracia from the applied neuroscience community.”

Regular scheduled supervision is carried out by the school principal to ensure that the learning process aligns with the plan and allows for necessary adjustments to maximize student stimulation. This consultative supervision provides space for teachers to make improvements and incorporate suggestions and criticisms. The goals of supervision include improving teachers' understanding of educational goals and the school's role, enhancing their ability to prepare students for society, facilitating critical self-evaluation of teaching activities, promoting democratic and cooperative work procedures, and assisting in evaluating student progress.

### ***Facilities and infrastructure management***

RA Al-Madani provides both general and specific facilities to support inclusive education. General facilities include classrooms, offices, support infrastructure, sanitation, and teaching aids. Special facilities consist of pull therapy rooms and neurofeedback therapy rooms. The school has dedicated spaces such as classrooms, administrative offices, principal's office, health unit (UKS), and a warehouse. These rooms are equipped with learning aids and ensure the safety of children with fences around them. Supporting infrastructure includes waste bins, sports fields, and handwashing facilities. Sanitation facilities include bathrooms and toilets for both students and teachers. Various teaching aids are available in the school to assist students with disabilities. These aids include blocks, puzzles, art supplies, balls, literacy games, role-playing toys, and sensorimotor toys. They

contribute to students' spatial awareness, cognitive skills, creativity, physical activity, social skills, and sensory processing. The RA headmaster revealed,

“The procurement of inclusive education facilities mostly relies on support from foundations. Because these foundations are family-owned, coordination is easy. We also receive support from the committee and the government. We hope that support will increase, as RA Ulumul Qur'an Al-Madani has become a reference for inclusive RA in South Kalimantan.”

Adequate infrastructure supports full participation of students in the learning process and promotes their inclusion and well-being. The management of inclusive education facilities at RA Al-Madani involves thorough planning, routine maintenance, and adequate resources to meet the needs of students with disabilities and sustain the inclusive education program.

### ***Communication and public relations management***

Effective communication between parents and teachers plays a crucial role in successfully stimulating the five aspects of child development. To foster effective communication, RA Al-Madani regularly implements parenting programs conducted at least every two months. These programs provide presentations on child development, showcase intervention activities conducted at school, and encourage parents to carry out similar activities at home. The goal is to enhance parents' knowledge, stimulate child development, and promote the concept of inclusive education.

WhatsApp groups are also used as a communication tool between teachers and parents. However, it is important to establish guidelines and protocols to ensure safety and privacy, especially for children. Clear guidelines should be provided regarding content, frequency, etiquette, and equal access for all parents. Additionally, RA Al-Madani actively shares learning activities through its Facebook page and school website. This serves as an information platform for parents and allows for gathering feedback, criticism, and suggestions. Promoting school activities indirectly benefits the Facebook page as a communication platform. Administrative staff member, Aina Shoufia stated,

“We utilize social media, Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp groups to post school activities. So that parents can get information and implement similar activities at home. Social media is managed by the administration, while WhatsApp groups are managed by teachers. In addition, there are also parenting activities. So we strive to involve parents more in their child's education.”

Figure 2. Facebook page of RA Al-Madani



The Headmaster of RA Al-Madani stated that the success of inclusive education depends not only on the relationship between the school and parents but also on the relationship with the broader community. They understand the importance of collaborating with various entities to enhance their services and expand their reach to a wider audience. These entities include the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Department of Education, the Department of Social Affairs, the Department of Transportation, Clinical Psychologists providing Neurofeedback Therapy (NF Therapy), Educational Psychologists conducting Psychological Testing (Psychotesting), School Counselors offering Individual or Group Counseling, teacher special education Coordinators for Developmental and Academic Assessments, School Committees, Class Associations, and Learning Places that can be utilized for exemplary theme-based learning. By collaborating with these entities, RA Al-Madani can provide comprehensive services that meet the diverse needs of its students and foster an environment supportive of inclusive education. The RA headmaster stated, *“Effective public*

*relations can enhance the quality and quantity of support for the school. If our activities are clear and transparent, especially when known by many people and go viral, then the support will be even greater.”*

***RQ2: The impact of management on improving the implementation of inclusive education***

***Student learning outcomes***

Teacher expectations have a significant impact on the social, emotional, and academic outcomes of early childhood. At RA Al-Madani, the early childhood inclusive education program offers adjustments for children with disabilities to ensure their success. These adjustments include suitable and flexible curriculum and pedagogy, interactive learning environments, age-appropriate and developmentally appropriate learning resources, as well as communication modes and technologies that support learning.

