



The Role of School Principals in Improving Teacher and Education Personnel Performance for Inclusive School Management

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive education requires school management that can guarantee equal access, participation, and learning outcomes for all students, including children with special needs (ABK). However, field findings in several elementary and junior high schools in Samarinda City show that the performance of teachers and educational staff in planning, implementing, and evaluating inclusive learning is still not optimal, and the support of school principals has not been consistent and structured. This Community Service Program (PKM) aims to strengthen the role of principals in improving the performance of teachers and educational staff through the strengthening of visionary, transformational, and instructional leadership in the context of inclusive school management. The program was implemented through a series of activities, including needs analysis, workshops on developing inclusive vision and policies, assistance in developing adaptive learning tools, as well as academic supervision and collaborative reflection with school principals, regular teachers, special assistant teachers, and educational staff. The results of the activities show an increase in school principals' understanding of inclusive education principles and policies, improvements in the quality of adaptive learning planning by teachers, and strengthened interprofessional collaboration in serving children with special needs in schools. This PKM recommends the development of a sustainable mentoring program and policy support from the education office to strengthen an inclusive school culture.

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is a strategic approach within the education system that emphasizes the fulfillment of the right to learn for all students without discrimination, including children with special needs (ABK). This paradigm requires schools to not only accept student diversity but also be able to manage learning, services, and school environments that are responsive to individual needs. In Indonesia, the commitment to inclusive education has been affirmed through various regulations, including Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System and Minister of National Education Regulation Number 70 of 2009 concerning Inclusive Education, which positions regular schools as the primary vehicle for providing educational services for all children. Although inclusive education policies have been established, their implementation at the school level still faces various challenges. Several studies and field findings indicate that the performance of teachers and education personnel in planning, implementing, and evaluating inclusive learning is not yet optimal. Limited competency in adaptive learning, minimal collaboration between regular teachers and special education assistants, and the lack of a truly inclusive school culture are common issues. These conditions indicate a gap between normative inclusive policies and actual practices in schools.

In this context, the role of the principal is a key factor in determining the success of inclusive school management. The principal serves not only as an administrator but also as a visionary, transformational, and instructional leader capable of mobilizing all school resources. Through effective leadership, the principal is expected to improve the performance of teachers and education staff, build professional collaboration, and foster a school culture that values diversity and is oriented towards equitable educational services for all students.

However, the reality in many schools shows that the principal's leadership role in the context of inclusive education is not yet implemented consistently and in a structured manner. Support for academic supervision, ongoing professional development, and strengthening of resource management are often sporadic. Therefore, systematic efforts are needed to strengthen the capacity of principals to fulfill their strategic role in improving the performance of teachers and education staff, the primary foundation of inclusive school management.

Based on this background, this article aims to examine and analyze the role of school principals in improving the performance of teachers and education staff to support inclusive school management. This study is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of inclusive educational leadership and serve as a practical reference for school principals, educators, and policymakers in strengthening the implementation of inclusive education in schools.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is an educational approach that guarantees the right of every student to receive equal educational services without discrimination, including for children with special needs (ABK). UNESCO (2020) emphasizes that inclusive education focuses not only on access, but also on active

participation and meaningful learning outcomes for all students. In Indonesia, inclusive education is legally regulated through Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System and is reinforced by Minister of National Education Regulation Number 70 of 2009, which states that regular schools are required to adapt their curriculum, infrastructure, and learning services to suit the individual needs of students.

Key characteristics of inclusive education include an adaptive curriculum, differentiated learning strategies, flexible assessment, and a school culture that values diversity. Research shows that the success of inclusive education is greatly influenced by the readiness of a school's human resources, particularly teachers and education staff, as well as managerial support from the principal (Sari et al., 2023; Salma et al., 2025).

The Role of the Principal in Inclusive School Management

The principal holds a strategic position as the determinant of the direction of school policy and organizational culture. In the context of inclusive education, the principal plays a leadership role, translating national policies into operational practices at the school level. Aminatuzzuhriyah et al. (2025) emphasized that the principal serves as the primary driver in developing an inclusive vision, coordinating resources, and ensuring the involvement of all school members in the implementation of inclusive education.

The principal's role in inclusive school management includes formulating an inclusive vision and policies, managing resources, developing professional development for teachers and education staff, and creating an inclusive school culture. Pasaribu et al. (2023) demonstrated that principals with strong managerial and leadership skills are able to improve the school's readiness to provide services to students with special needs, despite limited resources and external support.

