

## THE STRATEGIC ROLE OF HOMEROOM TEACHERS IN SUPPORTING INCLUSIVE LEARNING IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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Inclusive Education;  Homeroom Teachers;  Adaptive Strategies;	<i>This study aims to describe the strategic role of homeroom teachers in supporting inclusive learning in elementary schools, identify the challenges faced, and the strategies applied in dealing with them. The research method used was descriptive-qualitative with a case study approach, which was conducted in class IV of SD Negeri 06 Malang Jiwan. Data collection techniques included observation, interviews, and document analysis. The results showed that homeroom teachers play an important role not only in academic aspects, but also social-emotional, especially in dealing with students with special needs who are classified as slow learners and ADHD-like behavior. Teachers apply adaptive learning strategies such as customized assignments, positive reinforcement, and alternative assessments. Despite facing obstacles such as the absence of Special Assistance Teachers (GPK), limited facilities, and not optimal training, teachers show high initiative by building active communication with parents and school principals. Cross-party collaboration, including with the Technical Service Unit for Disability Services and Inclusive Education (UPT PLDPI), strengthens efforts to create an inclusive learning environment. This research confirms the importance of homeroom teachers' adaptive capacity and systemic support as keys to successful inclusive education in primary schools.</i>

## INTRODUCTION

### Background of the Study

Inclusive education is an approach that emphasizes respect for diversity and provides equal opportunities for all children, including children with special needs, to learn together in a friendly and responsive education system (Wulandari et al., 2024). At the primary school level, the implementation of inclusive education is very important because this period is the foundation of character building, social skills and long-term learning readiness. However, in its implementation, inclusive education is still faced with various challenges, including the lack of teacher understanding of the needs of diverse learners, the lack of supporting facilities, and weak institutional policy support (Endu et al., 2023).



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In this context, homeroom teachers play a strategic role because they interact directly with students every day. Not only responsible for academic aspects, homeroom teachers are also learning facilitators, classroom atmosphere managers, and liaisons between schools, parents, and special assistance teachers (Daffa et al., 2025). Therefore, they are required to have adaptive pedagogical competencies and be able to create a classroom atmosphere that supports the active participation of all students, including students with special needs.

### **Problem of The Study**

Although homeroom teachers play an important role in inclusive education, they face many barriers to optimizing their role. The lack of understanding of inclusion principles, lack of professional training and limited resources and institutional support are the main barriers. In addition, not all teachers have the pedagogical skills to address the diverse needs of students in the classroom. In practice, homeroom teachers often experience difficulties in developing adaptive learning strategies and building inclusive interactions in the classroom. This indicates a gap between the ideal role of homeroom teachers and the reality they face in the field.

### **Research's State of the Art**

Previous research has highlighted the importance of teacher competencies in supporting the success of inclusive education. For example, Maesaroh et al. (2025) and Salamah et al. (2025) state that teachers who understand the principles of inclusion and are able to apply them in learning will be more effective in creating adaptive classrooms. This competency includes the ability to develop flexible lesson plans, implement differentiated learning strategies, and collaborate with special assistant teachers and parents. Meanwhile, research by Sembung et al. (2023) emphasized the importance of social-emotional skills and interpersonal communication in building an inclusive classroom.

From the managerial side, research by Jayadi & Supena (2023) and Lestari et al. (2022) showed that support from the school management system, such as training, adaptive curriculum and the formation of inclusion teams, plays an important role in supporting homeroom teachers. Ismaya et al. (2024) also highlighted that technology integration and effective classroom management can improve the success of inclusive education at the primary school level.

### **Gap Study & Objective**

Although various studies have examined the importance of teacher competencies in inclusive education, most focus on the role of special assistant teachers (GPK), inclusion policies in general or theoretical approaches to inclusive learning. Research that specifically highlights the role of homeroom teachers - who interact directly and intensively with students on a daily basis - is limited. In fact, homeroom teachers are the main actors who have a strategic role in shaping an adaptive learning environment that supports diversity. Therefore, research is needed that specifically explores the role of homeroom teachers in supporting inclusive learning, the challenges they face and the concrete strategies they employ to overcome these obstacles.

