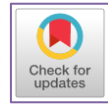


Teachers' perceptions and competencies in implementing individualized education program in inclusive primary schools



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Abstract: The implementation of inclusive education in elementary schools requires teachers to be prepared not only in terms of attitude, but also in terms of pedagogical competence in translating the individual needs of students into learning practices. This study aims to analyze teachers' perceptions and competencies in implementing Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) in inclusive elementary schools, as well as to examine the gap between perceptions and implementation practices in the classroom. The research used a qualitative approach with a case study design conducted at SD Negeri Nayu Barat 1 Surakarta. The research subjects consisted of three class teachers and the school principal, who were selected using purposive sampling. Data were collected through the SACIE-R questionnaire, learning observations, in-depth interviews, and IEP document analysis. The data were then analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model. The results showed that teachers' perceptions of inclusive education were in the moderate to high category, but this was not in line with their IEP implementation competencies. A gap was found between perception and practice, influenced by mediating factors such as teachers' professional initiative, involvement in assessment, and structural factors such as the limited number of special assistant teachers and the high administrative burden on classroom teachers. These findings emphasize the importance of strengthening pedagogical competence and institutional support so that IEP implementation does not stop at administrative compliance but functions as a meaningful learning instrument. **Keywords:** Individualized Education Program (IEP); inclusive education; teacher perception; teacher competence; elementary school.

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INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has become a strategic approach to ensuring equal access to education for all students, including students with special needs in regular schools. In Indonesia, this policy has been established through Article 10 of Indonesian Law No. 8/2016 on Persons with Disabilities, which states that the government is obliged to provide an inclusive education system at all levels. The main objective of its implementation is to create a learning environment that is open and responsive to student diversity regardless of differences in background, physical condition, characteristics, personality, social status, ethnicity, or culture (Arriani et al., 2022). This principle aims to reduce disparities and accustom students to living in diversity, so that they can get to know, understand, and appreciate each other (Munajah et al., 2021; Zamroni et al., 2024). In its implementation, inclusive education requires schools and teachers to be

prepared to create a learning environment that allows each student to develop according to their potential and needs, not just physically present in regular classes (Komara et al., 2024). This condition places high demands on the professional role of teachers, particularly in designing and implementing learning that is responsive to the individual needs of students.

One of the learning frameworks used to support the implementation of inclusive education is the Individualized Education Program (IEP). The main objective of the IEP is to optimize academic development and build student independence by adjusting learning methods and materials based on each individual's characteristics (Haryati et al., 2022). The implementation of the IEP emphasizes the importance of paying attention to individual differences so that learning can be tailored to the level of development and needs of students (Lubis, 2022; Arriani et al., 2021). Thus, the success of the IEP implementation greatly depends on the ability of teachers to translate the individual needs of students into classroom learning practices. In the book *Panduan Penyelenggaraan Pendidikan Inklusif (Guide to Implementing Inclusive Education)* by Arriani et al. (2021), teacher competence in implementing IEP is demonstrated through the ability of teachers to design, implement, evaluate, and report on learning services that are tailored to the needs, characteristics, and development of students with special needs.

However, the implementation of IEP in inclusive elementary schools still faces various challenges. SD Negeri Nayu Barat 1 Surakarta, the location of this study has been designated as an inclusive school and has formally implemented IEPs with the support of special education teachers. However, preliminary studies show a gap between policy and practice in the field. The limited number of special education teachers means that they are unable to provide proportional support to all students with special needs. In practice, the preparation and implementation of IEPs is still largely the responsibility of classroom teachers, while the involvement of special guidance teachers is more focused on students with severe disabilities. This situation has implications for the increased professional burden on classroom teachers in implementing inclusive learning amid varying levels of teacher competence in the field of inclusive education. This condition presents a phenomenon where schools already have policies and supporting structures for inclusive education, but still face challenges in optimizing the implementation of IEP. Therefore, this school is considered relevant as a case study location to understand the relationship between teacher perceptions, teacher competencies, and the quality of IEP implementation in the context of inclusive learning in elementary schools.

The limited availability of special education teachers requires classroom teachers to not only understand the principles of inclusive education, but also have adequate competence in conducting assessments, planning lessons, and implementing adaptive learning strategies. As found in a case study Anggreani et al. (2024), teachers in inclusive classrooms lack understanding and skills in teaching students with special needs, resulting in difficulties in managing heterogeneous classrooms. This is in line with the findings of a study Lukitasari et al. (2017) that teachers who handle students with special needs and regular classes find it difficult to perform their functions optimally due to their lack of competence. Meanwhile, if teacher's competencies are inadequate, there will be administrative bias and suboptimal handling of students with special needs (Setiawan et al., 2020). Without adequate competencies, the implementation of IEPs has the potential to become merely an administrative fulfillment,

rather than a meaningful pedagogical process for meeting students' learning needs (Putri & Ain, 2022).

