



Rethinking inclusive primary education: Managerial leadership, pedagogical strategies, and Islamic value-based practices in Indonesia

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Abstract

Inclusive education at the elementary level is essential to ensure equal learning opportunities for all children, including those with disabilities. This study explores and interprets the implementation of inclusive primary education in an Islamic elementary school through an in-depth qualitative case study. Using an interpretative qualitative design, data were collected through classroom observations, in-depth interviews with school leaders and teachers, and document analysis to capture institutional practices and lived experiences within the school context. The findings reveal three interconnected dimensions shaping inclusive practice. First, transformative managerial leadership institutionalizes inclusive policies and fosters a collaborative school culture. Second, adaptive pedagogical strategies, including differentiated instruction, flexible assessment, and peer collaboration, support diverse learner needs in everyday classroom practice. Third, Islamic moral-spiritual values, including justice ('adl), compassion (rahmah), and communal responsibility, provide an ethical foundation that strengthens inclusive commitments and relational engagement among stakeholders. Rather than positioning inclusion solely as a technical pedagogical reform, this study demonstrates how value-based leadership and religious moral frameworks can reinforce inclusive educational transformation. The study proposes an integrative perspective on inclusive education by linking contemporary inclusive pedagogy with Islamic moral-spiritual values in a primary school context.

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1. Introduction

Primary education serves as a strategic foundation for shaping children's character, knowledge, and skills; therefore, equal access at this level is crucial for ensuring the quality of human development in the future. Every child has the right to learn without discrimination, including children with disabilities. Globally, international studies emphasize that inclusive education is a key instrument for promoting equality and sustainability. UNESCO (2020) highlights inclusion as a prerequisite for achieving SDG 4 on quality education, while OECD (2023) and the



European Agency (2012) underscore that inclusive education systems contribute to social cohesion, civic participation, and long-term learning outcomes. Ainscow (2020) further stresses that inclusion at the elementary level is an important indicator of social justice in education. This view resonates with the spirit of Islam, which emphasizes justice in education, as stated in the Qur'an:

“Indeed, Allah commands justice, doing good, and giving to relatives; and forbids immorality, wrongdoing, and oppression. He admonishes you so that you may take heed” (QS. An-Nahl: 90).

In the Indonesian context, inclusive education is mandated by the Ministry of National Education Regulation or Permendikbudristek (2023) No. 48/2023, which requires elementary schools to admit children with disabilities to learn alongside regular students. For schools under the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the mandate is reinforced by Ministerial Regulation (KMA) No. 1/2024 on reasonable accommodation for students with disabilities. These regulations are further supported by the *Merdeka Belajar* policy and the vision of equitable access to education (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). However, research in Indonesia shows a significant gap between policy and practice. Studies by Li et al. (2022) and Sunardi et al. (2024) reveal that many elementary schools still face limited facilities, a shortage of special education teachers, and weak managerial capacity in handling student diversity. Marlina et al. (2023) add that inclusion often occurs due to the empathy and humanitarian values of teachers and principals, rather than systemic readiness. From an Islamic perspective, this relates to the value of *rahmah* (compassion), as emphasized in the Qur'an: *“and We have not sent you [Muhammad], except as a mercy to the worlds”* (QS. Al-Anbiya: 107).

Thus, although legal frameworks exist, realities on the ground reveal complex managerial, pedagogical, and socio-cultural challenges in implementing inclusive education at the elementary level in Indonesia. International research also confirms that the success of inclusive education depends heavily on school leadership and teachers' pedagogical practices (Abdullah et al., 2026; Berhanu, 2025; Lin et al., 2026; Lüddeckens, 2025). Ainscow et al. (2006) highlight the importance of leadership in building a culture and policies that support diversity, while Spillane (2005), through the concept of Distributed Leadership, emphasizes the effectiveness of collective leadership in promoting inclusion. Scheerens (2016) identifies management effectiveness as a key factor in education quality, and Fullan (2019) reminds us that transforming toward inclusion is a gradual process requiring consistency and cultural change within schools. From a pedagogical perspective, Florian & Black-Hawkins (2011) introduced the concept of Inclusive Pedagogy, which emphasizes designing learning for all students, while Meyer et al. (2014) with Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Tomlinson (2014) with Differentiated Instruction underscore the importance of teacher flexibility in accommodating diversity. Additional studies reinforce this view. For instance, Rose & Garner (2010) argue that pedagogical innovation within UDL enhances the