At RA Al-Madani, management regularly conducts in-house training by inviting experts and practitioners from various educational backgrounds related to inclusive services and handling CWSN. Furthermore, teachers are encouraged to develop themselves and improve their skills by participating in various training programs outside the school environment. Here's a quote from the interview with the Inclusive Education Coordinator, Linda Yani,

“Since ULM (Universitas Lambung Mangkurat) opened the Special Needs Education program, we have found it easier to recruit teachers who already have a background in special needs education. However, their perspective is still different from inclusive education, where children with special needs are served in a regular setting. So, we often hold In-House Training, invite experts, and facilitate teacher training. If teachers' insights into inclusive education become broader, their expectations become more positive, and their mentoring practices become better.”

**Figure 3.** *Art Stage and Student Farewell*



Inclusive strategies and assessment can help build teachers' knowledge and understanding of early childhood, which should be applied in five areas of learning and development: identity, connectivity, well-being, active learning, and communication. This approach will help ensure that children with special needs receive appropriate and fair learning opportunities that will enable them to reach their full potential. Assessing young children with disabilities can be challenging due to time constraints and teachers' capabilities. However, at RA Al-Madani, this obstacle is overcome through teacher collaboration. Here's a statement from homeroom teacher, Eka Sulistyani,

“Assessing the development of children with special needs is quite challenging for teachers like us, with a background in regular early childhood education. So we are assisted by two other teachers, the classroom assistant teacher and the special education teacher. I collaborate with Putri Rana and Nor Asiah as classroom assistant teachers. There are also Rina Febriana and Syifa Raudhah as special education teachers.”

The assessment data collected will be analyzed, reflected upon, and used to plan and expand children's learning within their proximal development zone. Teachers provide scaffolding to solve problems or perform tasks beyond their current abilities, helping them build knowledge and new skills based on child development assessment data.

### ***Parent empowerment***

RA Al-Madani headmaster, Husnul Khatimah, emphasizes that collaboration between teachers and parents is crucial for the success of inclusive education. Through this approach, teachers can gain insights into how children function in different environments and receive input from those who know the child best. This collaboration can enhance the role of parents in caring for children with special needs, shifting from passive recipients of expert treatment to active participants in interventions guided by experts, through family-centered collaborative partnerships. Parent involvement is crucial in determining the effectiveness of interventions and promoting the social, emotional, and academic development of their children. According to therapist teacher Ghea Amalia Arpandy, M.Psi, Psychologist, in an interview,

“Families often find it difficult to transition from early interventions, where their children receive more intensive therapy services. We encourage them to prepare their children for independent living in the future and not to rely on others. Collaboration is key. We utilize every moment with parents, through parenting sessions, child development achievement report sessions, and even every activity conducted by RA Al-Madani, we involve parents. Communication is also done through Instagram and Facebook, so parents know about their children's activities and can implement them at home.”

RA Al-Madani headmaster emphasizes the importance of parental involvement in continuing interventions at home. Without this continuity, the likelihood of failure is high. However, the assumption that all parents are capable of shouldering this responsibility and making the

right decisions may be flawed. Therefore, RA Al-Madani's management regularly holds parenting programs to educate parents on how to develop their children's potential. Personal consultation time is also provided to ensure that families are motivated and guided in their child intervention activities.

Interviews with several parents of children with special needs indicate that collaborative efforts and programs between schools and parents have yielded expected results. One parent, MD, said,

“Initially, it was difficult for us to accept the differences and special needs of our child. We often received negative responses from the environment, causing us to reject our child. However, consultations and sharing with teachers and therapists at RA have changed our perception. We now understand that children, regardless of their condition, are gifts and tests for us to improve our quality as God's servants. Children deserve the same love and attention and have their own valuable and unique potentials.”