In addition to technical competence, internal factors related to teachers also play an important role in the implementation of IEP, one of which is teachers' perceptions of inclusive education. Perception is understood as the way teachers view and interpret inclusive education, which is formed through the process of receiving, organizing, and interpreting information, there by influencing attitudes, beliefs, and pedagogical tendencies in responding to the diversity of student characteristics in the classroom (Nisa et al., 2023; Sanisah et al., 2022). In this context, teachers' perceptions serve as the basis for their readiness to make learning decisions. Thus, teachers' perceptions can be seen as a prerequisite for the implementation of inclusive education, but their effectiveness is highly dependent on the pedagogical competence of teachers in translating the values of inclusion into learning practices.

Teachers' perceptions influence how they respond to student diversity and make pedagogical decisions in the classroom. Hidayah et al. (2021) state that teachers' less positive attitudes toward inclusive education can hinder the smooth running of the learning process. Positive perceptions encourage teachers to be more open, adaptive, and proactive in implementing IEPs, while negative or doubtful perceptions can lead to minimal implementation (Sharma & Sokal, 2016). However, positive perceptions do not automatically guarantee the effectiveness of IEP implementation. Teachers still need technical and pedagogical competencies so that inclusive values can be realized in concrete learning practices (Mumpuniarti et al., 2020), especially in subjects that require structured conceptual understanding, such as mathematics. Barsihanor and Rosyida (2019) emphasize that teacher competence in Individual Learning Programs is reflected in the ability to modify learning planning, implementation, and assessment according to student ability levels.

Although various studies have examined teachers' perceptions, self-confidence, and competence in the context of inclusive education, most of these studies still discuss each aspect separately. This separate approach has resulted in an incomplete understanding of the quality of IEP implementation. Research focusing on teacher perceptions generally emphasizes aspects of acceptance and attitude, but does not show how these perceptions are manifested in classroom teaching practices. Conversely, studies on teacher competence often focus on technical abilities, without considering how teachers' attitudes and perspectives influence the application of these competencies. In fact, in inclusive education practices, the successful implementation of IEPs requires a connection between teachers' perceptions as the basis for their readiness and pedagogical competencies as their ability to act. Therefore, studies that integrate these two aspects are important to gain a more complete understanding of the quality of IEP implementation in inclusive elementary schools.

Based on the above description, this study aims to analyze teachers' perceptions and competencies in implementing Individualized Education Programs in inclusive elementary schools. The analysis focuses on the correlation between teachers' perceptions and their pedagogical competencies in determining the quality of IEP implementation at the assessment, planning, and learning implementation stages. By examining these two aspects simultaneously, this study is expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the correlation between teachers' perceptions and their professional competencies in determining the quality of IEP implementation. The results of this study are expected to provide practical contributions to teachers, school

administrators, and policy makers in their efforts to strengthen inclusive learning practices through targeted professional development and sustainable institutional support.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of teachers' perceptions and competencies in implementing the Individualized Education Program (IEP) in inclusive elementary schools. The case study design was chosen because it allows researchers to analyze a case or event in depth with limited time, location, and sources (Creswell, 2019). The research was conducted at SD Negeri Nayu Barat 1 Surakarta for 3 months, from July to September 2025.

The research subjects were selected using purposive sampling techniques, considering the teachers' direct involvement in the implementation of inclusive education and the preparation of IEPs. The research subjects consisted of three classroom teachers (Teachers A, B, and C) and the principal. Teachers A, B, and C had the same educational background, i.e. elementary education, but they had different teaching experiences and varying levels of perception of inclusive education as obtained from the results of the initial questionnaire. This variation was intended to obtain a comprehensive picture of teachers' competence in implementing IEPs.

Data collection was conducted through questionnaires, in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis. Questionnaires were used in the initial stage to map teachers' perceptions of inclusive education. The questionnaire instrument referred to SACIE-R (Sentiments, Attitudes, and Concerns about Inclusive Education–Revised) developed by Forlin et al. (2011) covering three main aspects, which are teachers' sentiments, attitudes, and concerns about inclusive education. The questionnaire results were not analyzed statistically but were used as the initial context in the qualitative analysis process. Data integration was carried out by utilizing the questionnaire results as the basis for subject selection, strengthening the interpretation of interview and observation data, and as a comparison in drawing conclusions about the relationship between teachers' perceptions and their competence in implementing IEP.