participation of students with disabilities, and Sharma & Loreman (2021) stress teachers' attitudes as a primary predictor of inclusion success. These principles align with the Qur'anic command for all individuals to seek knowledge, as emphasized in QS. Al-'Alaq: 1–5, which affirms the universal obligation to read and learn.

In Indonesia, research consistently points to the crucial roles of management and pedagogy. Marlina et al. (2023) stress that school leadership is key to successful inclusion at the elementary level. Sunardi et al. (2024) find that differentiated instruction enhances engagement among students with disabilities, while Li et al. (2022) emphasize the importance of collaboration between teachers, parents, and education staff. Fu et al. (2022) show that a positive social climate in elementary schools reduces stigma and fosters broader acceptance. These studies indicate that inclusion in Indonesia is more often driven by empathy, moral commitment, and teachers' improvisation rather than by robust formal systems. This resonates with the value of *amanah* (responsibility), as the Qur'an declares:

“Indeed, Allah commands you to render trusts to whom they are due and when you judge between people to judge with justice. Excellent is that which Allah instructs you. Indeed, Allah is ever Hearing and Seeing” (QS. An-Nisa: 58), affirming the responsibility of teachers and school leaders as trustees in educating all children.

Both international and national studies point to inclusive leadership, adaptive pedagogy, and supportive social climates as key determinants of inclusive education. However, much of this work examines these dimensions separately, without exploring their interaction in depth. Furthermore, moral and spiritual dimensions, particularly Islamic values such as *adl* (justice), *rahmah* (compassion), *ihsan* (excellence in doing good), and *amanah* (responsibility), are rarely addressed, despite their potential to strengthen the moral foundations of inclusive primary education in Islamic schools. This is the gap that the present study seeks to address through an integrative analysis.

Accordingly, this research is designed to address several key questions: (1) What is the role of principals and vice principals in supporting the implementation of inclusive education in elementary schools? (2) What strategies do teachers use to create adaptive learning that reaches all students? and (3) How can Islamic values strengthen managerial and pedagogical practices in the context of inclusive education? This study contributes to broader theoretical discussions on inclusive education while offering practical insights for developing more comprehensive models of inclusive primary education. Theoretically, it aims to broaden the understanding of how managerial and pedagogical aspects integrate with Islamic values as ethical-spiritual foundations. In practice, it offers guidance to policymakers, principals, and teachers on designing effective, adaptable strategies for implementing inclusion aligned with Islamic values. In this way, the study not

only enriches academic literature but also makes a tangible contribution to improving the quality of inclusive primary education in Indonesia.

2. Methods

This study employed a qualitative case study design. The case study method was selected because it allows for an in-depth exploration of the dynamics of inclusive education implementation in an Islamic elementary school in Palembang. This design is relevant for understanding real-life contexts, social interactions, and the strategies used by principals, vice principals, and teachers to implement inclusive practices. To improve methodological clarity, the study defined the unit of analysis (an Islamic elementary school admitting students with disabilities) and the unit of observation (the principal, the vice principals for curriculum and student affairs, and classroom teachers).

The research was conducted at an Islamic elementary school in Palembang that has admitted students with disabilities despite not having special education teachers. The site was selected purposively based on three criteria: (1) the school has implemented inclusive policies for at least three years, (2) the school currently has students with disabilities enrolled, and (3) the principal and teachers are directly involved in managing inclusion.