Principal Leadership Style

Educational management literature shows that the effectiveness of the principal's role is greatly influenced by the leadership style applied. In the context of inclusive schools, visionary, transformational, and instructional leadership are considered most relevant.

Visionary leadership emphasizes the principal's ability to formulate and communicate a school vision oriented toward inclusion and diversity (Bass & Avolio, 1994). This vision serves as the foundation for developing policies, programs, and school culture. Transformational leadership focuses on empowering teachers and education staff through motivation, intellectual stimulation, and attention to individual needs, thereby fostering attitudinal change and commitment to inclusive values (Rismita et al., 2024).

Meanwhile, instructional leadership positions the principal as the direct facilitator of the learning process. The principal plays a role in academic supervision, adaptive curriculum development, and improving the quality of inclusive learning strategies. Research shows that instructional leadership contributes significantly to improving teacher performance and the quality of learning in inclusive classrooms (Fuaddah et al., 2025).

Teacher Performance in Inclusive Education

Teacher performance in the context of inclusive education is measured not only by their ability to deliver material but also by their competence in designing and implementing learning that is responsive to student diversity. Dimensions of teacher performance include adaptive learning planning, differentiated learning implementation, flexible assessment, and the ability to collaborate with special assistant teachers and other parties (Mulyani & Abidinsyah, 2021).

Various studies have shown that teacher performance in inclusive schools varies. Some teachers demonstrate a strong commitment to inclusive values, but still experience difficulties with the technical aspects of adaptive learning and alternative assessments (Andriyan et al., 2023). Principal support through academic supervision and ongoing training has been shown to play a crucial role in improving teacher competence and performance in inclusive schools.

Performance of Educational Personnel in Inclusive School Management

Education personnel play a crucial role in supporting the smooth management of inclusive schools, yet they often receive less attention in scientific studies. They contribute to the provision of inclusion-friendly administrative services, the maintenance of accessible facilities and infrastructure, and the creation of a safe and comfortable school climate for all students. Literature shows that the performance of educational staff is significantly influenced by the principal's management system and leadership. Principals who are able to build a collaborative work culture and provide ongoing coaching will encourage educational staff to play an active role in supporting inclusive education (Serang et al., 2024).

Relevant Previous Research

Several previous studies have confirmed a positive relationship between principal leadership and teacher performance in the context of inclusive education. Aminatuzzuhriyah et al. (2025) found that principals' transformational leadership can increase teacher commitment to implementing inclusion policies. Rismita et al. (2024) emphasized the importance of instructional leadership in improving the quality of inclusive learning, despite the ongoing constraints of limited teacher training. However, most previous research has focused on the role of the principal and teacher performance, while studies that simultaneously link the principal's role, teacher performance, and the performance of educational staff within a single inclusive school management framework are still limited. Therefore, this article aims to fill this gap by presenting a more comprehensive and integrated literature review.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach with a literature review. This method was chosen because the research aimed to examine, analyze, and synthesize various scientific findings related to the role of school principals in improving teacher and education staff performance to support inclusive school management, without directly collecting field data.

Literature reviews enable researchers to gain a comprehensive overview of concepts, theories, empirical findings, and current research trends relevant to principal leadership, school human resource performance, and inclusive education. This approach is also suitable for identifying research gaps and formulating theoretical and practical implications.

Research Data Sources

The data sources in this study are secondary data, obtained from various scientific literature and official documents, including:

1. Accredited national and international journal articles that discuss:
 - The role and leadership style of the principal
 - Performance of teachers and education staff
 - School management and inclusive education
2. Books, reference books, and book chapters relevant to educational management and school leadership.
3. Education policy documents, such as:
 - Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System
 - Minister of National Education Regulation Number 70 of 2009 concerning Inclusive Education
 - Other policy documents that support the implementation of inclusive schools

The literature used is limited to publications from the 2021–2025 period to ensure relevance to the current context of inclusive education policy and practice.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection is carried out through several systematic stages as follows:

1. Database Determination
Literature was searched through scientific databases such as Google Scholar, DOAJ, Sinta, as well as university journal portals and academic publishers.
2. Determining Keywords
Keywords used include:
 - “The role of the principal”
 - “Inclusive leadership”
 - “Teacher performance”
 - “Performance of educational staff”
 - “Inclusive school management”
 - “Inclusive education”
3. Inclusion Criteria
Literature is selected if:
 - Published in 2021–2025
 - Relevant to the topics of principal leadership, teacher/educational staff performance, and inclusive education
 - In the form of research articles, reviews, or theoretical studies
 - Available in full-text form

4. Exclusion Criteria

Literature is excluded if:

- Not relevant to the research focus
- Opinion-based without a clear scientific basis
- Is a duplication of the same publication

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was carried out using content analysis and thematic synthesis, with the following stages:

1. Organizing Literature

The selected literature is recorded in a matrix containing information on the author, year of publication, focus of the study, research method, and main findings.