RA Al-Madani headmaster acknowledges the importance of parental roles in their children's education and development and has formed a parent committee to strengthen their contributions and participation. This committee allows parents to provide suggestions and input on activities and curriculum development, as well as the procurement of media and learning resources for their children. The committee also provides support to fellow members who may need assistance in handling their children or other social needs. This collaborative approach fosters a sense of community and empowers parents to play an active role in their children's education. Hadi Purwanto, the committee chair, stated in an interview,

“In addition to supporting the RA institution, this committee also supports its members, the parents, both financially and emotionally. Raising children with special needs indeed requires a strong support system. Committee member parents can support each other and share experiences.”

### ***Improving the quality of 5 clusters of children's rights***

#### ***Civil rights and freedoms cluster***

RA Al-Madani is an inclusive educational institution, meaning it provides meaningful learning opportunities for all children in regular schools, including those with disabilities. Ideally, inclusive education allows children with disabilities to attend the same classes as their peers in the nearest school, with additional support and accommodations tailored to the individual needs of each child. Administrative staff member Diah Sari Wijayanti stated,

“To complete the registration process, children submit specific administrative documents including a registration form with complete biodata, a copy of the Family Card (KK), a copy of the birth certificate, and the Child Identity Card (KIA). The goal is for the institution to know the child's identity so that it can provide maximum service. Sometimes there are children with disabilities who suddenly stop attending without any notice. We can visit their homes, use persuasive approaches to ensure that

their children continue to receive educational services. Registration is free of charge. If there are parents who are less capable, we provide cross-subsidies. Everything is done to ensure that children receive their right to education, including those with special needs.”

Both regular children and CWSN have the right to participate in various aspects of life, including decision-making that affects themselves. This includes the right to participate in social, educational, and cultural activities without discrimination, as well as the right to express opinions, verbally or non-verbally. Additionally, both regular children and CWSN have the right not to experience discrimination based on race, religion, gender, or disability.

#### ***Family environment and alternative care cluster***

The RA Al-Madani was established with the view of being a child-friendly school, which accepts differences and is non-discriminatory. This aligns with the fundamental concept of inclusive education. An inclusive institution comprises of four interrelated components, which include children without special needs, special assistance teachers, parents, and CWSN.

The services offered at RA Al-Madani include study groups for children aged 3-4 years, 4-5 years, and 5-6 years, as well as childcare parks, Al-Qur'an Education parks, and CWSN handling centers. Additionally, the institution offers a premium service known as neurofeedback therapy, which utilizes the latest technology to train brain function and improve neural pathways. This therapy, also known as EEG Biofeedback, is particularly effective for treating brain dysregulation issues such as ADHD, ADD, OCD, depression, anxiety disorders, emotional instability, behavioral disorders, as well as conditions like autism, seizures, cerebral palsy, and others. Brain Mapping examinations are used to diagnose these psychological problems.

Neurofeedback Therapy generally provides several benefits, including increased optimal brain function. For patients undergoing Neurofeedback Therapy, optimal brain function can help restore performance and productivity in daily life, improve memory and focus, reduce anxiety and depression, and support progress in the psychological treatment being undertaken.

#### ***Basic health and welfare cluster***

The RA Al-Madani places great emphasis on Basic Health and Welfare. This is demonstrated by the provision of excellent services in schools, collaboration with professionals, and activities conducted both inside and outside the school premises. The Basic Health and Welfare cluster for CWSN is a crucial aspect that must be prioritized in efforts to fulfill the rights of CWSN in the health and welfare sector. CWSN has the same rights as other normal children with regard to access to basic health services, including immunization services, child health services, and adequate nutrition tailored to their age and needs. The government and all related parties have an obligation to ensure that CWSN has equal access to basic health services, without discrimination and with consideration given to their special needs.



CWSN also has the right to optimal welfare, including in educational, social, and economic aspects. This includes access to inclusive education that caters to their needs, access to child-friendly and disability-friendly facilities and environments, as well as social and economic support necessary for their development and full participation in society. When implementing the basic health and welfare cluster for CWSN, it is important to observe the principle of inclusion, which entails ensuring that CWSN is fully included in various programs and activities focusing on the health and welfare of children. Efforts should also be made to identify and overcome barriers to physical, communication, and social services that may impede CWSN's access to basic health and welfare services. Moreover, active participation from CWSN and their families should be encouraged in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of relevant programs and policies. Furthermore, protection against discrimination, violence, and exploitation must also be a concern in the basic health and welfare of CWSN, ensuring their rights are fully protected in accordance with recognized international conventions.