The main participants consisted of five key informants (all names are pseudonyms): Mukmin (principal), Dwi (vice principal for curriculum), Maya (vice principal for student affairs), Azizah (homeroom teacher for lower grades), and Andi (homeroom teacher for upper grades). Additional informants, including parents of students with disabilities and administrative staff, were involved to enrich the data through triangulation.

Data were collected over five months, including: 2 classroom observations, in-depth interviews with five key participants (the principal, the vice principals for curriculum and student affairs, and two classroom teachers), and document analysis. Each interview lasted approximately 90–120 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' consent and then transcribed verbatim. The interview protocol covered key dimensions, including leadership vision for inclusion, pedagogical adaptation strategies, collaboration practices, and the integration of Islamic values in inclusive learning. Furthermore, two classroom observations were conducted to document pedagogical interaction and student participation in context. Documentation was also drawn from school archives (curriculum, school reports, meeting notes) related to the implementation of inclusive education.

Data analysis followed the interactive model by Miles et al. (2018), consisting of: (1) data reduction, by selecting and organizing data according to research focus; (2) data display in the form of descriptive narratives, direct quotations, and categorization tables; and (3) drawing and verifying conclusions continuously until

data saturation was achieved. Coding was conducted manually through open coding, followed by thematic categorization to identify relevant patterns.

Although the number of primary participants was limited to five, the study prioritizes depth of inquiry over breadth of representation, consistent with the qualitative case study methodology. The focus was on obtaining rich, contextually grounded insights rather than generalizable statistical patterns.

The validity and trustworthiness of the data were ensured through: (1) source triangulation (principal, vice principals, teachers, parents, documents); (2) methodological triangulation (interviews, observations, documentation); (3) member checking by confirming transcripts and findings with participants; and (4) an audit trail documenting the entire process of data collection and analysis in detail, providing a transparent record of the research process.

This research adhered to ethical principles of social research, namely informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. The researcher obtained official permission from the school and explained the study's purpose to all participants. Participants' identities were protected using anonymous codes. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants retained the right to withdraw at any time without consequence. These ethical principles are consistent with the Islamic value of *amanah* (trust and responsibility), which underscores the importance of safeguarding responsibility and trust in social and academic interactions.

3. Results

The findings demonstrate how inclusive education is implemented in an Islamic elementary school in Palembang through the roles of the principal, the vice principals for curriculum and student affairs, and classroom teachers. Table 1 summarizes the main findings across managerial, pedagogical, and socio-cultural dimensions.

Table 1.

Research findings summary.

Focus of Findings	Field Evidence	Implications
Value-driven managerial leadership	The principal framed inclusion as a moral commitment; vice principals reinforced it through curriculum flexibility, social messaging, and coordination.	Leadership functions as a moral and enabling force linking policy, culture, and practice.
Flexible curriculum adaptation	Teachers were allowed to modify methods, materials, and pacing based on student needs.	Curriculum flexibility is central to inclusive pedagogy and teacher responsiveness.
Inclusive school climate	Repeated moral messaging promoted respect for diversity; students with	Inclusion is sustained through socio-cultural processes and school climate.

	disabilities participated in daily activities with peers.	
Differentiated pedagogical strategies	Teachers used simplified instructions, repetition, concrete media, and mixed-ability group work.	Inclusive pedagogy is adaptive, situational, and dependent on teacher judgment.
Flexible and authentic assessment	Portfolio and task-based assessments were used to evaluate individual progress.	Assessment must be developmental and responsive to learner diversity.
Islamic values as a foundation	Values such as <i>adl</i> , <i>rahmah</i> , and <i>amanah</i> guided leadership and classroom interactions.	Religious-ethical values function as a cultural infrastructure for inclusion.
External collaboration	The school collaborated with psychologists and external support services.	Collaboration compensates for limited internal resources.
Structural limitations	Lack of special education teachers and limited facilities; reliance on teacher improvisation.	Inclusion remains uneven without systemic and resource support.

