

School Principals' Strategies in Managing Inclusive Education at a Junior High School in Humbang Hasundutan Regency

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Abstract. This study aimed to analyze school principals' strategies in managing inclusive education by applying management functions principles, and to identify hindrances to such implementation at a state junior high school in Humbang Hasundutan Regency. This is qualitative in nature with a descriptive method. Data were collected through observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation with school principals, vice-principals of schools, guidance and counselling teachers, and subject teachers. The data was analyzed using an interactive model of Miles and Huberman's, comprising data reduction, data presentation, verification, and conclusion. The validity of the data was tested through a credibility test. The study reveals that there are three strategies which school principals employ in managing inclusive education, such as planning, organizing and coordinating teachers, and supervising subject teachers, homeroom teachers, and parents. Several hindrances are involved, including a lack of teacher competence, inadequate facilities, and parents' limited understanding of inclusive education.

Keywords: school principals' strategies, management, inclusive education

1. Background

Inclusive education is crucial, as it concerns every child's right to a decent education free from discrimination. The right to education is guaranteed in the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia in Article 31 Paragraph 1 stating that every citizen has the right to education, and it is also mandated in the National Education System Law Article 3, emphasizing that education is organized democratically without any discrimination, as well as Law No. 8/2016 concerning disability person. Children with special needs have the right to quality education through special education units or through an inclusive education system that includes them in the learning process with other children. This means that every child, including those with special needs have the right to quality education, either through special schools that provide special services or through regular schools that include children with special needs in classes with their peers without discrimination.

Initially, the implementation of inclusive education in Indonesia was limited, through the government designating pilot schools. These designated schools were tasked with providing educational services for children with special needs within regular schools. However, in a subsequent development, the spirit of inclusive education has become more widespread, with the legal basis of the Minister of National Education Regulation No. 70/2009 concerning

inclusive education which confirms that every school can accept children with special needs and the Minister of Education and Culture Regulation No. 17/2017 about PPDB, stipulating the affirmative path as one of the mechanisms for accepting new students, including students from vulnerable groups. This emphasizes that all schools are required to accept children with special needs through the PPDB affirmative process, making inclusion no longer an option but a national obligation. Schools that have the opportunity to implement inclusive education must receive training and workshops on inclusive education learning systems in accordance with applicable guidelines.

The implementation of inclusive education at Humbang Hasundutan Regency Middle Schools began in 2023, but it remains limited to 4 (four) schools designated by the Head of the Humbang Hasundutan Office, namely SMPN 1 Paranginan, SMPN 1 Pollung, SMPN 4 Pollung, and SMPN 5 Aeksongsang Parlilitan. However, in subsequent developments, with the implementation of new student admissions through 4 pathways, namely domicile, achievement, affirmation, and transfer. The affirmation pathway is a new student admission selection pathway (PPDB) intended for students from underprivileged families and people with disabilities to ensure equal access to education. Therefore, this pathway affects the obligation to accept children with special needs in every school. Schools are not allowed to reject ABK due to limitations but must provide inclusive education services within their capabilities.

Acceptance of students with special needs has an impact on the management of education in schools, because if a student with special needs is identified, the principal plays a strategic role in inclusive education as a visionary, manager, and motivator who builds a diversity-friendly school culture, provides facilities, mentors teachers, and mobilizes all school members to create an environment where all students, including those with special needs, can learn and develop equally, by involving parents and the community as partners. However, implementing inclusive education is not as easy as managing a regular school, because of various obstacles faced by teachers, such as limited facilities and infrastructure, a lack of teacher skills, and a lack of support from parents. The results of research by Sentia Alisah et al. (2024) show that the implementation of inclusive education still faces challenges, including: a lack of understanding of teachers and assistant teachers about children with special needs, a lack of teachers with special education degrees (PLB), and a lack of trust from parents of students in schools. Likewise, Mukti et al. (2023) in their research showed that obstacles in inclusive education include inadequate numbers of special guidance teachers, limited competence among regular teachers, misperceptions about children with special needs, an unadopted curriculum, and a lack of facilities and infrastructure.

Based on the description above, the researcher wishes to conduct research on "Principal Strategies in Managing Inclusive Education at Public Junior High Schools (SMP) in Humbang Hasundutan Regency." The goal is to describe the steps implemented by principals in managing inclusive education, the management functions they implement, and the obstacles and barriers encountered in their implementation.

Strategy is an outline of a course of action to achieve predetermined goals (Djamarah 2002). This means that a strategy is an action plan that directs actions in a specific way/method according

to the situation and conditions to achieve goals effectively and efficiently. Furthermore, according to Marrus (2018), strategy is a process by which top leaders determine plans that focus on the organisation's long-term goals, accompanied by the development of methods and efforts to achieve these goals. This definition emphasises that strategy is the concrete actions or steps taken by leaders to achieve an organizational goal or policy. Strategy is a long-term plan designed to achieve specific goals, policies, and objectives. Griffin's strategy is a comprehensive plan for achieving organizational goals. Strategy is a comprehensive plan for accomplishing an organization's goals. This means that strategy is not just a plan, but also an integrated framework for directing all resources to effectively achieve the organization's principles, policies, and objectives.

