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Challenges and Opportunities in the Policy and Practice of Inclusive Education in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah: Evidence from Cirebon Regency, Indonesia

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Abstract

Inclusive education has become a global priority aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4); however, its implementation in Islamic primary schools remains underexplored, particularly in the context of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) in Indonesia. **Objective:** This study aims to examine the challenges and opportunities in the policy and practice of inclusive education in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in Cirebon Regency, Indonesia. **Novelty:** This study contributes to the limited body of research on inclusive education in Islamic primary school contexts by providing empirical evidence from Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, highlighting the intersection between policy and practice in a local Indonesian setting. **Method:** A qualitative case study approach was employed. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis, and analyzed using thematic analysis with triangulation to ensure validity. **Results:** The findings reveal that the primary challenges include limited teacher competencies in inclusive pedagogy, inadequate disability-friendly infrastructure, insufficient curriculum adaptation, and persistent social stigma. Additionally, gaps between policy and practice hinder effective implementation. However, opportunities emerge through increased access to professional development programs, growing awareness of inclusive values, and strengthened collaboration among schools, families, and local communities. **Conclusion:** Strengthening teacher capacity, improving resources, and enhancing multi-stakeholder collaboration are essential to advancing inclusive education and achieving equitable learning outcomes.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, Challenges, Opportunities.

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INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) in Cirebon Regency continues to face major challenges, especially in the area of teacher capacity. Munoz-Martinez et al. (2021) emphasize that teacher competence in managing inclusive learning is essential to the successful implementation of inclusive education. However, many teachers in MI have not received adequate training regarding the needs of students with disabilities (Syaifudin, 2021; Nasir, 2024). As a result, teachers struggle to develop adaptive instructional strategies and create classroom environments that support the development of all learners. These gaps also limit teachers' ability to identify individual student needs, which is a crucial element of inclusive learning.

In addition, limited school resources—such as assistive facilities and inclusive learning materials—further exacerbate the situation. Choi and Seo (2024) note that inclusive learning environments require accessible teaching aids, including assistive technology and differentiated instructional materials. Preliminary data from several MIs in Cirebon Regency show that limited budgets remain a major barrier to providing these facilities, preventing students with special needs from receiving equitable learning opportunities. Moreover, societal stigma toward students with disabilities continues to affect the acceptance of inclusive education in both school and community settings (Thaibah et al., 2024).

To address these concerns, a collaborative approach involving multiple stakeholders is required. As highlighted by Wray et al. (2022), inclusive education is not solely the responsibility of teachers but also requires support from schools, families, and government institutions. Local governments can facilitate teacher training programs through partnerships with organizations specializing in inclusive education and allocate funds for upgrading school facilities (Pratiwi et al., 2024; Gupta & Kaul, 2024). Strengthening community partnerships can also help shift negative perceptions of students with disabilities, fostering inclusive environments both within schools and in surrounding communities. With these efforts, the challenges faced by MI in Cirebon Regency can be minimized, allowing inclusive education to function more effectively.

The lack of disability-friendly physical facilities in many MIs across Cirebon Regency poses a significant challenge to creating an inclusive learning environment. Scanlon et al. (2022) assert that physical accessibility—such as wheelchair ramps, adaptable classroom layouts, and accessible restrooms—is fundamental to supporting the participation of students with special needs in schools (Mamuladze et al., 2023). However, limited funding for such facilities often becomes a major barrier, resulting in suboptimal learning experiences for students with disabilities.

The limited availability of learning aids—such as assistive technologies or other support devices—also hinders inclusive education. Students with special needs require tools such as Braille books, hearing devices, or augmentative technologies to support their learning (Marantika et al., 2024; Eldred et al., 2025; Menon, 2025). Without these resources, they risk falling behind, especially when the curriculum is not designed to meet their needs. In MIs across Cirebon Regency, the scarcity of these tools not only reduces learning accessibility but also contributes to low motivation among students and parents in supporting inclusive education.

