



Analysis of Teacher Strategies in Promoting Students Socio-Emotional Development in Inclusive Elementary School Classes

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive education has become a central paradigm in contemporary educational reform, emphasizing equal learning opportunities for all students regardless of their diverse abilities. However, the implementation of inclusive education in schools often faces pedagogical challenges, particularly in managing classroom diversity and supporting students' socio-emotional development. This study addresses the gap between inclusive education policies and classroom practices by examining how teachers implement strategies to promote students' socio-emotional development in inclusive elementary school classrooms. The purpose of this study was to analyze teachers' pedagogical strategies in promoting students' socio-emotional development in an inclusive environment. This study used a descriptive qualitative approach conducted at SD 44 Banda Aceh, involving the principal, third-grade teachers, and physical education teachers as research participants. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model, including data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that socio-emotional development is supported through four main aspects: school policies and institutional support, teachers' understanding of socio-emotional competencies, adaptive teaching strategies in inclusive classrooms, and the integration of socio-emotional values into physical education activities. These findings highlight that the development of students' social-emotional skills in inclusive classrooms requires collaborative and systemic support involving school leadership, teacher competency, and an inclusive learning environment.

1. Introduction

Inclusive education has evolved over the past two decades from a mere policy agenda to a key paradigm in global education system reform (Garrote et al., 2020; Khoshimov, 2022; Ncube et al., 2025). Its core principle emphasizes that every child, regardless of physical, cognitive, social, or emotional condition, has equal access to a quality education. However, various studies indicate that the success of inclusive education is determined not only by the existence of formal regulations or policies, but also by the extent to which these policies are effectively implemented in classroom learning practices (Basyori, 2025).

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In the Indonesian context, inclusive education policies have gained legitimacy through various national regulations that encourage schools to accept and serve students with diverse characteristics. Normatively, these policies reflect the state's commitment to the principles of educational equity and respect for student diversity. However, the implementation of these policies at the school level often faces various structural and pedagogical challenges (Khotimah et al., 2025). Many schools have opened access to students with special needs, but have not yet fully developed learning practices that are truly responsive to the diversity of students' learning needs.

This situation demonstrates a gap between policy orientation and the reality of educational practice. In many cases, inclusive education is still understood administratively as an obligation to accept students with special needs, rather than as a pedagogical transformation that requires changes in learning design, classroom management, and social interaction patterns within the classroom (Erika Yunia Wardah, 2021; Hilalludin, 2026). As a result, the presence of students with different needs often poses new challenges for teachers in managing the dynamics of learning and social relationships between students.

In this context, the role of teachers becomes highly strategic. Teachers no longer merely serve as transmitters of subject matter, but as pedagogical agents responsible for constructing an inclusive learning environment. This includes the ability to design flexible learning strategies, manage social interactions in the classroom, and facilitate the simultaneous academic and socio-emotional development of all students. In other words, the success of inclusive education depends heavily on teachers' capacity to translate inclusion principles into concrete pedagogical practices. This complexity is increasingly apparent in inclusive classrooms at the elementary school level, where the diversity of student characteristics is not only related to academic ability but also to social and emotional development. The presence of students with special needs, such as students with emotional and behavioral disorders, can impact the dynamics of social interactions in the classroom. This situation requires teachers to not only manage the learning process but also to build a social climate that allows all students to interact positively, respect each other, and learn together.

Social-emotional development during elementary school is a crucial phase in the development of children's social competence. At this stage, children begin to develop the ability to control their emotions, build relationships with peers, and understand social norms that apply within groups. In the context of an inclusive classroom, this developmental process takes place in a more heterogeneous environment, making social interactions between students more complex. If not managed appropriately, differences in student characteristics can lead to social conflict, marginalization, or difficulties in adjustment. Therefore, the pedagogical strategies implemented by teachers play a crucial role in fostering students' social-emotional development. Teachers need to develop learning approaches that are not solely oriented toward academic achievement but also consciously designed to strengthen students' social skills, empathy, cooperation, and emotional regulation abilities. Thus, inclusive classrooms function not only as academic learning spaces but also as social spaces that facilitate the development of students' character and social competence.

