

The Role of Principals in Implementing Inclusive Education Through Culturally Responsive School Leadership

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive education aims to ensure that all students can be fully involved, feel accepted, and feel valued. The principal must be willing to build an inclusive school in all aspects that respects the diversity of students in an assertive and supportive manner. This article's objective is to provide an understanding and description of the leadership role of principals to increase engagement and to establish an environment of acceptance for children with special needs in inclusive schools through Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) framework. The phases of a systematic literature review, which included designing a review, conducting a review, and assessing and documenting the outcomes of the review, were followed in the conduct of this study. Data were generated from reviewing 13 articles. This article reviewed articles published from 2018 to 2023 from the Taylor & Francis, Science Direct, and Google Scholar databases. All articles are classified by year and internationally published articles, research articles, research objectives, and topics related to the role of inclusive school principals based on the CRSL framework. Purposive sampling was used to get the data, and specific search engine phrases were used. After gathering the data, content analysis methods were used to examine it. This study discovered that the principal's leadership is essential for developing inclusive educational management. Principals need to be responsive and serious about the diversity of students with special needs, which includes reflection on leadership, developing responsive teacher abilities, and building an environment that is inclusive of children with special needs.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The implementation of inclusive education is a reflection of openness and acceptance of diversity, as well as expanding special needs children's access to schooling. As a new reflection, inclusive education can inspire more progressive actions to maximise the Indonesian education system while realising equality. In general, inclusive education seeks to enrol special needs students in neighbourhood public schools (Herawati, 2016). Indonesia officially issued Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan Nasional (Permendiknas) Number 70 of 2009 about inclusive education for children with

special needs. It is thought that inclusive education can aid in the development of both typical and special needs children (Skočić Mihić et al., 2016). Hence, implementing inclusive education not only increases awareness of diversity and expands educational opportunities for children with special needs but is also in line with Indonesia's commitment to improving the education system and promoting equality.

According to data from *Data Pokok Pendidikan* (Dapodik) as of December 2022, there were 30,982 inclusive education provider schools in Indonesia, comprising primary and secondary schools, as well as junior and senior high schools, and vocational high schools, both with state status and private. This means that inclusive schools are often found in the community, but the system still uses the regular school system, even though inclusive schools have their own management system (Riwati et al., 2022). The application of a management system to achieve optimal inclusive education requires collaboration between all school members. In this case, it requires serious planning, organising as needed, optimal direction, and intense supervision from the parties involved, such as the education office and principals (Sholihah & Chrysoekamto, 2021). For that reason, strong collaboration between all parties involved, including the education department and principals, is the main key to realising optimal inclusive education.

Apart from having its own management, implementing inclusive schools is not as easy as organising regular schools due to the diverse characteristics of children with special needs, and the acceptance of school members for children with special needs has not fully supported them (Darma & Rusyidi, 2015). In this context, principals are considered successful if they use policies as a progressive and strategic opportunity to create a coherent culture and conditions that support staff to learn to update learning practices in schools (Gu, 2023). In an effort to optimise the management of inclusive education, the role of the principal as the highest decision-holder greatly influences the vision and mission that are the goals of the school (Sholihah & Chrysoekamto, 2021). Therefore, it can be claimed that principals who are knowledgeable and effectively execute inclusive education play key roles in the success of inclusive education.

The principal has a role as an important agent of change because of his very broad authority in the school (DeMatthews et al., 2020). Besides that, principals can also be crucial in developing and carrying out different initiatives (Kuknor & Bhattacharya, 2022). The Concern-Based Adoption Model (CBAM), which defines how changes are made, includes the six components stated below: establishing a shared vision, planning and allocating resources, investing in professional development, monitoring developments, providing dependable assistance, planning and allocating resources, planning and allocating resources, constructing a culture that fosters change, and so forth (Hall GE, 2015). The creation of an inclusive culture also depends on the principal's relationships with teachers and other school workers because he or she is the highest-ranking leader in the organisation (Boychuk et al., 2021). Additionally, the principal has the power to turn the integrated school system into an inclusive school or enhance the efficacy of the inclusive education he has personally established.