These limitations are often compounded by insufficient systemic awareness and support. Lubis et al. (2024) highlight that inclusive physical environments must be reinforced by government policies that prioritize disability-responsive planning. In the context of MIs in Cirebon Regency, collaboration between local governments and school administrators is crucial to identifying priority needs—from physical renovations to the provision of learning aids. Such efforts will enhance accessibility and foster active participation among students with disabilities, aligning with the goals of inclusive education. A combination of improved physical facilities, adequate learning tools, and supportive policies offers a comprehensive solution to these challenges (Hunt, 2021; Kim et al., 2024).

The national curriculum used in MI is often insufficiently flexible to accommodate the individual needs of students with disabilities, limiting their ability to reach their full potential. McKenzie et al. (2023) argue that rigid curricula without individualized adaptations widen the learning gap between regular students and those with special needs. The one-size-fits-all approach commonly used in MI fails to consider differences in ability, learning style, and additional needs (Masri et al., 2024). Consequently, many students with disabilities become academically and emotionally marginalized, affecting both their engagement and learning outcomes.

This lack of curriculum flexibility also affects teachers' ability to implement differentiated instruction. As shown by Koimah et al. (2024), differentiated instruction is one of the most effective approaches in inclusive education because it enables teachers to adjust learning content, processes, and outputs according to student needs. However, without an adaptive curriculum, MI teachers in Cirebon Regency often have difficulty designing and applying differentiated learning strategies. This problem is further exacerbated by limited guidelines or resources to help teachers develop inclusive instructional materials (Gladwin et al., 2024).

To overcome these issues, curriculum reform is necessary to ensure greater flexibility and inclusiveness. Arday et al. (2021) note that inclusive curricula must allow for local adaptation and personalization to meet individual student needs. In the context of MI in Cirebon Regency, this may involve developing competency-based curricula that allow modifications in learning materials, assessment methods, and teaching approaches. Additionally, intensive teacher training on curriculum adaptation can strengthen their capacity to support students with special needs (Ruppar et al., 2023). With curriculum flexibility and practical support, inclusive education in MI can be optimized to provide equitable learning opportunities for all students.

Community stigma toward students with disabilities near MIs remains one of the major barriers to achieving inclusive education. Maryam et al. (2024) show that community attitudes play a crucial role in determining the success of inclusive education. When communities hold negative views or consider students with disabilities a burden, support for inclusion initiatives becomes limited. In MI contexts, this is reflected in low parental and community participation in inclusive-related efforts, such as providing disability-friendly facilities or engaging in awareness programs.

This stigma affects not only students but also teachers and educational staff. Atika (2024) notes that social support from the community is essential for motivating teachers to implement inclusive teaching methods. However, in many MIs in Cirebon Regency, teachers often feel insufficiently supported—both morally and materially—because the surrounding community

lacks understanding of the importance of inclusive education. Consequently, teachers face dual burdens: internal school constraints and external social pressures that deem inclusion irrelevant or burdensome.

Addressing community stigma requires an educational and collaborative approach involving all stakeholders. Nilholm (2021) argues that changes in community attitudes can be achieved through awareness campaigns, community involvement, and proven examples of successful inclusive education practices. In MIs in Cirebon Regency, programs such as training and public outreach for parents, communities, and local leaders can help shift mindsets. Successful inclusive practices in certain MIs can serve as models that demonstrate the broader benefits of inclusive education for both students and communities. By cultivating a supportive social environment, inclusive education in MI can become more effective and sustainable.

Inclusive education policies designed by the government often face challenges during implementation at the school level, including in MIs. Miles and Singal (2010) emphasize that the success of inclusive education depends not only on macro-level policies but also on how these policies are operationalized at the school level. In MI contexts, the lack of clear technical guidelines and operational documents causes confusion among teachers and administrators when implementing inclusive practices. As a result, inclusive education is often carried out merely as a formality without significantly influencing teaching and learning processes.