Several international studies in recent years have confirmed that the success of inclusive education is closely related to the pedagogical practices developed by teachers in the classroom. A study by Awalia et al., 2025, shows that an effective inclusive approach emphasizes not only educational access but also the transformation of learning practices that are able to respond to student diversity. Another study by Fierna & Lusie, 2023, emphasizes that inclusive pedagogical strategies should focus on expanding learning opportunities for all students without creating labels for students with special needs. In the context of socio-emotional development, Khattak et al., (2025) found that positive social interactions in inclusive classrooms contribute significantly to increased empathy, emotional regulation, and collaborative skills in students. Meanwhile, a study by

Munawaroh et al., (2025) shows that teacher competence in managing heterogeneous classroom dynamics is a key factor in the successful implementation of inclusive education in various countries. Recent research by Nafilata et al., (2025) also confirms that adaptive learning strategies such as learning differentiation, collaborative learning, and social relationship-based approaches can increase students' social participation in inclusive classrooms.

However, most of this research still focuses on the conceptual framework of inclusive education or on implementation policies at the education system level. Empirical studies specifically analyzing how teachers develop and implement pedagogical strategies to support students' socio-emotional development in inclusive classrooms, particularly in the Indonesian elementary school context, are still relatively limited. Furthermore, the dynamics of social interactions between regular students and students with special needs—including those with emotional and behavioral disorders—have not been explored in depth in the national education literature.

These limitations indicate a research gap that is important for further study. A more comprehensive understanding of teacher strategies in managing inclusive classrooms and promoting students' social-emotional development is essential, both to enrich theoretical studies on inclusive education and to provide practical recommendations for improving the quality of learning in schools. Based on these considerations, this study aims to analyze teacher strategies in promoting students' social-emotional development in inclusive elementary school classrooms. The analysis focuses on how teachers manage social interactions, design adaptive pedagogical strategies, and create learning environments that support the social-emotional development of all students in a heterogeneous classroom context.

2. Methodology

Research design is a strategy to achieve predetermined research objectives and serves as a guideline or guide for researchers throughout the research process. In this study, using a descriptive research design is in principle an effort to find a theory that can support the research results. With this approach, data is collected, then analyzed, abstracted, so that theories emerge as qualitative research findings. The approach chosen in this study is a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is a research method used to examine the state of an object, a qualitative research method is used to obtain in-depth and meaningful data. Judging from the type of research, the approach used in this study is descriptive qualitative. Descriptive qualitative research is data collected in the form of words, visuals, learning activities, and behavior that are not expressed in numerical form, but in qualitative terms with broad meaning. Qualitative data allows researchers to understand in depth how the process of Teacher Strategies in Encouraging Students' Social-emotional Development in Inclusive Classrooms.

This research will be conducted at SD 44 Banda Aceh, Jl. T Iskandar, Ceurih Village, Ulee Kareng District, Banda Aceh. This research is aimed at the principal, the third-grade teacher who teaches the inclusive class, and the third-grade physical education teacher. This qualitative research was conducted through several stages as follows: (1) the pre-field stage, (2) the field research implementation stage, and (3) the data analysis stage.

Data collection techniques are one of the methods in data collection using techniques or methods used by researchers to collect data. The data used in this study are in-depth interviews directed at specific problems with pre-selected informants to obtain the necessary data. The interview technique used is unstructured, where the researcher does not conduct interviews with a strict and formal structure so that the information obtained has sufficient capacity regarding various aspects of this study.

The analysis technique used in this study is qualitative data analysis, which is based on the semantic relationship between research problems. Qualitative analysis is carried out with the aim of researchers obtaining the meaning of the data to answer the research problem. Therefore, in qualitative analysis, the collected data needs to be systematized, structured, semanticized, and synthesized to have complete meaning. Data analysis in this qualitative research model, Miles and Huberman, is conducted during data collection and after completion of data collection within a certain period. During the interview, the researcher analyzes the interviewee's answers. If the answers are not satisfactory after analysis, the researcher will continue the questioning until a certain stage. This field model analyzes continuously until complete, so that the data is saturated. This ensures that researchers truly obtain results in accordance with the facts on the ground without any manipulation. Activities in data analysis include data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. The analysis steps are:

3. Results

Based on the analysis of interview data conducted with the principal, third-grade teacher, and physical education teacher, the researchers conducted a coding process to identify key themes emerging from the data. The coding process was carried out by assigning a code to each important statement related to teacher strategies in promoting students' social-emotional development in inclusive classrooms.