In the world of education, strategy is defined as a plan containing a series of activities designed to achieve educational goals. Strategy is also defined as a plan, method, or series of activities designed to achieve a particular educational goal. Strategy is a series of processes for determining a framework that focuses on the long-term goals of an organization or institution, as well as efforts to achieve a predetermined target. Based on the several definitions above, the principal's strategy referred to in this study is the concrete steps or actions taken by the principal in planning, implementing, and supervising education to achieve long-term goals through empowering resources within the educational unit.

Management is a term used in management science. According to Terry (1977), management is a unique process, consisting of planning, organizing, implementing, and controlling to achieve established goals using human resources and other resources. This is in line with Handoko's (2006) opinion, management is the process of planning, organising, directing, and supervising the efforts of organisational members and the use of resources to achieve established organisational goals. Then, Hasibuan (2006), management is the science and art of regulating the process of utilizing human resources and other resources effectively and efficiently to achieve certain goals. These three theories emphasize that management is a systematic and continuous process that includes planning, organizing, implementing/directing, and controlling organizational activities. This process is carried out through collaboration between organizational members by utilizing human resources and other resources effectively and efficiently to achieve established goals. Thus, management is not only understood as a technical activity, but also as the science and art of coordinating various resources to optimally achieve organizational goals.

According to Smith (2006), inclusive comes from the word "inclusion," which means unification, meaning the effort to integrate children with disabilities (children with special needs) into a regular, comprehensive educational environment. He also emphasized that inclusion is not simply placing children with special needs in mainstream classes, but rather ensuring they receive educational services appropriate to their needs without feeling neglected. This definition aligns with Armstrong & Spandagou (2010), who stated that "Inclusion is about all students with disabilities participating in all aspects of school life within the regular school to provide them with access to the same educational experiences as other students and full citizenship in an inclusive society." This means that inclusion is not just about placing students with disabilities in

regular schools, but also about ensuring that they actively participate in all aspects of school life. Furthermore, Sapon & Shevin (2007) state that inclusion can be defined as a special education service system that requires every child with special needs and children with differences to receive educational services in nearby schools, in regular classes together with their peers. Biantoro and Setiawan (2021) state that inclusive education is an educational approach that accommodates children's needs regardless of their physical, social, and cultural conditions. According to UNESCO (2008), inclusive education is an educational approach that views each child as a unique individual with their own needs and potential. Furthermore, Regulation of the Minister of National Education (Permendiknas) Number 70 of 2009 explains that inclusive education is a system of organizing education that provides opportunities for all students who have disabilities and have the potential for intelligence and/or special talents to participate in education or learning in an educational environment together with students in general.

Inclusive education emphasizes respect for diversity, fulfilling individual potential needs and creating a learning environment that allows all students to learn together, whether they have obstacles or strengths, to develop optimally. Inclusive education does not only refer to academics, but also to the values of inclusivity and respect for diversity, as stated by Irdamurni & Rahmiati (2015) that inclusive education respects diversity, is non-discriminatory towards children's rights, and respects that everyone is part of something valuable in togetherness in society. From a humanist psychology perspective, every human being is considered a unique individual (Ahmadi 2011). Thus, inclusive education is a concrete manifestation of efforts to realize justice, equality, and the right to education for all children.

2. Research Methodology

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach. The study was conducted at Public Junior High Schools in Humbang Hasundutan Regency (UPT SMP Negeri 001 Pasar Doloksanggul, UPT SMP Negeri 026 Pearung, UPT SMP Negeri I Pollung, UPT SMP Negeri 04 Pollung, UPT SMP Negeri 016 Nagasaribu V) from May to August 2025. The data sources (informants) in this study were the principal/vice principal and teachers. Data collection techniques used observation, interviews, and documents. Data validity was assessed by extending the research, using triangulation, and conducting member checks. Data analysis techniques started from data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusions/verification.

3. Findings and Analysis

Based on the results of research on 5 (five) State Junior High Schools (SMP) that have implemented inclusive education in Humbang Hasundutan Regency, it was found that students with special needs experienced specific learning difficulties, communication and interaction disorders, autism, hearing impairments, unstable emotions, and 2 (two) students with physical motoric disabilities/physical disabilities. One student experienced a muscle movement disorder due to bone tuberculosis, and another student experienced impaired brain nerve function, so that he used a tube in his head. In general, these findings were identified during the acceptance of new students (PPDB). Awareness of the presence of students with special needs in each school inevitably prompts school principals to implement inclusive education. Therefore, the principal makes various efforts by socializing to all elements of the school to provide a sense of

comfort to students with special needs, instructing teachers to adjust the curriculum, using learning approaches, methods, techniques, media and assessments that are appropriate to the needs of students, appointing guidance and counselling teachers as companions, and establishing cooperation with parents.