Moreover, inadequate supervision by relevant authorities further hampers policy implementation in MIs. Anugerah et al. (2024) highlight the importance of consistent and solution-focused supervision to ensure the sustainability of inclusive education. However, in many MIs, supervision is often limited to administrative checks rather than substantive evaluations of inclusive strategies and practices. This limits schools' ability to identify specific obstacles and prevents them from receiving adequate support. The absence of effective supervision also reduces accountability among school-level stakeholders.

Improving policy implementation requires strong coordination among government entities, MI administrators, and other stakeholders. Herrera-Pavo (2021) emphasizes the need for collaborative approaches when designing practical and contextually relevant technical guidelines. Government bodies can provide training for principals and teachers to enhance understanding of inclusive policies and equip them with practical skills. Collaborative supervision involving inclusive education experts can also help schools identify challenges and develop appropriate solutions. These measures ensure that inclusive education policies become meaningful practices that directly benefit students with disabilities.

This research is important because it provides a comprehensive overview of the challenges surrounding the implementation of inclusive education in MIs in Cirebon Regency. A clear understanding of these challenges allows for the development of appropriate solutions that support better implementation. The findings of this study will help MIs improve the quality of education for all students, including those with special needs, aligning with national goals of equitable and inclusive education.

Beyond identifying challenges, there are also opportunities—such as collaboration with local communities and non-governmental organizations—that can accelerate the implementation of inclusive education in MI. Judijanto and Caroline (2025) note that partnerships between schools and communities can foster supportive ecosystems by providing resources, training, and awareness programs. In successful MIs, such collaborations have

played a crucial role. NGOs can provide learning aids for students with special needs and offer specialized teacher training. These efforts help MIs with limited resources take concrete steps toward improving inclusive education.

Teacher training and capacity-building initiatives are also essential for strengthening inclusive practices. Kaufmann and Reimann (2024) emphasize that hands-on and mentoring-based training is more effective than purely theoretical instruction in developing teachers' skills for managing diverse learners. Government-supported training programs and private training institutions can help teachers adopt differentiated instruction, inclusive classroom management, and individualized learning approaches. With enhanced teacher capacity, MIs can create more inclusive learning environments.

Early successes in some MIs also present opportunities for sharing best practices through inclusive school networks. Baird et al. (2024) note that such knowledge sharing accelerates the adoption of inclusive practices in different regions. Successful MIs can serve as models and learning hubs for other schools. Local government and community support are essential for facilitating the exchange of resources and expertise. By leveraging these opportunities, inclusive education in MI can be strengthened and expanded to reach more students with special needs.

This study offers novelty by identifying specific challenges within the local context of MI in Cirebon Regency. Unlike previous research, this study focuses on both internal school readiness and external support from communities and policies. The case study approach provides in-depth insights into inclusive practices in MIs that enroll students with special needs, contributing rich empirical data to the analysis.

The findings are expected to serve as a foundation for developing more contextual policies at the regional level. Local governments can use these insights to design support programs for inclusive education in MIs. This research also contributes to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 on inclusive and equitable quality education. Its implementation can accelerate progress toward these goals in Cirebon Regency.

By identifying both challenges and opportunities, this research has the potential to create long-term improvements in access and quality of education for students with special needs. It can also enhance the reputation of MIs as inclusive learning institutions. Beyond practical recommendations, the study provides a basis for further research in inclusive education. Ultimately, this research encourages multi-stakeholder collaboration to build inclusive, equitable, and sustainable educational environments in MIs in Cirebon Regency.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design. This approach was selected because it is well suited for gaining an in-depth understanding of inclusive education practices in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) across Cirebon Regency. A case study design enables the researcher to explore a specific context—namely, the challenges and opportunities in implementing inclusive education within MI settings. According to Poltak and Widjaja (2024), case studies are appropriate when researchers aim to address “how” and “why” questions related to a particular phenomenon.