The findings are elaborated in three major thematic sections below.

3.1 Managerial roles of principals and vice principals

The findings indicate that the implementation of inclusive education in the studied school is strongly shaped by the managerial roles of the principal and vice principals, particularly through value-driven leadership, policy flexibility, and social reinforcement practices. The principal played a central role in initiating and sustaining inclusive practices by framing inclusion as a moral and institutional commitment rather than merely regulatory compliance. As stated by the principal: *"We opened this inclusive school out of a sense of humanity, because we want all children, including those with special needs, to have equal rights to learn."*

Similar views were expressed by other participants. The vice principal for curriculum also emphasized that inclusion was understood as a shared responsibility within the school: *"In our school, inclusion is not just about following policy, but about responsibility toward every child."* School documents further supported this orientation. Internal meeting notes explicitly positioned inclusive education as part of the school's vision and mission, highlighting fairness and equal opportunity as core institutional values.

In terms of managerial practices, the vice principal for curriculum reported that teachers were given flexibility to adapt instructional strategies, media, and materials based on classroom needs: *"Teachers are given the freedom to adapt methods and media to classroom conditions, because our goal is for all children, without exception, to understand the lessons well."*

This flexibility was observed in classroom practices, where teachers modified learning materials, simplified instructions, and adjusted pacing for students with disabilities. These adaptations were not formally standardized; rather, they depended on teachers' professional judgment and specific classroom conditions.

The vice principal for student affairs contributed by reinforcing inclusive values through social and character-building activities. As stated: *“In every assembly, we always stress the importance of respecting peers with disabilities, because this is part of the Islamic character that must be instilled in all students.”*

Observations confirmed that these messages were consistently delivered during morning assemblies, where the principal and vice principals emphasized acceptance of diversity and mutual respect. These messages were not limited to students; during teacher meetings, similar themes were discussed, particularly regarding how to create supportive classroom environments.

In addition, the school established collaborations with external institutions, including psychological services and disability support providers, to support students with disabilities. This collaboration was documented in school reports and was mentioned by multiple participants as an important strategy to compensate for the absence of special education teachers.

However, managerial practices were not without limitations. The absence of formally trained special education personnel meant that much of the responsibility for inclusive implementation relied on teachers' individual initiative and the moral commitment promoted by school leadership. This indicates that while managerial support created enabling conditions, the consistency of implementation varied across classrooms. Overall, managerial leadership in this context functions not only as administrative coordination but also as a moral and relational force that shapes inclusive practices across the school.

3.2 Teachers' pedagogical strategies in inclusive classrooms

The findings show that classroom teachers implemented a range of adaptive and differentiated pedagogical strategies to accommodate diverse student needs, particularly for students with disabilities. These strategies were not formally standardized but developed through teachers' practical experience, reflection, and situational judgment.

Teachers consistently reported using differentiated instruction as a primary approach. One teacher stated: *“Of course, we use differentiated learning strategies.”* This was further elaborated by another teacher, who explained that instructional adjustments were made based on students' learning pace and attention levels: *“For children with ADHD and slow learners, I often give light motor activities to help them stay focused, while still involving them in discussions.”*

In practice, differentiation was evident in several forms. Teachers provided step-by-step instructions, simplified explanations, and additional time for completing the task. For students who experienced difficulty in understanding abstract concepts, teachers repeated explanations and used alternative examples to ensure comprehension.

Classroom observations confirmed these practices. In a science lesson on photosynthesis, for instance, the teacher used concrete materials such as leaves and flowers as instructional media. Students, including those with disabilities, were observed actively touching, examining, and discussing these objects during the lesson. This approach appeared to facilitate engagement, particularly for students who struggled with abstract explanations.

Small group activities also played an important role in supporting inclusive learning. Observations indicated that students frequently worked in mixed-ability groups, where regular students assisted peers with disabilities in completing tasks. This peer support mechanism enabled students with disabilities to participate more actively in classroom activities.

