

Teacher Strategies in the Inclusive Learning Process for Early Childhood

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Submission December 28, 2024	Revised January 11, 2025	Accepted April 20, 2025	Publish 05 May, 2025
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ABSTRACT

Inclusive early childhood education (ECE) is essential for children's character, spiritual, and cognitive development. Its success relies on teachers, instructional strategies, collaboration, and professional training that support non-discriminatory educational practices. This study analyses the inclusive teaching strategies used by ECE teachers at Aceh Flexi School in Banda Aceh. It develops a flexible and responsive learning model based on previous findings for inclusive education. The study employs a qualitative case study approach with purposive sampling. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation, and analysed descriptively through data condensation, presentation, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that teachers' strategies in inclusive learning at Aceh Flexi School include planning based on initial assessments, developing Individualised Learning Programs (ILPs), and using concrete media and flexible methods tailored to children's needs. Teachers apply individualised and multisensory approaches during implementation to ensure all children's engagement. Evaluation is conducted contextually, focusing on each child's learning process and developmental progress. Strong collaboration between teachers, therapists, and parents is a core strength. Despite challenges such as varying student abilities and limited parental awareness, holistic and communicative strategies make inclusive education more effective and meaningful. Conclusion: Inclusive ECE strategies require active teacher involvement in adaptive, collaborative, and contextual planning, implementation, and evaluation to meet individual learners' needs.

Keywords: Learning strategies, inclusive education, early childhood, ECE, teachers.

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A. INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education (ECE) holds critical urgency as it serves as the foundation for character development through the early inculcation of moral and religious values (Oktari et al., 2025). ECE encompasses academic aspects and spiritual guidance, such as Islamic mentoring, which strengthens children's moral and personal foundations (Rofiki et al., 2022). The success of its implementation heavily depends on systemic and professional educational management (Jannah et al., 2024). Furthermore, attention to children's psychological aspects through counselling underscores the importance of a holistic approach in ECE (Nasution et al., 2023). According to Piaget's theory, early childhood falls within the preoperational stage of cognitive development, which requires appropriate educational stimulation (Khotimah & Agustini, 2023).

Therefore, the implementation of ECE is urgent and cannot be delayed. Inclusive education in early childhood emphasises children's rights to fully participate in educational environments without discrimination or segregation (Munchan & Agbenyega, 2020; Ispas, 2020). Children with special needs are encouraged to learn alongside their peers in regular classrooms (Mathias, 2015). Inclusive education also guarantees access to quality education for all children, supporting lifelong learning competencies (Bartolo et al., 2016). However, challenges remain, particularly the lack of training and professional support for educators who often feel unprepared to meet the needs of children with disabilities (Brodzeller et al., 2018).

Systemic challenges to inclusive education include limited funding, social stigma, cultural factors, and unsupportive policies (Tafirenyika et al., 2025). Cross-sector collaboration, including education, health, and social services, along with parents and professionals, is key to successful implementation (Ališauskienė et al., 2023). Additionally, senior teachers often struggle to utilise educational technology, highlighting the need for ongoing professional development (Diana et al., 2020). Approaches such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL) can be employed to implement inclusive STEAM pedagogy (Wade et al., 2023). Both national and international policies emphasise the importance of equitable and inclusive education systems (Ginner Hau et al., 2022; Shaeffer, 2019).

Inclusive education is a comprehensive approach to providing equitable learning opportunities for all learners, regardless of individual differences, disabilities, or socioeconomic background (Oranga et al., 2024). Its core principles include equity and fairness, ensuring that all students with special needs can access quality education in regular classrooms (Mathias, 2015; Maguvhe, 2023; Karim & Hue, 2022). This approach also promotes diversity and active participation of all students in age-appropriate learning experiences (Ispas, 2020), and supports holistic development through social integration and mutual respect (Saporno, 2025).