The research subjects include educators, school principals, parents, and students with special needs from five Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in Cirebon Regency. Subjects were selected purposively to ensure representation from various stakeholders involved in inclusive education. The object of the study is the implementation of inclusive education in MI, including policies, infrastructure, and instructional practices.

The data consist of both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with teachers, principals, and parents, as well as direct observations of learning activities at the selected MIs. Secondary data include policy documents, school annual reports, and relevant literature on inclusive education. Creswell emphasizes the importance of combining primary and secondary data to produce a comprehensive understanding of the research focus (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

The study was conducted in four main stages: planning, data collection, data analysis, and reporting. The planning stage involved conducting a literature review, preparing the research proposal, and securing permissions from relevant authorities in Cirebon Regency. The data collection stage consisted of in-depth semi-structured interviews, observations, and documentation to explore the issues thoroughly. The data analysis stage was carried out thematically using qualitative data analysis software to identify patterns related to challenges and opportunities. The final stage involved compiling the research report, which includes strategic recommendations for strengthening inclusive education in MI.

Data were collected using interviews, participant observation, and documentation. Research instruments included semi-structured interview guides and checklists for assessing infrastructure and classroom activities. The use of multiple data collection techniques aimed to ensure the richness and diversity of the information gathered.

Data validity was maintained through source, method, and researcher triangulation. Source triangulation was achieved by comparing information obtained from interviews, observations, and documents. Method triangulation was carried out by employing multiple data collection techniques. Additionally, the researcher engaged in peer debriefing to discuss and verify the accuracy of the data analysis, as recommended by Hatch (2023).

Data were analyzed thematically following the qualitative data analysis steps proposed by Braun and Clarke, which include familiarizing oneself with the data through repeated reading, generating initial codes based on emerging patterns, grouping codes into broader themes, reviewing themes for coherence, naming themes and developing their narratives, and finally producing a comprehensive analytical report (Braun & Clarke, 2024)..

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Challenges in Implementing Inclusive Education in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah

The implementation of inclusive education in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) in Cirebon Regency reflects a complex and multifaceted set of challenges, primarily because students with special needs present highly diverse characteristics that require differentiated pedagogical approaches. UNESCO (2017) asserts that the success of inclusive education depends significantly on a school's ability to adapt instructional strategies to individual student needs, including instructional modification, the use of visual media, and adjustments to the learning environment. This aligns with Sunardi et al. (2011), who found that the diversity of special

needs students is one of the main factors influencing the effectiveness of inclusive practices in Indonesian elementary schools.

In this study, teachers encountered challenges when supporting students with hearing impairments who rely on hearing aids. Although these devices amplify sound, their effectiveness depends heavily on how teachers communicate. Marschark and Spencer (2010) argue that many students with hearing loss struggle not because of intellectual limitations, but because instructional delivery is not adjusted to their auditory needs—for example, the lack of clear speech, visual cues, or consistent eye contact. The findings of this study reinforce that teachers in MI across Cirebon Regency are not yet accustomed to applying visually supported communication strategies, causing many instructions to be misunderstood.

Another frequent issue is the limited adaptation of learning materials for students with hearing impairments. Hadzi-Kostova (2015) highlights that deaf students' academic success relies heavily on the availability of visual media, instructional repetition, and simplified, accessible language. Without such adaptations, students tend to become passive, disengaged from class discussions, and socially withdrawn—phenomena observed in several MI settings in Cirebon Regency.

Beyond hearing impairments, some students have physical differences such as incomplete fingers. Although physical disabilities do not always directly affect academic ability, research shows that physical limitations can impact fine motor skills required for writing and manipulating learning materials. Case-Smith (2013) stresses that impairments in hand or finger function significantly affect writing speed, legibility, and completion of fine-motor tasks. These conditions often necessitate adaptive tools or modified activities to ensure equitable participation.