In terms of assessment, teachers applied flexible and authentic assessment strategies. Portfolio-based assessment was commonly used, allowing teachers to document individual learning progress through collected student work and observational notes. This approach enabled teachers to evaluate students based on their development rather than uniform performance standards.

Descriptive observation notes indicated that approximately 7 out of 10 students with disabilities were able to complete the modified tasks prepared by the teacher. In addition, around 70% of students were actively engaged during observed lessons. Although these figures do not represent statistical measurements, they reflect consistent patterns of participation across multiple classroom sessions.

However, the effectiveness of these strategies was not uniform across all learning situations. In lessons involving more abstract or cognitively demanding content, some students with disabilities required repeated assistance and were less actively engaged. This suggests that while differentiated strategies supported participation, their implementation depended heavily on teacher capacity and the nature of the learning task. Therefore, inclusive pedagogical practices in this context are characterized by flexibility, responsiveness, and reliance on teacher judgment. Rather than following fixed models, teachers continuously adapted their strategies to balance curriculum demands with learners' diverse needs.

3.3 Contribution of Islamic values to inclusive practices

The findings indicate that Islamic values played a significant role in shaping inclusive practices at both managerial and classroom levels. These values were not only expressed symbolically but were embedded in everyday interactions, decision-making processes, and pedagogical approaches within the school.

The principal explicitly linked inclusive education to the concept of *amanah* (responsibility), framing students with disabilities as a trust that must be fulfilled through equitable educational practices. As stated: *"We believe every child is an amanah from Allah. Our duty is to treat them fairly and ensure they develop according to their abilities."* This perspective was echoed by teachers, who

described their teaching practices as part of a moral and spiritual commitment. One teacher explained, “*Even though it is tiring, I see this as part of worship. If we patiently guide these children, God willing, there will be blessings.*” These narratives suggest that Islamic values functioned as an internal motivational framework that sustained teachers’ commitment, particularly in situations where institutional resources were limited.

Observational data further confirmed the presence of these values in daily school practices. During morning assemblies, school leaders consistently conveyed messages emphasizing justice (*adl*) and compassion (*rahmah*), often referencing Qur’anic principles to reinforce inclusive attitudes among students. These messages were not merely rhetorical but were reflected in student interactions. For example, during recess and group activities, students with disabilities were observed participating alongside their peers, with minimal signs of exclusion.

In classroom contexts, teachers were also observed linking learning activities to the concept of *amanah*, particularly when assigning group tasks. Students were encouraged to take responsibility not only for their own work but also for supporting peers who required assistance. This approach appeared to foster collaborative learning and mutual respect among students.

However, the integration of Islamic values was not always explicitly structured or systematically planned. In several instances, values were conveyed informally through verbal reminders or personal reflection rather than through formal curricular design. This suggests that while Islamic values played an important role in reinforcing inclusive practices, their implementation depended largely on individual interpretation and teacher initiative. Therefore, Islamic values must be used as a moral and relational foundation for inclusive education practices. Rather than operating as abstract principles, values such as *adl* (justice), *rahmah* (compassion), and *amanah* (responsibility) were enacted through concrete actions, shaping both leadership decisions and classroom interactions in the school context.

4. Discussion

The discussion suggests that inclusive education in the studied school is shaped by the interplay of leadership, pedagogy, and a value-based school culture. The mapping of inclusive implementation dynamics in the conceptual framework is not merely descriptive but also analytical, as it illustrates the organic interconnection between managerial, pedagogical, and socio-cultural aspects. Accordingly, this conceptual model bridges empirical data with theory while affirming that inclusion is a multidimensional, adaptive, and value-laden process.