As a leader, the principal at an inclusive school must be willing to create a school climate with student diversity in an assertive and positive manner so that each student can participate fully, feel accepted, and feel valued (Pazey & Combes, 2020). However, in reality, based on previous research, it shows that principals are not optimal at managing inclusive education. The results of research conducted by Andini et al. (2018) state that principals' understanding of the meaning of inclusive education is still narrow. In addition, other research conducted by DeMatthews et al. (2021) adds that principals have an important role in creating inclusive schools, but they face challenges in implementing meaningful change. This is confirmed by research conducted by Frick et al. (2013), which confirms that principals feel challenged in creating inclusive schools when dealing with restrictive local regulations, resource deficits, teacher demands, and parental dissatisfaction. In this context, it shows that principals must face real challenges in creating a school climate that supports inclusive education, considering that understanding is still limited and the complex changes required to achieve this goal.

Based on the issues in prior research that have been discussed earlier, it is essential to apply Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) in order to establish an engaging and inclusive learning environment for students with special needs. CRSL was conceptualised as culturally responsive leadership to establish a leadership that recognises that student diversity adds complexity to additional teaching tasks (Ham et al., 2020). CRSL can make it easier for the principal, as a leader, to build an environment that can involve all students and create an inclusive school climate.

Several previous studies have been carried out regarding the application of CRSL to managing inclusive school education for principals. Research conducted by Hollowell (2019) and Khalifa et al. (2016) confirms that the implementation of CRSL by principals can create an inclusive school environment that respects diversity, encourages equality, and makes certain that every child has access to a top-notch education. Other research suggests that the implementation of CRSL can explore the role of principals in controlling the policies implemented in schools and that principals must be knowledgeable, involved, and responsive to the education of students with special needs (Khaleel et al., 2021). There are three reasons why it is important to apply CRSL to principals, including: 1) CRSL is an important component of effective school leadership. 2) CRSL can be sustainable if the principal is consistent in implementing it. 3) CRSL has unique leadership behaviour characteristics, namely: self-reflection on leadership behaviour, developing and maintaining CRSL teachers and curricula, cultivating an inclusive school environment, and involving students, parents, and the community (Khalifa, 2018).

Based on a review of previous research, although several studies have stated that the implementation of CRSL can be a framework for principals to implement and develop inclusive education, more in-depth and comprehensive research is still needed. This research will examine previous research in more depth in order to understand trends, methods, and findings relevant to the research topic. The scientific novelty of this research lies in its main focus, namely examining specifically the role of principals in the implementation of inclusive education for students with special needs, because, based on the literature that has been reviewed, the implementation of CRSL is still often found in inclusive schools with diversity in general (diversity based on race, culture, and marginalised groups). In addition, this research is important to conduct because it has the potential to contribute to providing more holistic and relevant insight for principals to achieve inclusive school quality by optimally accommodating students with special needs.

The role of the principal must be taken more seriously, and inclusive education must be implemented. Additionally, in order to foster an inclusive environment where children with special needs can be accepted and have the opportunity to reach their full potential, there needs to be an understanding and knowledge of each school member. One of the key determinants in the development of an inclusive educational climate is the principal, who is the highest-ranking leader in the institution. In order to improve involvement and foster an inclusive environment for students with special needs in inclusive schools, this article tries to describe and explain the leadership role of principals. Consequently, the following research questions will be addressed: How do principals reflect on inclusive leadership behavior? How do we develop teachers who are responsive to the diverse needs of students with special needs? and how to cultivate an inclusive environment in schools?

2. METHODS

This study uses a systematic literature review method. A systematic literature review gathers and summarises research findings that address specifically specified topics using explicit and systematic approaches (Higgins & Thomas, 2019). The data obtained is then analysed to understand the study of the leadership role of principals in increasing engagement and creating an inclusive environment for children with special needs in inclusive schools, using thematic techniques to identify study patterns. Choosing a study design for data collection, analysing and interpreting the data for report writing, and deciding whether to submit articles for publication are the processes in this method (Page et al., 2021). The systematics of this study use research with this method, namely as follows:

2.1 Search Strategy

The process of searching for and selecting scientific articles related to the role of principals in providing inclusive education was obtained from the journal databases Taylor & Francis (19), Science Direct (21), and Google Scholar (62). Literature searches used the keywords "school leader," "inclusive," "disability" and "children with special needs." Article submitted in June 2023.

2.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Eligibility criteria are needed to obtain analysis results that answer research questions. The articles found were filtered based on inclusion and exclusion criteria set by the authors. The criteria for writing in this article were scientific articles; in addition to that, for example, books, theses, reports, studies, and non-English-speaking articles were the exclusion criteria. In other words, only internationally published articles were collected for this analysis. This selection aims to obtain analytical results that are able to present the various roles of principals in leading inclusive schools.