Siu and Shek (2010) found that teachers often struggle to adjust learning activities for students with physical disabilities because they lack training in adaptive instructional design. Teachers tend to apply uniform approaches to all students, leading to suboptimal opportunities for students with physical challenges to demonstrate their potential. This is consistent with UNESCO (2017), which notes that many elementary teachers lack the skills to provide alternative tasks or supportive tools such as pencil grips, modified worksheets, or non-technological assistive devices.

Moreover, Gardner and Smith (2016) found that teachers often demonstrate overprotection toward students with physical disabilities. While well intentioned, this behavior can hinder students' development of independence, confidence, and problem-solving skills.

A significant challenge also arises from students whose cognitive development does not align with their chronological age, resulting in childish behavior even in upper grades. Such students struggle with multi-step instructions, are easily distracted, and have difficulty maintaining focus. Shapiro (2011) explains that students with cognitive delays often face problems processing complex information and require instructions broken down into simpler steps.

Impulsive behaviors—especially when students feel anxious or misunderstood—are consistent with findings by DuPaul and Stoner (2014), who note that students with developmental delays and attention-related issues exhibit heightened emotional reactivity. These behaviors require intensive supervision, which becomes difficult when class sizes are large.

Teachers in this study acknowledged that students with slow cognitive development require intensive, individualized support. Cole, Daniels, and Visser (2012) observed that inclusive classrooms with large enrollments prevent teachers from providing adequate attention to students needing individual support. McLeskey and Waldron (2011) also emphasize that high teacher workloads and the absence of special education support staff constitute a major barrier to effective inclusive learning.

More concerning is the condition of slow learners, including sixth-grade students who are still unable to read fluently. This suggests that early assessment and remedial interventions have not been properly implemented. Teachers lack multisensory literacy strategies and specialized methods for persistent learning difficulties. As these students progress to higher grades without targeted support, the learning gap widens and their engagement and confidence diminish.

Students with ADHD also present unique challenges. They struggle to sit still, frequently move around the room, act impulsively, and are easily distracted by minor stimuli. Teachers unfamiliar with ADHD-specific classroom management strategies often feel overwhelmed, especially when impulsive behaviors disrupt the learning environment.

Teachers also noted issues related to self-regulation and social norms, such as students refusing to wear the required school uniform—e.g., insisting on wearing a kindergarten sports outfit despite being in MI. These behaviors reflect deficits in self-regulation and understanding of school expectations.

Overall, MI teachers face substantial pedagogical challenges. Many teachers lack formal training in inclusive education, including how to develop an Individualized Education Program (IEP), apply differentiated instruction, or conduct authentic assessments aligned with student abilities. Large class sizes exacerbate the problem, leaving teachers to manage diverse needs without the support of special educators.

School environments remain insufficiently supportive of inclusion. Physical facilities are limited, and schools lack visual aids, multisensory materials, or calming spaces needed by students with ADHD. The absence of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for identifying special needs means that students enter regular classrooms without screening, leaving teachers to discover special needs only after learning disruptions occur.

Social-emotional challenges also arise. Some students with disabilities struggle to be accepted by peers and are sometimes teased due to physical differences or impulsive behavior. This negatively affects their confidence and participation. The lack of a school culture that embraces inclusion contributes to low peer acceptance.

Overall, these findings indicate that inclusive education in MI across Cirebon Regency faces multidimensional challenges involving student needs, teacher readiness, school facilities, and school culture. Systemic unpreparedness leaves many needs of special needs students unmet, limiting the effectiveness of inclusive practices.

Opportunities in Implementing Inclusive Education in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah

The findings reveal that the presence of students with special needs in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) in Cirebon Regency not only presents challenges, but also opens significant opportunities for educational and institutional transformation. During early observations, researchers identified a wide range of student profiles, including children with hearing impairments who

excel in swimming, students with incomplete fingers, cognitively delayed learners, slow learners unable to read by sixth grade, ADHD students, and children who struggle to follow uniform rules. This diversity represents not only technical challenges but also opportunities for developing stronger inclusive practices.