Implementation strategies for inclusive education include teacher training to effectively manage diverse classrooms and apply inclusive practices through continuous professional development (Triviño-Amigo et al., 2022; Motitswe, 2025). Designing appropriate curricula for early childhood is also essential for improving education quality (Marjuki & Baidowi, 2023). Family and community involvement play a crucial role by fostering collaborative relationships among schools, students, and parents (García Leiva & Romero López, 2024). However, challenges persist, such as resource limitations, inadequate teacher training, systemic barriers, and gaps between policy and practice (Hespel, 2023; Srivastava, 2019; Merchant & Gaad, 2025). Globally, the implementation of inclusive education varies widely depending on socioeconomic and cultural conditions (Shmeleva & Litovchenko, 2022). However, some regions have progressed through digital technology and Universal Design for Learning approaches (Paul et al., 2022).

Aceh Flexi School is an ECE institution that applies inclusive education principles by admitting children from diverse backgrounds and with different needs without discrimination. The curriculum and learning activities are individually adapted to support each child's potential development. Based on observations at Aceh Flexi School in Banda Aceh, the implementation of inclusive education is evident through the admission of children with special needs;

however, the teaching strategies employed by educators remain a critical aspect to be further examined. The success of inclusive education relies not only on systems and curricula but also significantly on teachers' roles in designing learning strategies, selecting appropriate methods, and creating a classroom atmosphere that supports all children, including those with special needs.

In inclusive early childhood education, teachers apply project-based and cooperative learning strategies to encourage the active participation of all children through collaboration and peer support. Peer tutoring, dialogic learning, play-based approaches, and gamification create enjoyable and inclusive learning experiences. Teachers also utilise interactive groups and learning corners to address diverse learning needs. Experiential and service-learning help children connect learning to real-life contexts (Orozco & Morña, 2020). Scaffolding strategies support the development of foundational skills (Nair et al., 2024), while the integration of technology enhances accessibility and engagement (Lyons & Tredwell, 2015; Diana et al., 2020).

Differentiated instruction Tailors content, processes, assessments, and learning environments to meet individual students' needs, including the use of visual media, flexible timing, and varied activities (Demirci-Ünal & Öztürk, 2024). Continuous professional development (CPD) and collaboration with specialists such as occupational therapists enhance teachers' competencies in inclusive practices (Henry & Namhla, 2020; Hart, Barnett, & O'Shaughnessy, 2015). Nevertheless, many teachers still feel unprepared for inclusive education due to diverse student needs, limited resources, and insufficient training (Majoko, 2018). Practice-based and collaborative training is recommended to improve teacher preparedness (Ajani & Ajani, 2025).

This study explores in depth the inclusive learning strategies employed by teachers in early childhood education at Aceh Flexi School in Banda Aceh, and to integrate previous findings in formulating a flexible and responsive learning model for inclusive ECE institutions. The expected impact of this research is to enhance understanding and practices of inclusive education in Aceh, serving as a reference for other inclusive schools. Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature on inclusive early childhood education, and practically, it provides guidance for teachers and policymakers in designing adaptive teaching strategies.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore teachers' strategies for inclusive learning in early childhood education. The research was conducted at Aceh Flexi School in Banda Aceh, an early childhood education institution that genuinely implements inclusive principles. The primary focus of the study is the strategies used by classroom teachers and special assistant teachers in adapting teaching methods, materials, and approaches to meet students' individual needs.

Research subjects were selected purposively due to their direct involvement in the planning and implementing inclusive learning. Data collection was carried out through three primary methods. First, direct classroom observations were conducted in inclusive settings to observe interactions between teachers and children naturally. Second, in-depth interviews with the principal and teaching staff were conducted to explore their strategies, perspectives, and experiences. Third, documentation was carried out through photographs, videos, and audio

recordings as supporting data.

Data analysis was conducted in three stages: condensation, display, and conclusion drawing. Data condensation involved sorting and filtering information from literature and field findings to align with the research focus. The reduced data was then presented descriptively and structured to aid comprehension. The final stage was concluded by formulating the essence of the data and linking it to the research questions and objectives.