2.3 Data Extraction and Analysis

After determining the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 13 articles were produced, which were used to fulfil the objectives of this study. The articles that have been found are thoroughly examined to explore and summarise the various pieces of information that the research focuses on. Based on the required information, the authors considered several inclusion and exclusion criteria according to the research objectives:

Table 1. Criteria of Inclusion and Exclusion

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Articles in English	Articles in languages other than English
Published 2018-2023	Published before 2018
Research published in international journals	Books, theses, and reports
Related to the role of the principal in leading inclusive schools	Related to the role of the principal in leading other than inclusive schools
Disabilities and children with special needs	In addition to disabilities and children with special needs

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A selection procedure based on criteria was used to compile data from a systematic literature review and group it into thirteen publications that explore the role of principals in leading inclusive schools, as listed in the table below:

Table 2. Description of Selected Studies

Studies	Purpose	Method	Findings
1. (Emam & F. Hendawy Al-Mahdy, 2022)	To develop and verify the Inclusive School Climate Scale (ISCS) and evaluate how Oman's schools are developing their ability for effective inclusive education practises	Qualitative	The study's findings highlight three key variables that are indicative of schools' abilities to develop inclusive implementation strategies and foster an inclusive learning environment for students. These three elements are superior academic performance, inclusive leadership, and inclusive execution.
2. (Van Mieghem et al., 2023)	To investigate the relationship between professional development initiatives (PDIs) and the	Qualitative Comparative Analysis	Teachers' positive interactions with pupils who have special needs have a greater influence than professional development. Additionally, it

	readiness to accept students with special needs (SEN) into regular classrooms.		appears that specialists who work with students with special needs can foster a stronger willingness to involve these individuals in the educational process.
3. (Van Mieghem, Verschueren, et al., 2022)	To investigate the function of leadership in Flanders, Belgium, in fostering inclusive education and lowering opposition to the adoption of inclusive practises in classrooms.	A Multiple Case Study and Qualitative Comparative Analysis	Schools are more likely to accept students with special needs if they have leaders providing educational guidance toward an inclusive system who are willing to engage in constructive discussion of issues and choose and create resources to aid with inclusive education.
4. (Esposito et al., 2019)	To examine the responsibilities of principals in providing accessible environments for children with special needs and to provide historical context for the inclusion movement.	A Historical Perspective	Principals play a crucial role in setting inclusive practices into place to build a culture that respects the principles of inclusive education.
5. (Faas et al., 2018)	To investigate how principals at community national schools in Ireland can foster inclusive and encouraging learning environments for multicultural and multifaith student groups.	Mix Method Approach	The data in this study is organized into three key sections: school policies and principles; recognizing and addressing cultural differences; and the role of principals. In the future, the school code will be led by the principal.
6. (Ham et al., 2020)	To investigate if some schools might benefit more than others from having leaders who are sensitive to cultural differences.	Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM)	Culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) is greater than teacher collegiality and/or inclusive school collaboration. Both of these consider that the two arrangements have characteristics of management that are not yet good, so they require leadership based on CRSL.
7. (Hosshan et al., 2020)	To carry out an overview of the research on inclusive education in Southeast Asian nations.	Scoping review	Leadership affects other factors including resources and finances, cooperation and shared responsibility, and instructional strategies. Top-down school leadership is common in Southeast Asian nations, where what the principal does serves as an example for teachers. Principal must foster a positive outlook by encouraging teamwork among all students.
8. (Leithwood, 2021)	To review empirical research and studies to find leadership practises and traits that can help diverse	Literature Review	The most powerful series of roles carried out by inclusive-oriented principals is, first, creating partnerships connecting