The purpose of this study is to thoroughly describe the strategic role played by homeroom teachers in supporting the implementation of inclusive learning in primary schools. This research seeks to describe how homeroom teachers create an inclusive and welcoming learning environment for diverse students, including students with special needs. It also aims to identify the challenges faced by teachers in implementing the principles of inclusion in the classroom, from pedagogical, social and structural perspectives. Not only does it stop at identifying problems, this research will also explore concrete strategies implemented by homeroom teachers in overcoming these obstacles, either independently or through collaboration with other parties. Thus, the results of this study are expected to provide a comprehensive and applicable picture, which can be used as a basis for designing teacher training programs, drafting school policies that support inclusive education, and becoming an academic reference for the development of further studies in the field of basic education that upholds diversity and equality.

## **METHOD**

### **Type and Design**

This research uses a descriptive-qualitative method with a case study approach. This method was chosen because it allows researchers to explore in depth complex phenomena in a natural context, especially related to the strategic role of homeroom teachers in supporting inclusive learning in elementary schools. The case study approach is considered relevant because this research focuses on one specific case unit, namely class IV at SD Negeri 06 Malang Jiwan, which has distinctive characteristics in the form of the presence of students with special needs in regular classes. In accordance with Creswell's (2014) view, case studies are used to explore a phenomenon within certain time and space constraints by collecting rich and in-depth data through various techniques over a period of time. Thus, this approach enables a full understanding of the social dynamics, learning strategies and challenges faced by teachers in inclusive education practices.

### **Data and Data Sources**

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The data sources in this study consist of primary data and secondary data. Primary data was obtained directly through interviews and observations of the main research subjects, namely the homeroom teacher, the principal, and grade IV students consisting of 29 students, one of whom is a child with special needs. The homeroom teacher was chosen because she has a central role in managing learning in the inclusive classroom while the principal plays a role in policy and institutional support for the implementation of inclusive education. Secondary data was obtained from relevant school administrative and academic documents, such as lesson plans, records of student learning outcomes, documentation of activities and class evaluation files. The use of various data sources aims to strengthen the validity of information through triangulation techniques.

### Data collection technique

Data collection in this study was conducted through three main techniques that complement each other, namely participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Participatory observation was conducted directly during the learning process inside and outside the classroom. The aim was to observe the interaction between teachers and students, including students with special needs, and to understand the approach applied by teachers in creating an inclusive classroom atmosphere. These observations were recorded systematically in the form of field notes and reinforced with visual documentation such as photos and videos as supporting data. The second technique was in-depth interviews, which were conducted with the fourth grade homeroom teacher and principal using a semi-structured format. Through these interviews, researchers explored the perceptions, experiences, strategies and challenges they faced in implementing inclusive education. This approach enabled us to gain a more contextualized and personalized understanding of the dynamics of inclusion implementation in the school. The third technique was documentation, which involved analyzing school documents such as lesson plans, student progress notes, learning evaluation results, as well as archives of activities and other administrative documents related to the inclusion program. This documentation provides concrete evidence and complements the data obtained from observations and interviews and helps to enrich the understanding of the inclusive education practices under study.

### Data analysis

Data analysis in this study was conducted using the interactive analysis model developed by Miles and Huberman (2014), which includes three main stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing and verification. In the data reduction stage, information obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation was selected, simplified, and focused on aspects relevant to the research objectives, especially those related to the strategic role of homeroom teachers, inclusive learning strategies, and challenges faced in the implementation process. Furthermore, the reduced data was presented in the form of descriptive narratives, direct quotes from interviews, and thematic matrices that made it easier for researchers to identify patterns, linkages between concepts, and build initial interpretations of the findings. The final stage of the analysis process is conclusion drawing and verification, where the researcher formulates the main results based on all the data that has been collected and thoroughly analyzed. Data validity was strictly maintained through a triangulation process, by comparing results from various data collection techniques and sources of information to ensure consistency and accuracy of findings.