The validity of the data in this study was ensured through three main strategies: source triangulation, technique triangulation, and confirmability. To ensure data consistency, source triangulation was carried out by comparing information from various parties, such as classroom teachers, assistant teachers, and the principal. Technique triangulation involved using three data collection methods: observation, interviews, and documentation, to obtain a more comprehensive picture. Confirmability was maintained by ensuring that the research findings originated from the collected data, not researcher bias.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Teachers' Strategies in the Inclusive Learning Process for Early Childhood Education at Aceh Flexi School, Banda Aceh

a. Inclusive Learning Planning

In inclusive education at Aceh Flexi School, teachers design the learning process based on a comprehensive understanding of each student's characteristics, including children with special needs (CWSN). This effort begins with an initial assessment that includes direct observation of the child and interviews with parents. This assessment aims to identify specific needs, potential, and individual learning styles. The results are then used to develop an Individualised Learning Program (ILP), which aims to tailor teaching strategies to each child's unique abilities and conditions. Content adaptation is done by simplifying learning materials to make them more accessible for CWSN, without neglecting the core learning objectives. Teachers also apply a multimodal approach through concrete media such as pictures, stories, real-life teaching aids, and educational games relevant to the children's everyday lives. This approach is intended to facilitate a deeper conceptual understanding through meaningful learning experiences. Additionally, in both planning and implementing instruction, teachers actively collaborate with therapists and special education assistants to gain technical and specific input related to the challenges faced by each child.

Inclusive lesson planning requires careful attention to diverse learning needs, including those of students with cognitive or physical limitations, through a flexible and personalised curriculum (Eliseo et al., 2021). Teachers play a central role in supporting inclusive education by creating a classroom environment that is both supportive and responsive to student needs (Hosshan, 2022). Administrative support is also crucial to ensure the availability of adequate resources and institutional policies (Mahmood et al., 2024). An inclusive learning environment must be built through collaboration among educators, students, and other stakeholders (Debasu & Yitayew, 2024). Ongoing professional development prepares teachers pedagogically and psychologically to implement inclusive practices effectively (Elvira et al., 2024; Volosnikova et al., 2025). Furthermore, technology and e-inclusion can facilitate access and active participation of

students with sensory and motor disabilities in the learning process (Karagianni & Drigas, 2023).

b. Implementation of Inclusive Learning

The implementation of inclusive learning at Aceh Flexi School emphasises a flexible, child-centred approach tailored to individual needs. Learning strategies are personalised, with attention to emotional aspects through a bonding approach, which focuses on building warm and empathetic relationships between teachers and students. This approach aims to create a sense of safety, comfort, and acceptance, especially for children with special needs (CWSN), so they are more receptive to learning. In practice, teachers utilise various learning media selected and adapted to each child's characteristics and needs. These include digital media, books, educational toys, and flashcards. Learning materials are delivered concretely and step-by-step to make them more comprehensible, particularly for children with intellectual or communication challenges. For children experiencing communication barriers, teachers employ visual strategies, speak slowly with clear articulation, and use alternative communication methods such as lip movements or, when needed, sign language. This approach reflects attention to multisensory learning, enabling children to access information through various sensory pathways. The strategies implemented at Aceh Flexi School align with scholarly findings highlighting the need for individualised, communicative, and multisensory approaches in effective inclusive education. As such, all children, without exception, are given equal opportunities to understand the material and develop their potential optimally.

The implementation of inclusive education demands a holistic approach through teacher training and ongoing professional development to equip educators with the necessary skills to support diverse learners (Rusconi & Squillaci, 2023). Understanding the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and differentiated instruction is essential (Espada-Chavarría et al., 2023). Moreover, curriculum adaptation, including modifications in content, teaching methods, and assessment strategies, is crucial to ensure accessibility for all students (Oranga et al., 2024). National and institutional policies must also support inclusive education as a fundamental right (Makoelle, 2025). Collaboration among teachers, parents, students, and the wider community is vital in determining learning goals and decisions (Lyons et al., 2016). While assistive technology can enhance learning experiences for students with disabilities, infrastructure limitations and insufficient training remain challenges (Oswal et al., 2025). Resource constraints and systemic inequality continue to pose significant barriers to implementation (De Leon et al., 2024; Arns, 2024).