3.1 School Policies and Support in Students' Social-Emotional Development

In the principal data source, several key themes were identified relating to school policies and support for students' social-emotional development. The KS1 code indicates that students' social-emotional development is a priority in the school program, particularly through the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, which emphasizes character building.

Furthermore, the KS2 code indicates that the school supports social-emotional learning through an inclusive education policy that provides opportunities for all students, including those with special needs, to learn together in regular classes without discrimination. Furthermore, the KS3 code indicates support for learning facilities from the school, such as the provision of learning media, infocus, and educational games that can assist teachers in creating engaging lessons and fostering student social interaction. Other support provided by the school is demonstrated through the KS4 code, which includes training, workshops, and Teacher Working Group (KKG) activities aimed at improving teacher competency in developing social-emotional learning in inclusive classrooms. Meanwhile, the KS5 code indicates that the principal also directly monitors the implementation of learning strategies in the classroom through observations of teaching and learning activities.

3.2 Teachers' Understanding of Students' Social-Emotional Development

In the data source of third-grade teachers, several themes were found related to teachers' understanding of students' social-emotional development and the learning strategies used in inclusive classrooms. The GK1 code indicates that teachers understand social-emotional development as students' ability to recognize their own feelings, control emotions, and build positive social interactions with others. Furthermore, the GK2 code indicates that teachers implement differentiated learning strategies by adapting teaching methods to suit the abilities and learning needs of both regular and special needs students.

The GK3 code indicates that the teacher encourages the development of empathy and cooperation through heterogeneous group learning activities, so that students can help each other and learn to appreciate the differences in abilities of their classmates. Furthermore, the GK4 code

indicates that the teacher uses positive reinforcement strategies by giving praise and appreciation to students who demonstrate good social behavior. The GK5 code indicates the use of role-playing as a learning strategy that can help students understand social situations and develop empathy for others. Meanwhile, the GK6 code indicates that the teacher also guides students to recognize and express emotions appropriately through dialogue and reflection on experiences they have had in class.

3.3 Teacher Learning Strategies in Developing Social-Emotional Skills in Inclusive Classrooms

In the data source of the Physical Education (PJOK) teachers, several themes were found related to the integration of social-emotional aspects in physical education learning. Code GP1 indicates that during PJOK activities, students demonstrated an attitude of mutual assistance and respect for friends with different abilities. Furthermore, code GP2 indicates that teachers used team games as a strategy to foster cooperation among students. Code GP3 indicates that teachers instilled the value of sportsmanship through sports activities that taught students to accept victory and defeat positively. Furthermore, code GP4 indicates that teachers adjusted learning activities so that students with different physical abilities, including students with special needs, could still participate in PJOK activities. Meanwhile, code GP5 indicates that teachers also guided students in managing emotions when facing certain situations in games, such as when winning, losing, or waiting for their turn to play.

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4. Discussion

Research findings indicate that students' social-emotional development in inclusive classrooms is an important aspect of educational practice in elementary schools (Aldo, Ridwan, Rahmiyati, 2025; Bilqis et al., 2025). Interviews with principals, classroom teachers, and physical education teachers indicate that social-emotional development is not only understood as part of the character-building process, but also as an important foundation for students' overall learning success (Vienlentina & Katrin, 2025). In the context of inclusive education, students' abilities to recognize emotions, interact positively, and appreciate differences are essential skills for each student to learn optimally in a diverse environment (Vienlentina & Katrin, 2025). Based on research findings, school principals play a strategic role in creating policies and school environments that support students' social-emotional development (Risnajayanti & Nurlina, 2025). Policies that support the implementation of the Independent Curriculum provide teachers with the space to develop more flexible and student-centered learning (Azzahra & Rahmadhani, 2025). In this regard, schools not only emphasize academic achievement but also pay attention to student character development by strengthening the values of empathy, cooperation, and mutual respect (Sumar et al., 2025). This support is realized through the provision of adequate learning facilities and teacher professional development activities, such as training, workshops, and Teacher Working Group (KKG) activities. These findings indicate that school leadership plays a crucial role in building a learning ecosystem that supports students' social-emotional development in inclusive classrooms.