Observations were conducted to assess teachers' competence in implementing IEP in mathematics learning in inclusive classrooms. The observations focused on student needs assessment, learning planning, implementation of adaptive learning strategies, and learning evaluation in accordance with book *Panduan Penyelenggaraan Pendidikan Inklusif (Guide to Implementing Inclusive Education)* by Arriani et al. (2021). Each teacher was observed during three learning sessions.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with classroom teachers and school principals to explore in depth the teachers' perceptions and competencies in implementing IEP. The aspects of competency assessed included planning individual learning services, implementing adaptive learning, evaluating and monitoring student learning progress, and reporting and communicating learning outcomes to relevant parties. Meanwhile, document analysis, such as lesson plans, assessment sheets, and student work sheets, was used to examine the alignment between written planning and classroom learning practices, particularly regarding the implementation of IEP.

Data validity was conducted to re-examine and compare research findings to reduce bias that might arise if only one type of data collection technique was relied upon (Creswell, 2019). The validity of this research was achieved through source triangula-

tion and technique triangulation. Meanwhile, the data were analyzed using the model by Miles and Huberman (1992) which includes the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and continuous conclusion drawing until a complete understanding of teachers' perceptions and competencies in implementing IEP is obtained.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Survey results

The SACIE-R survey results in Table 1 show that teachers' perceptions of the implementation of inclusive education and IEPs are in the moderate to high category. Respondents' total scores ranged from 36 to 49, with an average score of 44.33. Two teachers obtained a high perception category, while most of the others were in the moderate category. No teachers were in the low perception category for inclusive education. Based on these results, three teachers were selected as the main subjects of the study, i.e., Teacher A (score 49), Teacher B (score 43), and Teacher C (lowest score 36). The selection of subjects was intended to illustrate the variation in teachers' perceptions and their relationship to IEP implementation competence.

Table 1. Teacher perception survey results

Respondent	Total Score
1	43
2	39
3	44
4	39
5	40
6	45
7	46
8	45
9	39
10	36
11	45
12	49

Results of observations and interviews

The results of classroom observations and in-depth interviews show variations in teachers' competencies in implementing IEPs. These variations are evident in four teacher competencies, namely lesson planning, adaptive teaching, evaluation, and reporting.

Lesson planning

Teacher A demonstrated relatively systematic assessment practices compared to other teachers, although these were not fully documented in a structured IEP draft. Teacher A conducted initial assessments covering literacy, basic numeracy, and non-cognitive aspects, which were then used as a basis for adjusting learning strategies. The following is their statement:

“I often give initial assessments to find out how much knowledge they have. Usually, I give four assessments, which include self-introduction, literacy, basic numeracy such as multiplication or division, and non-cognitive self-assessment, which includes

their learning experiences. From there, I use it as a reference to adjust the learning based on their abilities.”

In contrast, Teacher B does not conduct formal assessments independently. Teacher B tends to rely on special guidance teachers to develop learning plans for students with special needs. Here is what they said:

“For now, I don't differentiate learning objectives from those of regular students, but some students with special needs are handled by special guidance teachers. The objectives and treatment will be different because they are developed by special guidance teachers.”

Meanwhile, Teacher C relies on informal observation and previous teaching experience rather than conducting assessments. The learning plans for students with special needs tend to be the same as those for regular students, with adjustments made flexibly during the learning process. Here is his statement:

"So far, I feel that the many administrative demands like that are a burden for teachers. Because we've already made plans in such a way, but sometimes the implementation doesn't match. So now I'm more flexible in determining the learning plan. The learning objectives for students with special needs that I can still hold onto are usually the same as for regular students. But to achieve them, it's more gradual."

Implementation of adaptive learning

The observation results show that Teacher A more often applies adjustments to the learning strategy by grouping students. This is in line with the following interview:

“Because I use the grouping method in my class, it helps quite a bit. So at least they have no choice but to listen to my explanation. Even if they turn out to be daydreaming or busy with their own things, they are usually reminded by their groupmates.”

Meanwhile, Teacher B often provides and creates concrete models such as ice cream sticks, marbles, and bottle caps to help students with special needs understand. Some learning materials are delivered through songs that are easy for students to memorize. The following is her statement:

"Since their attention is easily distracted, they need a more interactive and varied approach. To overcome this, I usually turn some of the material into songs that are easy for them to memorize. I often provide ice cream sticks, marbles, or bottle caps for the children. Or, if not, I use objects in the classroom for calculations, such as tables, chairs, and animal legs. This is to make it easier for them to visualize."