c. Evaluation of Inclusive Learning

The evaluation of inclusive learning at Aceh Flexi School is conducted individually, emphasising the learning process and each child's development, rather than merely focusing on outcomes. The evaluative approach aligns assessment indicators with the Individualised Learning Program (ILP), ensuring assessments are relevant to each student's needs, abilities, and learning goals. Teachers conduct evaluations through various methods, including direct classroom observations, daily developmental records, and regular discussions with therapists and parents. The primary emphasis of this

evaluation is on the child's progress and active engagement during the learning process, rather than the achievement of uniform academic standards. This approach enables the evaluation to reflect authentic and meaningful progress for every child, including those with special needs. Beyond cognitive development, the evaluation includes social skills and independence, two critical components of inclusive education. For instance, improvements in peer interactions, initiative-taking, or completing tasks independently are important indicators of learning success. Inclusive evaluation requires flexibility and contextualization, as each child has a unique background, potential, and challenges. Therefore, teachers must exercise pedagogical sensitivity in interpreting evaluation data so that results serve not only as performance indicators but also as a guide for formulating more effective future learning strategies.

Inclusive assessment requires a comprehensive and contextualised approach, rather than a traditional biomedical model that often underestimates the learning potential of students with disabilities (Lebeer, 2022). Tools like the ACADI and CEEIU questionnaires enable teachers and education stakeholders to reflect on inclusive values and identify further training needs (Frutos et al., 2023; Herrán Gascón et al., 2017). Furthermore, developing inclusive schools through instruments such as QUIS-S and applying UDL principles ensures flexible teaching and assessment methods responsive to student diversity (Schurig et al., 2020; Biju & Pallath, 2023). Case studies also emphasise the importance of inclusive evaluation in remedial programs in remote areas and the strengthening of teacher competencies through ongoing training to support fair and equitable education practices for all learners (Sun et al., 2023; García Leiva & Romero López, 2024).

d. Collaboration between Therapists and Parents

One of the main strengths in the inclusive learning practice at Aceh Flexi School is the intensive and ongoing collaboration between teachers, therapists, and parents. This collaboration serves as a crucial foundation for creating a consistent, directed, and adaptive learning environment that meets the individual needs of children, especially children with special needs (CWSN). Teachers maintain regular communication with parents to provide updates on the child's development academically, socially, and emotionally. This communication is also used to discuss further learning strategies that can be implemented at home, thus creating continuity in the learning process between school and home environments. Meanwhile, therapists' involvement in designing and evaluating learning activities offers highly valuable professional input, particularly in developing approaches that match the specific needs and challenges of the child. Therapists help teachers gain a more comprehensive understanding of the child's motor development, communication, and behaviour, allowing teaching strategies to be precisely adjusted. This cross-role collaboration enables the integration of educational and therapeutic approaches into a cohesive learning process. The effectiveness of this collaboration is evident in increased behavioural consistency and achievement by the child, both at school and at home. This practice reflects the principle of true inclusion, where education is not solely the school's responsibility but the result of synergy among various parties to holistically support the optimal development of every child.

Collaboration between teachers and parents is essential for supporting the academic and psychosocial development of children with special needs. A harmonious relationship creates a consistent environment between home and school, ensuring continuous support for the child (Dor, 2022). Effective collaboration has also improved children’s learning outcomes and social interactions (Çelik & Tomris, 2024). However, some challenges, such as communication barriers, may hinder this process, where teachers often perceive parents as either not involved enough or overly demanding (Gilmore et al., 2023). Differences in perceptions and expectations can also cause conflicts between the two parties (Numisi et al., 2020). Encouraging active parental involvement, for example, in developing Individualised Education Programs (IEP), is crucial for setting more realistic educational goals (Sirirak et al., 2019). Support systems such as mentoring, training, and digital technology can strengthen this partnership (Ubaidillah et al., 2024).