4.1. Managerial leadership as an enabling condition for inclusive pedagogy

The findings suggest that managerial leadership in this context functions not merely as an administrative mechanism but, as emphasized in studies on moral and inclusive leadership (Ainscow, 2020; Sharma, 2018), as a moral and enabling force that shapes inclusive pedagogical practices. Rather than relying on formal structures alone, inclusion in the studied school is driven by value-oriented leadership that creates space for teacher agency and adaptive decision-making.

This indicates that managerial leadership operates as a mediating layer between institutional policy and classroom practice. The principal's emphasis on moral commitment, framed through empathy, responsibility, and fairness, translates into concrete managerial actions, such as curriculum flexibility, social reinforcement, and external collaboration. These actions, in turn, enable teachers to implement differentiated and responsive pedagogical strategies in their classrooms.

From a theoretical perspective, this finding extends Ainscow et al. (2006), which conceptualizes inclusive school development as the interaction of culture, policy, and practice. While Ainscow emphasizes structural alignment, the present study demonstrates that moral leadership can play a compensatory role in contexts where formal systems and resources are limited. In this sense, inclusion is not only structurally organized but also relationally and ethically enacted.

The findings also resonate with Fullan's (2019) concept of change leadership, particularly the idea that sustainable educational transformation is rooted in moral purpose. However, this study adds nuance by showing that moral purpose is not abstract but operationalized through everyday managerial decisions that directly affect teaching practices. Similarly, while Scheerens (2016) highlights management effectiveness as a determinant of school quality, the current findings suggest that effectiveness in inclusive contexts is closely tied to leaders' ability to foster trust, flexibility, and shared responsibility.

In contrast to previous studies in Indonesia that tend to treat leadership and pedagogy as separate domains (e.g., Marlina et al., 2023; Sunardi et al., 2024), this study highlights their interdependence. Managerial decisions are not external to pedagogy but actively shape the conditions under which inclusive teaching becomes possible. This shifts the understanding of leadership from policy enforcement toward pedagogical enablement. To illustrate this relationship, Figure 1 presents a conceptual model of how managerial leadership creates enabling conditions for inclusive pedagogical practices.

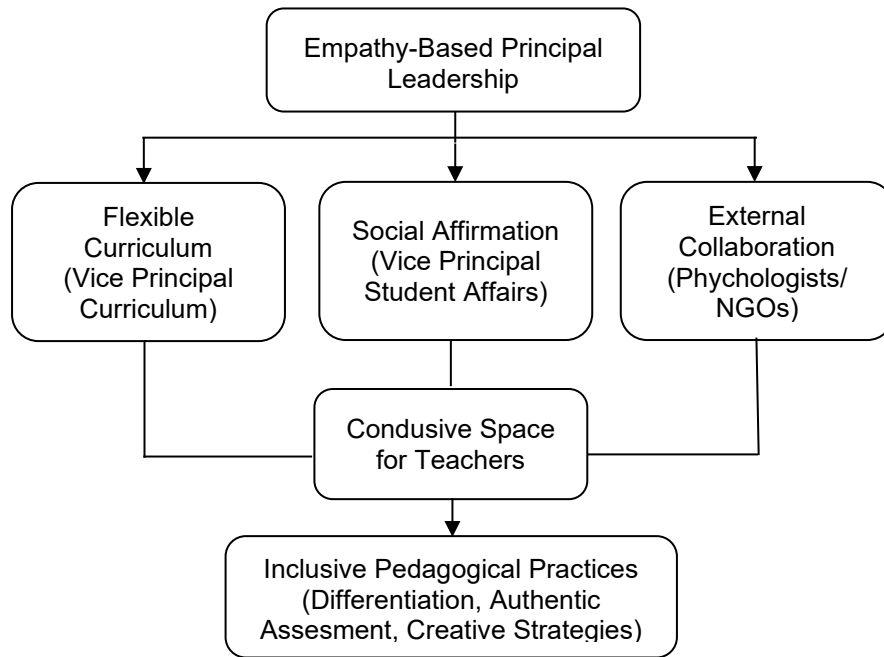


Fig. 1. Conceptual model of managerial leadership enabling inclusive pedagogical practices

These findings have important practical implications. Leadership development programs for inclusive education should move beyond technical management skills and incorporate components of moral and ethical leadership, relational capacity, and distributed decision-making. School leaders need to be equipped not only to design policies but also to create environments that empower teachers to respond flexibly to diverse learner needs.