		and historically marginalised students achieve better achievements in the classroom.		communities, families, and schools. Second, ensure that the learning curriculum prioritizes equality. Third, principals improve learning for students who are underserved by ambitious teachers.
9. (Mun et al., 2020)	To conduct a thorough evaluation of the literature on K-12 students from culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse (CLED) backgrounds in the United States in the areas of leadership, systemic reform, identification, and supports for gifted students.	A multiphase article identification process	Serving gifted children from all backgrounds in the program will be made possible by culturally relevant and systemically responsive leadership. Principal and teacher must obtain top-notch professional development and training in essential leadership and pedagogy appropriate to gifted student help and services in order to satisfy the various unique requirements of children.	
10. (Roberts & Webster, 2022)	To discuss the creation and scientific basis of the School-wide Autism Competency (SAC) method, which offers schools a whole-school strategy for helping autistic students.	Comprehensive Approach	Principals can deal with autistic students in the context of a particular curriculum and environment at their school with the aid of the school-wide autism competency (SAC) technique. The goal of this strategy is to implement systemic change in schools through inclusive leadership and team development.	
11. (Sharp et al., 2020)	To investigate how educators at an Australian secondary school dealt with learner diversity as part of a school-wide drive for more inclusive practises.	Qualitative Action Research	The function of principals in fostering ongoing contextual professional development and transforming school culture to support inclusive teaching methods.	
12. (Van Mieghem, Struyf, et al., 2022)	To examine the relationship between teacher-related and student-related variables in predicting teachers' self-efficacy, and to compare teachers' levels of student-specific self-efficacy with reference to pupils who have SEN and those who do not.	Survey	Teachers' beliefs (TSE) were less favorable toward students with many disabilities than toward students with a single type of disability, and less favorable toward students with emotional and behavioral disorders than toward students with academic challenges. A greater TSE can be achieved when teachers work together to support special needs students through teaching teams, observation and feedback, supervision, and student accompaniment within and outside the classroom are all examples of effective teaching methods. According to this study, assistance can help teachers become more	

				adept at working with students who have special needs and lessen their opposition to inclusive education.
13. (Jardí et al., 2022)	To explore and understand the interpersonal factors that affect the partnerships between teaching assistants (TAs) and teachers.	Qualitative Phenomenology Study		Collaboration between teachers and teacher assistants can work in schools. When pairing instructors and assistant teachers, schools should think about what can be done to foster excellent interpersonal interactions and mutually productive collaborations.

3.1 Reflection on Inclusive Leadership Behavior

Through reflection, one can develop the mindset of an inclusive leader. In accordance with the schools they oversee, principals carry out this process on the basis of the values of respect and equality (Faas et al., 2018). As a leader, it is necessary to reflect on the leadership behaviour that has been carried out. In this context, an inclusive leader has a commitment to an inclusive school environment that is built into the school he or she leads.

The principal's responsibility in inclusive education is very complex. Before involving many parties, principals need to have strong basic knowledge about the scope of inclusive schools and the processes used to analyse and instruct a variety of special needs children (Bateman et al., 2017). This is so that inclusive education can be tailored in response to the diverse requirements of children with special needs. The principal is aware of this direction.

Principals that prioritize supporting children with special needs in their schools will include the role of school leadership in this commitment to inclusive education, including: (1) working with teachers and staff to increase equality for all students, (2) examining the obstacles faced by children with special needs in the classroom; (3) provide teachers with information on what to expect from students with exceptional needs; (4) friendly and responsive when the teacher conveys obstacles and challenges in inclusive practices in schools; (5) embrace suggestions for adjustments that can help children with special needs participate and learn in the classroom; (6) enact laws to enable students with disabilities to participate in extracurricular activities (Jardí et al., 2022).

The principal's leadership role generally uses a top-down model. What the principal does to set an example for the faculty members at the school is referred to as the top-down model (Hosshan et al., 2020). As role models in schools in the realm of inclusive schooling, principals must develop a positive attitude by cultivating collaboration in schools (Vorapanya & Dunlap, 2014). The main strategies used by leaders who have succeeded in promoting equality in inclusive schools are cultivating a collaborative culture and exercising leadership. Principals can collaborate in three ways to implement inclusive education, namely: (1) communication with parents; (2) collaboration with school members; and (3) collaboration with the community or society (Leithwood, 2021).

3.2 Developing Responsive Teachers for Children with Special Needs

A leader in education also refers to a leader in the classroom. Principals must share responsibilities with teachers and other school staff to promote the implementation of inclusive education through collaboration and assist student learning so that they are not left behind in order for inclusive schools to be effective (Emam & F. Hendawy Al-Mahdy, 2022). The goal of teacher involvement in inclusive education is to assist teachers in developing their instructional strategies to better handle student diversity and to inform them of possibilities for professional growth so they can successfully instruct children with a variety of special needs. In order to "understand, respond, combine, accommodate, and improve the quality of learning for the students they provide," principals must be receptive to instructors (Khalifa et al., 2016).