#### ***Education, utilization of free time and culture cluster***

At RA Al-Madani, there are many activities related to education, leisure, and culture. Learning should not only take place within the school environment but also outside of it. Introducing local culture to children will instill love and pride for their homeland from an early age. Homeroom teacher Aya Sovia stated,

“We often organize field trips, such as visits to museums, performing religious rituals in the hajj dormitory, visiting children's libraries, storyteller communities, and much more. This is to ensure that these children, especially those with special needs, feel accepted in their social environment and also get to know the local culture.”

Individualized approaches, using various teaching methods, and support services such as mentoring and special education should be part of the CWSN education cluster. RA Al-Madani strives to actively involve experts, families, and the community to ensure that CWSN have equal access to leisure activities that can improve their quality of life, such as sports, arts, culture, and recreation. Efforts are also made to remove physical, communication, and social barriers that may hinder CWSN participation in recreational activities, as well as to ensure the necessary support and accommodations according to their needs. Inclusive and participatory approaches should be applied in the cultural cluster for CWSN by involving them in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of cultural activities. Special education teacher Anissa Salsabila Utami explained,

“We design individual learning programs for each CWSN, involving many parties, including parents. This indeed focuses on interventions for the specific needs of children. However, we also facilitate CWSN to participate like their regular peers in every cultural performance, such as dancing, singing regional songs, participating in traditional games, and more.”

### *Special protection cluster*

RA Al-Madani is an inclusive educational institution that serves as a learning resource center for CWSN. The institution has collaborated with several schools, universities, government agencies, and the community to provide maximum services to all children, without discrimination, bullying, or violence. It conducts outreach activities, focus group discussions, home visits, and childcare as forms of special protection.

However, CWSN are at higher risk of experiencing violence, neglect, and exploitation. Therefore, the special protection cluster for CWSN must involve efforts to prevent, identify, and handle cases of violence, neglect, and exploitation with sensitivity to their needs. Efforts must be made to provide support, protection, and recovery for CWSN who are victims of violence, neglect, or exploitation.

CWSN are entitled to inclusive, quality education and rehabilitation services tailored to their needs. The special protection cluster for CWSN includes efforts to ensure equal access to education and rehabilitation services, including special education support as needed. The RA headmaster, Husnul Khatimah, emphasizes,

“Support must be provided in a sensitive manner to the specific needs of CWSN, including curriculum modifications, teaching methods, and child-friendly and disability-friendly learning environments. We strive to maximize teacher competency, build synergistic cooperation with various parties, collaborate with parents, and provide facilities that facilitate children with disabilities. However, because this infrastructure, both school facilities and interventions, requires significant costs, we still need greater support, especially from the government. So far, funding support has relied on foundations.”

## **Discussion**

### *Breaking the barriers in early childhood inclusive education*

The teachers in the study had definitions of disability that reflected a social relational perspective, emphasizing their role in adapting practices to promote inclusion (Farmer et al., 2019; Li & Ruppap, 2021). However, there were indications of underlying ableism and deficit views of disability among some participants. The study emphasized the need for teachers and parents to critically reflect on their beliefs and assumptions about disability, challenge discriminatory views, and address underlying ableism. The presence of ableism and deficit views raises questions about the true understanding of inclusion and whether the reported levels of inclusion may be influenced by ableist misunderstandings (Cologon, 2022). It's crucial for teachers and parents to bridge this gap by recognizing and addressing their unexamined assumptions and beliefs that may contribute to barriers to inclusion. Teachers play a critical role in identifying and challenging these barriers, and their perspectives on the barriers are important in adapting early childhood practices (Shogren et al., 2015). This study illustrates several obstacles to inclusive education, including negative perceptions of parents and the community, lack of outreach, support from the government and organizations

working in the field of inclusive education, the lack of availability of supporting infrastructure and the difficulty of obtaining teacher training at an affordable cost.