In addition to school support, teachers' understanding of students' social-emotional development is also a crucial factor in the successful implementation of learning strategies in the classroom. Research shows that teachers understand social-emotional development as students' ability to recognize and manage emotions, understand the feelings of others, and build positive social relationships with their surroundings (Hartati, 2023). This understanding is reflected in the way teachers design learning that is not only oriented towards academic achievement but also considers students' social and emotional aspects. Teachers strive to create an inclusive classroom atmosphere by providing opportunities for students to interact with each other, collaborate, and learn to appreciate the differences in abilities of their classmates (Guberina, 2023).

In classroom learning practices, teachers implement various strategies aimed at encouraging students' social-emotional development. One widely used strategy is collaboration-based learning through heterogeneous group activities (Mesghina et al., 2024). Through this activity, students with different abilities are placed in one group so they can help each other and learn to work together to complete learning tasks. This strategy not only helps improve social interaction among students but also encourages the development of empathy and tolerance for differences. In the context of an inclusive classroom, collaboration between students is an important means of building a learning environment that supports and values diversity. In addition to collaborative learning, teachers also use positive reinforcement strategies to foster positive social behavior in students. Positive reinforcement is achieved through appreciation, praise, and recognition of student behavior that demonstrates empathy, responsibility, and cooperation (Ulfa et al., 2025). This approach helps students understand that positive social behavior is an essential part of school life. Indirectly, this strategy also builds students' intrinsic motivation to continue demonstrating good behavior in interactions with peers and teachers.

Research findings also indicate that role-playing is used as a learning strategy to help students understand social situations that occur in everyday life. Through role-playing activities, students can act out various social situations and learn to understand the feelings of others (Erika Yunia Wardah, 2021). This approach provides space for students to develop empathy and improve their ability to respond more wisely to social situations. Thus, learning is not only cognitive but also involves emotional experiences that can enrich students' understanding of social values. In addition to classroom teachers, physical education (PJOK) teachers also play a crucial role in supporting students' social-emotional development through physical education (Vienlentina & Katrin, 2025). Research findings indicate that sports and games can be effective tools for developing students' social skills. In PJOK activities, students learn to work together in teams, wait their turn, and respect peers with different physical abilities. Competitive situations in games also provide opportunities for students to learn to manage their emotions, both during wins and losses.

PJOK (Physical Education, Sports, and Health) teachers also adapt learning activities to ensure all students can actively participate, including those with special needs. These adjustments are made by providing alternative movements, using appropriate assistive devices, and allocating additional time for students who need it. This approach demonstrates that inclusive learning focuses not only on providing equal opportunities but also on creating meaningful learning experiences for each student, tailored to their abilities and needs. Overall, the findings of this study indicate that students' social-emotional development in inclusive classrooms is a process involving various elements within the school environment (Boeriswati et al., 2023). The role of the principal as policymaker, teachers as implementers of learning, and a supportive learning environment are interrelated factors in shaping students' inclusive and humanistic learning experiences (Abdussyukur et al., 2023). When all these elements work synergistically, the learning process not only results in academic achievement but also helps students develop as individuals capable of self-understanding, respecting others, and

interacting positively in social life. Therefore, social-emotional development in inclusive education needs to be understood as an integral part of the educational process oriented towards character building and student well-being. A humanistic, collaborative, and responsive learning approach to students' needs is key to creating a learning environment that is not only structurally inclusive but also socially and emotionally inclusive.

5. Conclusions

The social-emotional development of students in inclusive classrooms involves a complex interaction between school policies, teacher competencies, and the social dynamics of learning. Principals play a strategic role in creating an ecosystem that supports this development, through the implementation of the Independent Curriculum which emphasizes character, learning facilities, and teacher training programs. Principals' monitoring of the learning process also ensures that the strategies used by teachers align with character development. Pedagogical practices implemented by teachers, such as learning as a means of recognizing emotions and building social relationships, demonstrate a deep understanding of the importance of social-emotional aspects. Differentiation strategies, the use of diverse learning groups, and role-playing methods are part of this effort. Physical Education (PJOK) teachers contribute by adapting activities so that all students, including those with special needs, can actively participate. Research underscores the importance of a collaborative and systemic approach to students' social-emotional development, where synergy between policies, leadership, and pedagogical strategies is key to building an inclusive learning environment that is responsive to students' diverse needs. Efforts to strengthen inclusive education should include school policies and teacher professional development for more effective diversity management.

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