2. Theme Categorization

Literature findings are grouped into several main themes, including:

- The role of the principal in inclusive education
- Principal leadership style (visionary, transformational, instructional)
- Teacher performance in inclusive learning
- Performance of educational staff in inclusive school management
- Supporting and inhibiting factors for the implementation of inclusive schools

3. Synthesis and Interpretation

Each theme is analyzed in depth by linking various research findings and theories, so that a complete and integrated understanding of the role of the principal in improving the performance of teachers and education personnel is obtained.

4. Drawing Conclusions

The synthesis results are used to formulate conclusions, theoretical implications, and practical recommendations for school principals, educators, and policy makers.

Data Validity

To maintain the validity and credibility of the data, this study applies the following strategies:

- Source triangulation, by comparing findings from various literature and research contexts.
- Strict literature selection, using only credible and relevant sources.
- Consistency of analysis, using the same conceptual framework in reviewing each piece of literature.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A literature review of various scientific publications from 2021–2025 shows that the role of the principal significantly contributes to improving the performance of teachers and education personnel in the context of inclusive school management. Literature findings indicate that the success of inclusive education implementation is not solely determined by policies and the availability of infrastructure, but is also significantly influenced by the quality of the principal's leadership.

In general, the results of the study can be grouped into several main findings, namely:

- (1) The principal's role as a visionary leader,
- (2) The principal's role as a transformational leader,
- (3) The principal's role as an instructional leader,
- (4) The impact of the principal's leadership on teacher performance,
- (5) The impact of the principal's leadership on the performance of educational staff, and
- (6) Supporting and inhibiting factors in improving the performance of inclusive school human resources.

The Principal's Role as a Visionary Leader

The literature review shows that effective principals in implementing inclusive education always begin by formulating a school vision and mission oriented toward inclusive values. This inclusive vision serves as a direction and foundation for formulating school policies, developing learning programs, and shaping school culture.

Literature reveals that a consistently communicated inclusive vision can increase teachers' and education staff's understanding and commitment to inclusive education. Principals who act as visionary leaders not only formally convey the vision but also embed it in daily practice through student admission policies, classroom management, and a non-discriminatory approach to students with special needs. This finding aligns with research by Aminatuzzuhriyah et al. (2025), which asserts that an inclusive vision is a key prerequisite for establishing an inclusive school culture.

The Role of the Principal as a Transformational Leader

The study also showed that the principal's transformational leadership plays a crucial role in improving the motivation, commitment, and performance of teachers and other educational staff. Principals who implement transformational leadership are able to drive a shift in teacher attitudes from merely fulfilling administrative obligations to developing an awareness and moral responsibility for inclusive education services.

Literature shows that through inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized attention, principals encourage teachers to be more open to inclusive learning innovations and collaborate with special education teachers. Transformational leadership has also proven effective in reducing resistance among some teachers and parents to the presence of children with special needs in regular schools. These findings support the research findings of Rismita et al. (2024) and Fuaddah et al. (2025), which state that transformational leadership contributes positively to the formation of a collaborative and inclusive school culture.

The Principal's Role as an Instructional Leader

The literature review shows that instructional leadership is the leadership dimension that most directly influences teacher performance improvement. Principals who fulfill instructional roles are actively involved in academic supervision, learning development, and adaptive curriculum development.

The literature reveals that constructive and reflective academic supervision encourages teachers to improve the quality of adaptive learning planning, the use of differentiation strategies, and the implementation of flexible assessments. Without strong instructional leadership, teachers tend to struggle to translate inclusion policies into classroom practice. This finding aligns with studies that suggest that principal instructional leadership is positively correlated with improved learning quality in inclusive schools.

The Impact of Principal Leadership on Teacher Performance

The results of the literature review indicate that teacher performance in inclusive schools is significantly influenced by the principal's leadership support. Teachers working under the leadership of an inclusive principal tend to show improvements in:

1. Ability to design adaptive and differentiated learning
2. Implement learning that is responsive to student needs
3. Use of flexible and developmentally oriented assessments
4. Collaboration with special assistant teachers and educational staff

However, the literature also reveals that teacher performance still faces various challenges, particularly limited technical training, high administrative burdens, and minimal ongoing mentoring. Therefore, the role of school principals in providing ongoing professional development programs is crucial.