2. Challenges and Solutions for Teachers in the Inclusive Learning Process of Early Childhood at Aceh Flexi School, Banda Aceh

The inclusive learning strategy at Aceh Flexi School is holistic and collaborative, emphasising the involvement of all parties to create a compelling and meaningful learning process for children with special needs, as detailed in the following table:

Table 1. Challenges and Solutions

Challenges	Solutions Implemented
Vast differences in children’s conditions and abilities	Developing an Adaptive Individualised Learning Program (ILP) centred on each child’s unique needs
Limited awareness among some parents about the importance of support for CWSN	Conducting personal approaches and routine communication with parents to enhance their understanding and participation
Resistance or lack of empathy from regular students toward CWSN	Instilling values of empathy through joint activities, modelling positive interactions, and fostering an inclusive atmosphere that encourages cooperation among students
Knowledge gaps among teachers regarding CWSN	Conducting regular teacher training on approaches, strategies, and characteristics of CWSN
Parents’ limited understanding of CWSN needs	Providing education through discussions and regular meetings among teachers, parents, and therapists
Lack of involvement from professionals such as therapists	Involving therapists in planning and evaluating learning to ensure approaches are tailored to children’s specific needs
Challenges in accurately evaluating children’s progress	Using flexible, contextual evaluations focused on the process and child engagement, not just on outcomes.

Teachers implement various strategies to effectively carry out inclusive education for early childhood, aiming to meet diverse learning needs and promote holistic development. One main approach is using interactive groups and learning corners, which create engaging, flexible learning environments that accommodate multiple learning styles. This approach is complemented by experience-based learning and community service

activities, which provide direct experiences crucial for children's growth (Orozco & Moríña, 2020). Collaboration and cooperation among teachers, families, and multidisciplinary professionals strengthen inclusive practices through shared responsibilities and community involvement (Bonança et al., 2023). Additionally, teachers' positive attitudes and beliefs about inclusion play a vital role; ongoing professional development helps nurture this mindset (Lai Mui Lee et al., 2017). However, challenges remain, including limited resources, lack of institutional support, insufficient training (Laguardia & Pastor, 2024), and cultural and social barriers that require advocacy and deeper community engagement to overcome (Kim et al., 2024).

D. CONCLUSION

The teachers' strategies in inclusive learning at Aceh Flexi School Banda Aceh encompass planning, implementation, evaluation, and collaboration. Teachers conduct initial assessments to understand the characteristics of children, especially children with special needs (CWSN), and develop Individualised Learning Programs (ILP). Materials are adapted and delivered multimodally using concrete and educational media. During implementation, a personal and multisensory approach is applied to create a safe environment and support children's understanding. Evaluation is conducted individually, emphasising authentic processes and child development rather than solely academic results. Active collaboration between teachers, therapists, and parents is key to ensuring continuity and consistency in learning at school and home to support holistic child development. In inclusive learning at Aceh Flexi School, teachers face various challenges such as differences in children's abilities, limited parental awareness, and a lack of empathy from regular students. Solutions include developing adaptive Individualised Learning Programs (ILP), personal approaches to parents, and fostering empathy values in the classroom. Knowledge gaps among teachers and parents are addressed through regular training and education. The involvement of therapists is also strengthened in planning and evaluation. Evaluation is conducted flexibly and contextually, focusing on the child's learning process rather than just outcomes, to support optimal holistic development.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The researcher sincerely thanks all parties who have provided support and contributions during the implementation of this research. Special thanks are extended to the teachers and educational staff at Aceh Flexi School Banda Aceh who generously gave their time, shared experiences, and provided valuable information about inclusive learning practices at their institution. The researcher also appreciates the assistance and support from the school management, which granted access and permission during data collection. Additionally, gratitude is given to family, colleagues, and academic supervisors who provided encouragement, feedback, and invaluable guidance throughout the research process. It is hoped that the results of this study will contribute positively to the development of flexible and responsive learning models to support inclusive education for early childhood in Indonesia.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

- Author 1 : Formulated the research basis, reviewed literature, and designed methodology.
Author 2 : Designed research methodology, developed field instruments, and refined instruments.

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