The efforts made by the principals of Humbang Hasundutan Public Middle Schools in managing inclusive education are aligned with the implementation flow of inclusive education as stipulated by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology. The guide explains the steps of inclusive education, starting with the PPDB (Enrollment Registration), identification, assessment, child profiles, learning planning, learning implementation, assessment and evaluation of learning, and learning outcome reports. This means that inclusive education is implemented at every Humbang Hasundutan Public Middle School, from PPDB activities related to the government policy on accepting new students through the affirmative pathway. The affirmative pathway is a selection pathway designed for students from economically disadvantaged families and people with disabilities, with the main goal of ensuring equal access to education for all Indonesian children, regardless of the child's economic background or physical condition. Prospective registered students are identified based on observations, interviews, and documents such as registration forms and medical certificates. The results of data collection on children with special needs will provide information on the problems, obstacles, strengths, and needs, thus serving as the basis for schools to implement inclusive education and for teachers to design learning programs according to student profiles. Student learning profiles are also used to determine learning methods and evaluate students with special needs. Student learning profiles should contain at least the following information: a. Identity, b. Academic ability, c. Social-emotional ability, d. Motor skills, e. Health condition, and f. Student independence.

Based on the assessment and student profile, the teacher designs a learning program that is appropriate for students with special needs, determines learning outcomes that are appropriate to the needs and conditions of students with special needs, and takes a more appropriate approach. Furthermore, the planned learning program is implemented by the teacher during the learning process in the classroom. During the learning process, the teacher modifies the content (material), questions, tools, time, place, and learning methods so that students with special needs can master the expected competencies in learning. For example: The teacher does not force all the content or learning material to be mastered by students, learning is sometimes done in the same classroom, outside the classroom, in the library, the guidance counselor's room, at home, or even given additional tutoring by the teacher. The implementation of learning is often done repeatedly or drill. This method is in accordance with Edward Thorndike's theory, which strongly emphasizes the principle of "law of exercise", learning will be successful with lots of practice and repetition. This approach is used for students who experience learning difficulties. Furthermore, teachers strive to teach in a very friendly manner, using simple language that children can easily understand. In one school, SMP Negeri 01 Pollung, teachers even felt challenged to teach students with special needs.

The results of this study also show that the principal and teachers' strategies in managing

inclusive education implement a humanistic approach (humanistic or related to human values), which emphasizes acceptance, appreciation, individual differences, and student backgrounds, and the creation of a comfortable environment for all students. Meeting the needs, interests, and potential of all students, along with providing personalized support, helps them reach their full potential, including those with special needs, in an equitable and supportive learning environment. Providing equal opportunities for all students to develop their academic, social, and emotional potential. This humanistic theory, pioneered by Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers, places humans at the center of learning and believes that every individual has the potential to grow and develop. Students with special needs, if educated with compassion, will grow into confident, happy, and mentally healthy individuals.

The results of this study also indicate that supervision of inclusive education in schools is carried out by all relevant elements within the educational unit, including the principal, homeroom teachers, subject teachers, and guidance counselors. Supervision through coordination in the management of inclusive education aims to ensure that all activities align with the initial plans and objectives. Coordination ensures that various inclusive education activities run in harmony and balance to achieve learning objectives in inclusive classrooms. If deviations are found, corrective action will be taken. This finding aligns with Sondang P. Siagian's theory, which states that supervision is the process of observing the implementation of all activities within an organization to ensure compliance with established plans. Hasibuan,

Supervision is the process of observing the implementation of all activities to ensure they align with established plans. This is also supported by George R. Terry's theory, which defines supervision as the process of determining standards to be achieved, then evaluating, revising, and adjusting them to align with existing plans and standards. Furthermore, Manullang (2001: 172) states that the purpose of supervision is to observe what happens and compare it with what should happen, with the aim of promptly reporting any deviations or obstacles to management so that corrective action can be taken.

This research also shows that junior high schools in Humbang Hasundutan do not yet have human resources with specialized skills to handle children with special needs. Schools still rely on subject matter teachers and guidance counselors. Of the five schools used as research sites, only one teacher had received training from the Humbang Hasundutan Education Office, while the others had not. Similarly, facilities and funding still depend on each school's available budget. Cooperation with parents is well-established in some schools, but in others, some parents remain indifferent to their children's well-being, even believing their children are perfectly normal and have no challenges. In fact, information obtained from the principal and teachers of SMP Negeri 01 Pollung indicates that there are still parents of illiterate students.

4. Conclusion

The principal of Humbang Hasundutan Public Middle School implemented an inclusive education management strategy through planning that identified student needs, strengthened collaboration between teachers, adopted a humanistic approach, and coordinated supervision. However, this strategy still faces obstacles, including limited human resources, training, facilities, and parental support.

5. Recommendations

Principals need to strengthen strategic planning for inclusive services and teacher competency development. Teachers are expected to implement inclusive pedagogy and improve communication with parents. The Department of Education needs to provide ongoing training, specialized support staff, and facilities and infrastructure suitable for children with special needs. Parents are expected to be open and cooperative in supporting their children's development.

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