At the same time, the findings also reveal limitations. The reliance on moral commitment and leadership initiative, in the absence of strong institutional support, may lead to variability in implementation across classrooms. This suggests that while leadership can compensate for structural gaps, long-term sustainability of inclusive practices still requires systemic support, as emphasized in studies highlighting the need for policy alignment, adequate resources, and sustained professional development structures (Dhouib et al., 2025; Kim, 2026; Yang et al., 2025).

4.2. Constraints and adaptive strategies

The findings indicate that resource limitations, including the absence of special education teachers and limited instructional facilities, did not merely serve as barriers but also as conditions that stimulated adaptive pedagogical and managerial responses. In this context, inclusion was enacted through what can be understood as situated improvisation, where teachers and school leaders continuously adjusted their practices based on available resources and immediate classroom needs.

This suggests that inclusive education in resource-constrained settings is not solely dependent on formal support systems but is also significantly shaped by teachers' and leaders' capacity to adapt, negotiate, and innovate within constraints, as evidenced in studies of inclusive practices in low-resource contexts (Ravet & Mtika, 2024). Rather than viewing limitations as deficits, the findings highlight how constraints can trigger context-sensitive strategies that sustain students with disabilities' participation.

From a theoretical standpoint, this finding resonates with Sharma & Loreman (2021), who emphasize the importance of teacher attitudes in shaping inclusive practices. However, the present study extends this perspective by showing that positive attitudes alone are insufficient without supportive managerial conditions that allow flexibility in curriculum and instruction. Similarly, Walton (2018) identifies teacher innovation in low-resource contexts, yet this study demonstrates that such innovation is reinforced and sustained through leadership practices that legitimize flexibility and experimentation.

In contrast to Duncan et al. (2021), which primarily focuses on teacher-level adaptation, the current findings highlight the interaction between teacher agency and managerial support. Adaptive strategies do not emerge in isolation but are embedded within a broader institutional environment that either constrains or enables pedagogical responses. This shifts the analytical focus from individual teacher competence toward a more systemic understanding of adaptive inclusion.

These findings carry important practical implications. Schools operating under resource constraints may benefit from strengthening internal capacities, such as collaborative problem-solving, peer-to-peer teacher learning, and reflective practice. Establishing professional learning communities can support the exchange of adaptive strategies and reduce the burden on individual teachers.

At the same time, the findings also point to the limits of relying solely on improvisation. While adaptive strategies can sustain inclusion in the short term, long-term implementation requires structural support, as highlighted in research on inclusive school development Wicki et al. (2025) including access to special education expertise, assistive technologies, and targeted funding. Without such support, there is a risk that inclusion remains uneven and heavily dependent on individual initiative. Therefore, inclusive education in this context should be understood as a dynamic interplay between constraint and agency, where limitations simultaneously challenge and shape the development of locally grounded inclusive practices.

4.3. Socio-cultural context and the role of Islamic values

The findings highlight that inclusive education in this context is not only a pedagogical or managerial process but also a socio-cultural practice shaped by shared values, norms, and everyday interactions within the school community.

Inclusion is enacted through social relationships, collective routines, and moral expectations that extend beyond formal instruction.

This suggests that the success of inclusive education is closely tied to the development of an inclusive school culture, where students and teachers internalize values that support diversity and mutual respect. Observed practices such as mixed-group collaboration, peer assistance, and inclusive participation during recess indicate that inclusion is normalized in daily school life rather than treated as an exceptional condition.