Teachers adopting a strength-based perspective, focusing on what children can do, can better support inclusion. Supporting teachers in adopting a strength-based perspective when identifying and challenging barriers to inclusion is crucial (Kewanian et al., 2021). Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of identifying and addressing specific barriers to promote inclusion in centers. Applying social relational understandings to inclusive practice enables the identification and resolution of barriers related to children's activities and well-being (Layton & Steel, 2015). This approach recognizes children as diverse and capable individuals, ensuring their full participation.

Considering resources within the specific contexts and cultures of centers can help avoid a deficit-focused approach and ensure context-specific resources. Funding was also recognized as a potential barrier to children's inclusion (Roberts & Simpson, 2016; Shields & Synnot, 2016). The findings show that funding is indeed supported by a property company owned by the principal's family foundation. but the development of inclusive schools cannot forever depend on the only third-party donor. Insufficient funding can limit the availability and quality of educational programs and resources, such as specialized teaching staff, classroom materials, assistive technologies, and facilities that are necessary to meet the diverse needs of children (Henly & Adams, 2018; Pivik et al., 2002). This can disproportionately affect children with disabilities, those from low-income backgrounds, or those living in marginalized communities. However, this limited understanding of environmental barriers in centers indicated the importance of recognizing aspects of inclusive environments.

Moving on to inclusive cultures and reflective practice, teachers and parents in the study reported positive and inclusive attitudes, suggesting the presence of inclusive cultures. However, it's essential to consider inclusive cultures holistically and ensure they don't perpetuate ableism. Aligning inclusive visions and aims among teachers and parents is advantageous for fostering collaborative relationships within inclusive cultures (Samuels, 2018). Establishing strengths-based attitudes within inclusive cultures is crucial for the successful implementation of inclusive education. Inclusive cultures encompass various elements such as philosophy, climate, democratic leadership, collaboration, attention to learner diversity, resources, and parent involvement (Gross et al., 2015).

Throughout the study, flexible, collaborative, and reflective approaches were identified as important for personalizing practices to promote children's inclusion. Teachers suggested a private social media group for supporting collaborative decision-making. Teachers have a professional responsibility to respect and maintain the rights and dignity of children, families, colleagues, and communities (Lee et al., 2017). Sharing content related to children on social media raises questions about privacy and the right to share information. Teachers must uphold their confidentiality obligations and consider potential complications arising from social media platforms collecting and sharing information. Collaboration, as an important aspect of inclusive practice, involves overcoming obstacles collectively (Ainscow, 2016).

### *Leadership and its impact on inclusive education management*

According to Bolman and Deal's leadership theory (Bolman & Deal, 2017; Pourrajab & Ghani, 2016), effective leadership is crucial in inclusive education and greatly influences its management. Inclusive education aims to provide equal opportunities and support for all learners, regardless of their diverse needs and backgrounds. To achieve this goal, strong and effective leadership is essential at various levels, including school administrators, principals, and educational policymakers. The theory suggests four frames that leaders should adopt to effectively promote inclusion and manage inclusive education: structural, human resources, political, and symbolic.

In the structural frame, effective leaders focus on the organizational structure and processes of inclusive education. They establish clear expectations for teacher practices, ensure that necessary modifications are planned and implemented, and make program accommodations to meet the diverse needs of students (Stronge & Xu, 2021). These leaders create a supportive environment by setting expectations, providing resources, and facilitating communication among stakeholders (Sun & Henderson, 2017). However, the study found that even since the recruitment of staff and teachers, the leadership of RA Al-Madani has established competency standards and principles that are required for staff and teachers in inclusive schools. The school's commitment to capacity building is evident through the implementation of various training programs and the provision of reference books, with even the school principal personally funding these initiatives. Continuous supervision and evaluation of the educational process are conducted to ensure the maintenance of high-quality inclusive education.

Another aspect of the structural frame involves effectively communicating expectations for working with children with disabilities (Bryant et al., 2019). At RA Al-Madani, the preparation of learning programs for children with disabilities involves collaboration among teachers, psychologists, and parents. This multidisciplinary approach ensures that the educational plans cater to the specific needs and abilities of the students. To strengthen the inclusive learning environment, the school engages in various activities involving parents. These activities aim to promote a positive and supportive climate for all students. Parenting activities, such as workshops and seminars, provide parents with information and strategies to support their children's learning and inclusion. Sharing sessions with practitioners and experts allow parents to exchange experiences and gain insights into best practices. Additionally, visits to places that support inclusive practices provide firsthand exposure to environments that foster inclusivity.