To ensure data validity, this research also refers to four criteria from Lincoln and Guba, namely **credibility** (by triangulating sources and member checking), **transferability** (through in-depth contextual description), **dependability** (by maintaining procedural consistency), and **confirmability** (by ensuring that the findings are truly sourced from the data, not the researcher's unilateral interpretation) as explained by Daruhadi and Sopiati (2024). This approach allows the research results to have a high level of trust and accuracy and is relevant to be applied in similar contexts.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 1. The Strategic Role of Homeroom Teachers in Inclusive Learning

Based on the results of observations that have been made, class IV of the SDN where this research took place consists of 29 students, with 28 regular students and 1 student with special needs. Students with special needs are classified as slow learners and show behavior that leads to ADHD symptoms. Students with special needs have difficulty in understanding lessons as a whole, often showing impulsive behavior such as hitting friends, throwing things, and trying to damage classroom facilities. Homeroom teachers seem to play an active role in reducing children's emotions with an empathic approach, such as calming children without confrontation and giving children space to resolve their anger first. This is in line with the view (Sulasmi et al., 2025) that teachers must be able to create an emotionally safe environment for students with special needs. This condition demands more attention in the learning process. The strategic role of homeroom teachers in supporting inclusive learning is evident through the adaptive efforts made in dealing with the situation. This proves that

the homeroom teacher's role is not only academic, but also helps maintain the social-emotional stability of the class to make the learning process conducive. This is supported by the interview results:

*"I try to get the child to focus. But because he is a slow learner and has high emotions, I mostly calm him down before continuing the learning activities."*

The teacher also adjusts the way the student is assessed to keep it fair but realistic, as stated:

*"If he can only write two words, then we assess him from there. Not from the final result, but from the effort."*

This approach shows the teacher's competence in implementing the principles of inclusive education as stated by (Wulandari et al., 2024) that inclusive education must provide equal opportunities for all children by taking into account their diversity. Teachers act as facilitators and fair evaluators, and this is in line with the findings of (Maesaroh et al., 2025), that teachers who understand the principles of inclusion are able to develop flexible lesson plans and implement learning differentiation strategies.

## **2. Adaptive Learning Strategies in Supporting Children with Special Needs**

Strategies used by homeroom teachers to support the learning of children with special needs include the use of concrete methods, task flexibility, and emotional reinforcement. Teachers avoid excessive academic pressure and focus on realistic achievements according to children's abilities. For example, students are only asked to write a few sentences as a form of achievement, not long paragraphs. This strategy is supported by the use of behavior diaries and informal evaluations as a form of monitoring student progress. The teacher stated:

*"Just taking notes he is already good. So I just let him write a few sentences, the important thing is that he follows the learning process."*

This strategy is also complemented by positive reinforcement through hugs when children cry, praise when they sit quietly, and collaboration with peers. These strategies demonstrate the teacher's social-emotional skills, which according to (Sembung et al., 2023), are an important part of teacher professionalism in an inclusive context.

In addition, teachers record students' behavior on a daily basis as part of informal evaluations. These notes are included in alternative assessments and are referenced when coordinating with the principal and parents. This strategy strengthens the teacher's function as a liaison between school, students and families (Daffa et al., 2025).

## **3. Barriers to Inclusive Learning**

One of the main barriers found in implementing inclusive learning is the absence of a special assistant teacher (GPK) in the school. All responsibilities for classroom management, monitoring children with special needs and adjusting learning are borne entirely by the homeroom teacher. This was confirmed by the homeroom teacher:

*"There is no special teacher yet. So everything is handled by the homeroom teacher. They don't have any special training."*

This situation creates an emotional and physical burden on teachers, as they have to divide their attention between regular learners and children with special needs. In addition, the regular curriculum does not provide enough flexibility to adjust learning for children with special needs. In addition, teachers have not received any special training on inclusive education so they rely on their experience and learning from other teachers. Learning facilities and media are also limited. Teachers have not been able to use visual media optimally due to limited tools and unsupportive classrooms. Another barrier that arises is students' social response to children with special needs. His friends often feel disturbed by his hyperactive behavior, which can break the concentration of the class.