From a theoretical perspective, this finding aligns with Florian & Black-Hawkins (2011), who emphasize that inclusion involves participation and belonging, not merely access to instruction. Similarly, Fu et al. (2022) highlight the role of positive social climate in fostering acceptance of students with disabilities. However, the present study extends this perspective by demonstrating that, in Islamic school contexts, socio-cultural inclusion is reinforced through religiously grounded moral frameworks.

Islamic values such as *adl* (justice), *rahmah* (compassion), *amanah* (responsibility), and *ihsan* (striving for excellence) function as mediating principles that shape both attitudes and practices. These values are not only articulated in formal discourse but are enacted through everyday practices, including leadership messaging, classroom interaction, and peer relationships. In this sense, values operate as a form of cultural infrastructure that sustains inclusive behavior across different school contexts.

This finding contributes to the literature by offering a culturally grounded perspective on inclusive education, particularly within Islamic educational settings, as highlighted in studies on inclusive school culture (Ainscow, 2020). While previous studies have emphasized policy, pedagogy, or leadership, fewer have examined how religious-ethical values interact with these dimensions to support inclusion. The present study shows that values do not merely complement inclusive practices but actively structure how inclusion is understood and implemented.

At the same time, the findings also suggest that the integration of Islamic values remains largely implicit and practice-based rather than systematically embedded in formal curricula or institutional frameworks. This indicates that the effectiveness of value-based inclusion depends on individual interpretation and the consistency of its enactment across different actors within the school.

These findings have important implications. Integrating ethical and cultural values into inclusive education should not be limited to symbolic representation but should be deliberately incorporated into school policies, teacher training, and classroom practices. In Islamic school contexts, this may involve developing structured approaches to embedding values such as justice, compassion, and responsibility into pedagogical design and student engagement strategies.

Overall, the findings suggest that inclusive education is sustained not only by policies and pedagogical strategies but also by socio-cultural processes, as emphasized in research on inclusive pedagogy and social interaction (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011) that shape how individuals relate to one another. In this context, Islamic values function as a key mechanism that bridges formal inclusion policies with lived practices, making inclusion both a social and moral reality.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that implementing inclusive education in Islamic elementary schools is a multidimensional, relational process shaped by the synergy of managerial leadership, adaptive pedagogical strategies, and value-based socio-cultural climates. The findings show that empathy-driven principal leadership, curriculum flexibility, social affirmation, and external collaboration create the structural and moral conditions that enable teachers to exercise professional judgment and implement inclusive pedagogical practices, such as differentiated instruction and authentic assessment. In this context, inclusive education does not emerge from technical compliance or resource abundance, but from supportive managerial environments that foster teacher agency.

The study further highlights that Islamic values, i.e., *adl* (justice), *rahmah* (compassion), *amanah* (responsibility), and *ihsan* (excellence in doing good), function as ethical foundations that reinforce inclusive practices at both managerial and pedagogical levels. Rather than serving as mere symbolic or normative references, these values shape leadership decisions, classroom interactions, and school culture, contributing to a sustainable, morally grounded model of inclusion. The conceptual model proposed in this study offers a contextually grounded analytical framework that positions managerial policies as enabling conditions for inclusive pedagogy, thereby extending existing inclusive education theories with a culturally grounded perspective.

This study is limited to a single-site qualitative case study; therefore, the findings should be interpreted contextually and should not be generalized statistically. The results reflect inclusive practices shaped by specific organizational, cultural, and leadership conditions within the studied school. Consequently, the model and insights presented are not intended to represent universal patterns of inclusive education but rather to provide analytical transferability for contexts with similar characteristics.

Nevertheless, the study offers valuable implications for Islamic and value-based schools, particularly those operating under resource constraints, by demonstrating how inclusion can be enacted through moral leadership, adaptive pedagogy, and supportive professional environments. Future research is encouraged to examine the applicability of the proposed model across multiple

school sites and diverse cultural contexts, as well as to explore how institutional support mechanisms can strengthen the sustainability of value-driven inclusive education.

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