Principals must be able to let teachers know that they operate in inclusive settings that prioritise the needs of students with special needs (Faas et al., 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016). Then, by encouraging and taking part in the kinds of learning and teacher professional development that increase academic and nonacademic outcomes, principals can also give guidance on how teachers implement school transformation (Van Mieghem, Struyf, et al., 2022). Teachers can also use this in classrooms where there are students with special needs by trying to modify the curriculum to meet their needs, encouraging teachers to involve parents in the learning process, and supporting and training other teachers in the provision of quality services for students with special needs (Emam & F. Hendawy Al-Mahdy, 2022). Teachers should, in practice, receive assistance from paraprofessionals in the fields of health (nurses or other health workers) and law (attorneys and paralegals), given the variety of demands of persons with special needs (Jardí et al., 2022).

Teachers should be encouraged by principals to conduct inclusive teaching. The seven components of motivation include respect, commitment, cooperation, and teachers' capacity to assist students with specific needs. (1) The teacher adopts a professional demeanor when working with students who have special needs; (2) The teacher modifies the curriculum to accommodate the needs of children with special needs; (3) The teacher respects fellow students who have special needs if they receive high grades; (4) Teachers and school staff are encouraged to work together to support students with special needs in class; (5) Teachers demonstrate enthusiasm and perseverance in completing their teaching assignments for students with special needs; (6) Teachers assist friends who need assistance and training to give educational services to students with special needs in the classroom; and (7) Teachers offer social support to new teachers who are apprehensive and unwilling to address the needs of children with special needs (Emam & F. Hendawy Al-Mahdy, 2022).

3.3 Cultivating an Inclusive Environment for Children with Special Needs

All children benefit greatly from an inclusive educational setting. The principal's involvement is particularly important in establishing and sustaining an inclusive school climate. They can do this by modelling polite behaviour and attempting to engage all students in productive activities (Faas et al., 2018). Resilient educators provide the opinion that the success of an inclusive environmental culture consists of accepting, understanding, and involving students with special needs such as physical, cognitive, academic, social, and emotional (McManis, 2020).

Every member of staff must participate in initiatives to create an inclusive atmosphere for school leaders. The principal, as the highest leader, must be able to influence teachers and school boards to play a significant part in creating an inclusive atmosphere (Faas et al., 2018). The principal can manage the school community to develop an organised and altered environment that will be used in the classroom or school setting. Principals must also have a positive outlook on all children, demonstrating respect for students with special needs and belief in students' potential to succeed with the correct assistance (Roberts & Webster, 2022).

Furthermore, an inclusive environment reflects an anti-discrimination environment. Discrimination often occurs in inclusive schools due to a lack of awareness of diversity. This has a negative impact on the condition of students who have minority conditions, such as students with special needs. Principals deal with diversity in schools, one of which is through anti-bullying policies. Messages, signs posted throughout the school, and the principal's clear stands can all be used to adopt an open strategy (Faas et al., 2018).

Providing educational goals for students with special needs, ensuring the suitability of learning strategies, forming study groups to boost student success, engaging in constructive problem-solving, and choosing and developing assistive technology are the five key dimensions for optimising the learning environment for students when creating an inclusive learning environment (Van Mieghem, Struyf, et al., 2022). Additionally, principals can create an inclusive environment by enhancing the bonds of trust, vision, goals, and a strong sense of community (Khalifa et al., 2016).

4. CONCLUSION

From the findings and discussions above, the leadership position of the principal is pivotal in the management of inclusive education. Based on the four frameworks in Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL), this writing only focuses on three main studies. First, the principal reflects on leadership towards better implementation of inclusive education. To the furthest extent possible, principals in inclusive schools must uphold the values of equality and respect in all decisions they make. Second, to develop responsive teachers for children with special needs, the principal, as the highest-ranking official in the institution, must encourage and promote instructors' and all other students' participation in order to implement inclusive teaching and learning methods. Third, cultivating an inclusive environment for children with special needs: in order for children with special needs to develop their abilities to their full potential, principals must provide an inclusive environment where all students behave respectfully and work to engage them positively. This research has several limitations, including that of the four frameworks in CRSL discussed in this article, this article only discusses three frameworks. The framework that is not discussed is "engages students, parents, and indigenous context" because no data was found regarding the indicators in the framework in the primary article. Then, principals in different countries or regions may have different challenges. Therefore, generalisations from the results of this research must be adjusted to the cultural, legal, and educational context. Furthermore, a potential research direction in the future is that further researchers can adapt the indicators in the CRSL framework and then implement them as a form of developing the abilities of principals in inclusive education management in Indonesia because CRSL is an educational framework that has been used in other countries and has been proven to be effective.

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