One of the most notable opportunities is the advancement of differentiated instruction. Teachers realized that they could no longer rely on one-size-fits-all teaching approaches. Students with slow reading skills or immature cognitive functioning require more adaptive learning designs. Teachers began varying task difficulty, offering extended learning time, and using multisensory materials. This aligns with Tomlinson (2014), who argues that differentiation is a proactive response to learners' diverse needs. Inclusion thus enhances teachers' professional competence.

Student behavioral diversity also offers opportunities to strengthen child-friendly school cultures. Students wearing uniforms inconsistent with school rules or displaying impulsive behaviors prompt teachers to adopt supportive rather than punitive discipline approaches. Instead of reprimanding students harshly, teachers seek to understand emotional or sensory triggers. This reflects UNESCO's (2017) principles that inclusive schools must foster safe and welcoming environments. Inclusion therefore encourages schools to cultivate more empathetic and humane cultures.

Another opportunity is identifying hidden student strengths. The discovery that a deaf student excelled in swimming illustrates how children with disabilities often possess exceptional talents. Armstrong's (2010) concept of neurodiversity encourages schools to focus on student strengths rather than deficits. This inspired teachers to create more varied extracurricular activities and guide parents to enroll children in community programs to support their talents.

Inclusive education also strengthens external partnerships with parents and specialists. Students requiring speech therapy, hearing aids, ADHD behavior support, or developmental assessment compel schools to collaborate with psychologists, special schools (SLB), health centers, and therapists. Friend and Cook (2017) emphasize that collaboration is foundational to effective inclusive education. These partnerships enable teachers to better understand and support student needs.

Teacher competency development emerges as another important opportunity. Teachers recognized the need to master new skill sets—from alternative assessment and behavior management to phonics-based instruction for slow learners and the development of Individualized Learning Plans (ILP). Many attended training sessions organized by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, participated in webinars, and consulted with special education professionals. Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) argue that inclusive pedagogy expands teachers' capacity to respond to diversity. Inclusion thus becomes a catalyst for ongoing professional growth.

In peer interactions, inclusive education fosters greater empathy among students. Observations showed that peers assisted classmates with missing fingers during crafts, tolerated ADHD-related impulsivity, and refrained from teasing students whose clothing differed from the norm. These practices reflect Booth and Ainscow's (2011) values of belonging, participation, and acceptance.

At the institutional level, inclusive education encourages more flexible school policies. Students who struggle with uniform requirements or behavioral regulation push schools to adjust rules and evaluation strategies. This aligns with the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), which states that schools must adopt child-centered pedagogies. Inclusion thus enables policy innovation that benefits all students.

In sum, student diversity in MI across Cirebon Regency becomes a source of learning for teachers, schools, and the educational community. Inclusive education does not merely require adaptation—it drives pedagogical, social, and managerial transformation toward environments that are more empathetic, collaborative, and adaptive for all children.

Accessibility and Quality of Inclusive Education in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah

Inclusive education in various MI across Cirebon Regency shows that schools have opened access to students with special needs, but the quality of services remains inconsistent and depends on each school's readiness. Students identified in this study include those with hearing impairments using hearing aids, students with missing fingers, cognitively delayed learners, slow learners who cannot read even in sixth grade, ADHD students, and those struggling with self-regulation such as refusing to wear the standard MI uniform. This diversity requires high educational flexibility, consistent with Ainscow (2020), who emphasizes that every child comes with unique needs requiring differentiated support.

In terms of physical accessibility, most MI have not provided adequate disability-friendly facilities—such as accessible pathways, visual signage for deaf students, or resource rooms for remedial sessions. Booth and Ainscow (2016) argue that physical accessibility is foundational to inclusion, as it directly affects students' comfort and functioning. While some schools allow flexibility—such as permitting students to wear more comfortable clothing—these responses are reactive rather than guided by systematic inclusive policies.