The Impact of Principal Leadership on Educational Personnel Performance

The literature review shows that the performance of educational staff in inclusive school management is often overlooked, despite their highly strategic role. Educational staff contribute to the provision of inclusion-friendly administrative services, the management of accessible facilities and infrastructure, and the creation of a safe and comfortable school climate.

The literature reveals that principals who implement inclusive leadership are able to increase the participation and responsibility of their teaching staff through clear division of tasks, ongoing coaching, and the creation of a collaborative work culture. This suggests that improving teaching staff performance is inextricably linked to the leadership style and management systems implemented by the principal.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

The results of the literature review identified a number of supporting factors in improving the performance of teachers and education staff in inclusive schools, including:

1. Principal leadership commitment and competence
2. Collaborative and inclusive school culture
3. Government policy and regulatory support
4. Availability of professional training and mentoring programs
5. Meanwhile, frequently occurring inhibiting factors include:
6. Limited budget and infrastructure
7. Lack of specific training on inclusive education
8. Resistance from some teachers and parents
9. High administrative workload

Based on the literature review, it can be concluded that principal leadership is a central element in inclusive school management. The integration

of visionary, transformational, and instructional leadership enables principals not only to set policy direction but also to drive cultural change and significantly improve the quality of learning.

These findings confirm that improving teacher and education staff performance cannot be achieved in isolation. Principals serve as a bridge between macro policies and micro practices within schools. Therefore, strengthening principals' leadership capacity is a key strategy for ensuring the sustainability of inclusive education implementation.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on a literature review of various scientific publications from 2021–2025, it can be concluded that the role of the principal is crucial to the success of inclusive school management, particularly in improving the performance of teachers and education staff. The principal serves not only as an administrator but also as a strategic leader who directs the vision, drives cultural change, and fosters the quality of learning in the school.

This study shows that principal leadership that integrates visionary, transformational, and instructional dimensions has a positive impact on improving the performance of teachers and education personnel. Visionary leadership plays a role in establishing a shared direction and commitment to inclusive values, transformational leadership encourages motivation, empowerment, and changes in attitudes among school members, while instructional leadership contributes directly to improving the quality of inclusive learning planning and implementation.

The study also confirmed that teacher performance in inclusive schools still shows variation, particularly in adaptive learning, flexible assessment, and interprofessional collaboration. Principal support through constructive academic supervision, ongoing training, and strengthening a collaborative culture are key factors in improving teacher competence and professionalism.

In addition to teachers, educational staff play a strategic role in supporting inclusive school management, particularly in providing inclusion-friendly administrative services, managing accessible facilities and infrastructure, and creating a safe and comfortable school climate. However, a literature review indicates that the role of educational staff has received relatively little attention in school management research and practice.

Overall, this study confirms that the successful implementation of inclusive education is inextricably linked to the quality of the principal's leadership and the holistic management of the school's human resources. Without inclusive and sustainable leadership, inclusive education policies have the potential to remain normative without significantly impacting learning practices in schools.

Based on these conclusions, several recommendations can be put forward as follows:

For the Principal

Principals are advised to strengthen their role as inclusive leaders by integrating visionary, transformational, and instructional leadership in a balanced manner. Principals need to consistently internalize inclusive values in their vision, policies, and daily practices, and develop teacher supervision and development programs oriented toward adaptive and collaborative learning.

For Teachers and Education Personnel

Teachers and education personnel are expected to continuously improve their professional competencies through continuous learning, training, and cross-professional collaboration. Teachers need to strengthen their skills in differentiated learning and flexible assessment, while education personnel are expected to play an active role in supporting accessible services and an inclusive school climate.

For the Department of Education and Policy Makers

Education departments need to provide more systematic policy support and resources for inclusive schools, particularly in the form of principal leadership training, ongoing mentoring, and the provision of facilities and infrastructure to support inclusive learning. Furthermore, a reward and incentive system is needed to encourage schools' commitment to implementing inclusive education.

FURTHER STUDY

Further research is recommended to use empirical approaches, including quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods, to directly examine the relationship between principal leadership and teacher and education staff performance in inclusive schools. Further studies should also develop and test principal leadership models that integrate visionary, transformational, and instructional dimensions across contexts. Furthermore, research on the role of education staff and comparative analysis across levels and regions of inclusive schools are essential to broaden our understanding of sustainable inclusive school management practices.

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