The human resources frame emphasizes the importance of individuals and their development. Effective leaders in inclusive education understand the significance of collaborative consultation and building relationships among professionals, families, and teachers (McLeskey et al., 2017). They foster teamwork, define roles and responsibilities, gather information, set goals and strategies, and monitor progress. By promoting collaboration, leaders create an inclusive culture where all stakeholders actively contribute to the educational process. The study highlighted effective practices related to the human resources frame, such as building partnerships with families, facilitating collaborations with

related service providers, fostering collaboration within the program, and recognizing the value of teacher education and professional development specifically related to children with disabilities. Collaboration among professionals and stakeholders is emphasized in previous literature as a key factor in successful inclusive education (Ainscow, 2016; Shogren et al., 2015). The study also observed collaboration among leader within administrative teams, where responsibilities and roles were shared, and structured information sharing among teachers, families, and related service providers in certain programs.

Regarding training and educational needs, the study's findings align with previous literature that emphasizes the importance of additional education and training to facilitate inclusion (Marquis et al., 2016). Administrators in the study confirmed the need for teachers to receive training specifically related to strategies, adaptations, and effective assessment for supporting children with disabilities. Administrators provided emotional even financial support to teachers through direct assistance, collaborative problem-solving, and the provision of professional development resources. Observations indicated that administrators shared strategies, welcomed teacher suggestions, and expressed praise, which are valued practices in previous research. Personal experiences with disability influenced administrators' leadership styles, with some being more inclined to include children with disabilities based on their past experiences.

The political frame acknowledges the distribution of power and the need for advocacy (Khalifa et al., 2016). Effective leaders in inclusive education advocate for the rights of students with disabilities and ensure their voices are heard (Carter & Abawi, 2018; Theoharis et al., 2020). They address external pressures and concerns from families, use data to define goals and standards, and support families through the referral process. By being politically astute, leaders navigate the complexities of inclusive education and safeguard the interests of students with disabilities (Burke, 2013). The observed leadership practices in the study align with the political frame, particularly when program administrators connect children and families with external resources. They actively network with agencies serving children with disabilities, inform them of their program's intention to accommodate such children, and encourage them to refer families. Effective leaders also listen to the voices of teachers, recognizing the importance of their insights and experiences (Borrero et al., 2018).

The symbolic frame revolves around inspiring others and creating shared meaning and vision (Dartey-Baah, 2015). Effective leaders in inclusive education inspire and motivate others by articulating a compelling vision for inclusive practices (DeMatthews, 2015). They adapt their leadership approaches to different situations, intuitively shifting frames. Through their actions and communication, leaders cultivate a shared understanding of the importance and benefits of inclusive education, fostering a sense of belonging and purpose among stakeholders. In the symbolic frame, the study's emerging themes reflected an inclusive philosophy and expanded perspectives on disability that encompassed a wider range of special needs.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations/Implications**

The management of inclusive education at RA Al-Madani involves key steps and considerations, including admissions committee formation, needs analysis, student

identification and assessment, grouping based on needs and abilities, and the development of personalized learning plans and interventions. Continuous learning and openness to criticism are emphasized for teachers and staff, with a rigorous selection process for teachers and participation in training programs. Facilities and infrastructure management ensure accessibility and a suitable learning environment. Effective communication and public relations management are fostered through parenting programs, communication platforms, and partnerships with stakeholders. The implementation of inclusive education at the school has significant implications for student learning outcomes, parent empowerment, and the improvement of children's rights across various clusters.

To enhance the management of inclusive education at RA Al-Madani, the following recommendations are proposed: strengthen the admissions committee, enhance personalized learning plans, invest in continuous professional development, improve facilities and infrastructure, enhance communication and engagement, and establish a monitoring and evaluation system. These steps aim to ensure accurate student identification, provide tailored interventions, promote teacher growth, create an accessible environment, foster collaboration with stakeholders, and track progress effectively. Implementing these recommendations will contribute to a more inclusive and supportive educational experience for all students.

#### **Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest.

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