Curriculum accessibility also remains limited. Teachers provide ad hoc adjustments—simplifying tasks, lowering academic targets, or giving appreciative grades—without using formal Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), which are essential tools in inclusive education (Friend & Cook, 2017). This suggests that inclusion in MI is more administrative (“accepting students with disabilities”) than pedagogical (“adapting learning to their needs”).

Technological support is insufficient as well. Students with hearing impairments lack adequate visual materials, appropriate seating arrangements, and alternative visual communication strategies. Marschark and Spencer (2011) emphasize the importance of visual media and multimodal strategies for deaf students' learning, yet these remain underdeveloped in MI.

Despite these limitations, teacher–student interactions are characterized by empathy and patience. Teachers demonstrate strong commitment to supporting students but acknowledge the lack of skills to design differentiated instruction. Florian (2014) notes that the key challenge in inclusive education is not merely acceptance but adapting instruction to diverse learning needs.

The absence of Special Education Support Teachers (GPK) in most MI is a major barrier. Students with complex needs require intensive support that classroom teachers cannot provide alone. Sapon-Shevin (2020) stresses that special educators enhance the effectiveness of inclusive practices by supporting assessment and individualized planning.

Nevertheless, the findings highlight strong potential within MI in Cirebon Regency. Many students with disabilities display significant strengths, reinforcing the value of strength-based education (Shogren et al., 2015). Teachers and administrators also show strong moral commitment to maintaining inclusive environments, a critical foundation for sustainable inclusion.

Parent support is another strength. Many parents provide hearing aids, assist with home learning, and maintain communication with teachers. Hornby (2014) identifies parent–school collaboration as a key factor in successful special education services. Furthermore, MI have opportunities to strengthen inclusion through partnerships with nearby special schools (SLB), Ministry of Religious Affairs programs on inclusive madrasah, and collaborations with health centers for developmental assessments.

Overall, MI in Cirebon Regency have successfully opened access for all children but have not yet achieved ideal inclusive quality. Improvements are needed in physical accessibility, curriculum adaptation, instructional strategies, and support systems. Nonetheless, the strengths of students, teacher dedication, and parental involvement offer promising foundations for developing more humanistic and contextually grounded inclusive models in madrasah settings.

CONCLUSION

This study indicates that the implementation of inclusive education in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) across Cirebon Regency is currently in a transitional phase between conceptual understanding and practical application. At the policy level, most madrasahs recognize the importance of inclusive education; however, its execution continues to face complex obstacles. The main challenges stem from limited teacher competencies in addressing student diversity, the lack of specialized training on special education needs, and the absence of professional support staff. In addition, inadequate facilities—such as physical accessibility, adaptive learning media, and other supporting resources—continue to hinder the provision of proper inclusive services.

Social factors also play a significant role. Many parents and community members have not yet fully understood the concept of inclusion, resulting in hesitation to accept children with special needs as part of the learning community. Administrative barriers—such as heavy teacher workloads, complicated reporting requirements, and inconsistencies in implementation standards—further slow the optimal adoption of inclusive practices.

On the other hand, this study identifies several opportunities that provide optimism for the future of inclusive education in MI throughout Cirebon Regency. The enthusiasm and commitment of teachers to learn and adapt to students' needs serve as critical assets. Support from school principals—through internal policies, flexible scheduling, and resource allocation—demonstrates that madrasahs are becoming increasingly open to inclusive practices. Moreover, collaboration with parents, therapy centers, and supportive policies from both local government and the Ministry of Religious Affairs offers a strong foundation for strengthening the inclusive education system. Local cultural values, such as communal cooperation and close community ties, further enhance the acceptance of inclusion when implemented through humanistic and participatory approaches.

Overall, inclusive education in MI within Cirebon Regency holds promising prospects, provided that structural, pedagogical, and social challenges can be reduced through systematic and sustainable efforts.

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