## **4. Efforts to Overcome Challenges in Inclusive Learning Implementation**

Facing various challenges in implementing inclusive learning, homeroom teachers in this primary school show initiative and independent adaptation. Despite not being accompanied by a special assistant teacher (GPK), teachers still try to carry out learning as best as possible with various strategies. The teacher said:

*"Because there is no special assistant teacher, so I try to handle this child myself. Sometimes I give different tasks, sometimes I accompany him more closely when he starts to have difficulty focusing or disturbing friends."*

Teachers try to adapt learning strategies to the abilities and characteristics of children with disabilities. For example, by giving simpler instructions and modified tasks, and positioning students close to the teacher's desk so that they can be more easily monitored and directed. In addition, teachers also build intensive communication with the principal and parents. The principal provides a space for informal discussions so that teachers can convey obstacles and get support. In his interview, the principal stated:

*"We don't have a GPK yet, but we are always open to supporting teachers. If there is training or coaching from the office, we will participate."*



Although specialized training is not yet thoroughly available, teachers show initiative to learn independently and discuss with peers. The teacher revealed:

*"I usually learn from experience and ask other teachers who have worked with children with special needs."*

Although limited facilities and learning media are still an obstacle, teachers still use simple tools such as pictures, cards and concrete objects that can attract the attention of children with special needs. Teachers also rearrange the classroom to make it more conducive and minimize distractions. With all the limitations, teachers' efforts show a commitment to implementing the principles of inclusivity gradually and contextually.

Collaboration between teachers, principals and parents is key in creating an adaptive and supportive learning environment for all learners, including those with disabilities.

## 5. Collaboration and Cross-Stakeholder Support

Collaboration between teachers, parents, principals and external agencies such as the Technical Service Unit of the Center for Disability Services and Inclusive Education (UPT PLDPI) is the key to successful inclusive learning. Support from the school began to emerge after teachers reported intensely on student progress. The principal provides space for discussion and supports regular monitoring. This is reinforced by the school principal's interview:

*"We always encourage teachers to record student progress in detail and report it regularly. When a case like this arises, the school immediately establishes communication with parents and if possible, we bridge with services from the Technical Service Unit of the Center for Disability Services and Inclusive Education (UPT PLDPI)."*

In addition, the school also began to be open to collaborating with external parties such as the Technical Service Unit of the Center for Disability Services and Inclusive Education (UPT PLDPI) which provides free therapy services for Surakarta residents. Once it was known that the child had undergone therapy, the teacher better understood the appropriate approach in dealing with the child. Although the report from the counselor showed that the child behaved well during therapy, the teacher was aware of the difference in context between the therapy room and the regular classroom. The student's parents also showed a positive response despite initially not sharing information on the child's condition. They now regularly communicate with the teacher through daily messages, and replace friends' belongings that their child damaged. This shows that good collaboration between teachers and parents can be established even if it starts with a delay.



Picture 1. Interview with homeroom teacher



Picture 2. Group Photo with Other Homeroom Teachers



Picture 3. Photo with the Principal

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of classroom observations, evaluation documentation, and teacher and principal interviews, it can be concluded that homeroom teachers have a strategic and crucial role in the implementation of inclusive learning in primary schools, especially when there is no support from special assistant teachers (GPK). Teachers not only function as teachers, but also as facilitators, emotional mentors, fair evaluators, and liaisons

between students, parents and the school. An empathic approach, adaptive learning strategies and social-emotional strengthening are key in supporting children with special needs to participate in the learning process optimally.

Although faced with barriers such as limited training, facilities and an inflexible curriculum, teachers show great initiative through adapted learning strategies, the use of concrete media and recording the development of student behavior. Collaboration between teachers, principals, parents and external parties such as UPT PLDPI is an important supporting factor in creating an inclusive, adaptive and sustainable learning environment. This finding confirms the importance of cross-party systemic support and teacher capacity building to realize meaningful inclusive education for all students.

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