Meanwhile, Teacher C still predominantly uses the lecture method and the same exercises as for regular students, with limited adjustments in the form of reducing the number of questions. Here is her statement:

“Most of the children with special needs in my class are slow learners. So when I move on to new material, they forget the previous material. That's why I often review the material or give them separate homework so they can remember.”

Evaluation

In terms of evaluation, the three teachers mostly used simple formative evaluation, such as verbal answers, question modification, and observation of student inde-

pendence. However, there were differences in the indicators of learning achievement for students with special needs. The following is a statement from Teacher A:

"I use question modification. So, if his friends are working on 10 essay questions, for this student with special needs, I make multiple-choice questions, or I reduce the number of questions to only 5 with the same material but simplified language. In addition, I sometimes use verbal evaluation."

Meanwhile, Teacher B targets student learning completeness through independence and emotional control during the learning process. Here is his statement:

"Sometimes I give verbal exercises, sometimes written ones that I provide. My indicators are simple: independence and emotions. For me, learning is successful if that day he doesn't throw a tantrum, he is willing to sit quietly for at least 10 minutes, and he is willing to take out his own writing instruments. If he can read or count, that's a bonus."

Meanwhile, Teacher C views the indicators of learning success for students with special needs not only from an academic perspective, but also from a social perspective. Here is her statement:

"Or I modify the questions to make them simpler and more suitable for the children's abilities. For example, I summarize story questions and use familiar names, or I make the instructions short and direct sentences. Sometimes I also read and help them understand the questions one by one. Sometimes I also break down the material into small steps. Then I assess progress based on initiative and responsibility. A successful indicator is when I give an assignment and the student completes it happily, without refusing or throwing a tantrum. Additionally, social acceptance is also important."

Reporting

The three teachers have not systematically documented student learning progress. However, all three teachers acknowledge that communication with parents and special assistant teachers is intense, both through WhatsApp and school forums. The following is a statement from Teacher A:

"Of course. I often talk to the parents, via WhatsApp or when I see them after school. I report on overall progress when report cards are handed out."

The following is a statement from Teacher B:

"I collect all of his work in a portfolio folder. Every piece of work he does, whether it's doodles, drawings, or writing, I date and ask him to keep in his work folder. At the end of the semester, it will look neat. That's the most realistic documentation for me."

Here is a statement from Teacher C:

"Sometimes I share information about their progress in the class WhatsApp group, or I've also gathered all the parents to discuss challenges during the learning process over several months. It's more open this way so everyone understands the child's progress and learning expectations."

Document analysis results

The results of the IEP document analysis show that the available documents have not been fully utilized as dynamic learning guidelines. In several lesson plans from the three teachers, the learning objectives are still general in nature and the descriptions of students' learning barriers have not been formulated specifically. Teacher C said that preparing an IEP was quite difficult, especially in determining targets that were appropriate for the students' abilities. This condition causes the IEP to function more as an administrative document than as the main reference in planning and implementing learning in the classroom. The following is the statement:

“But so far, I feel that the many administrative demands like that are a burden for teachers. Because we have made plans like that, sometimes the implementation is not in accordance with them. So now I am more flexible in determining the learning plan.”

Based on the research results, teachers with a higher perception of inclusive education (Teacher A) tend to show more systematic IEP implementation practices, especially in the planning and learning adjustment stages. Conversely, teachers with moderate to low perceptions show limitations in written planning and IEP utilization, even though they still try to adjust learning in practical ways.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate a gap between teachers' perceptions and implementation competencies in the implementation of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) in inclusive elementary school classrooms. Although the questionnaire results show that teachers' perceptions of inclusive education are in the moderate to high category, this level of perception is not automatically reflected in the practice of implementing IEPs in the classroom. This indicates that teachers' perceptions serve as attitudinal readiness, but do not necessarily translate into technical readiness in inclusive learning.

This condition reinforces the findings of Sharma & Sokal (2016) and Putri & Ain (2022) who stated that teachers' acceptance of inclusive education is not always followed by adequate pedagogical skills. In the context of this research, teachers generally accept the principles of inclusion and the presence of students with special needs, but still face difficulties in translating these principles into the practice of assessment, planning, and implementation of individualized learning. These results reinforce the findings of Hidayah et al. (2021) that teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education are often ambivalent, i.e. they accept it conceptually but are not yet fully prepared in practice. Thus, positive perceptions can be understood as an initial prerequisite, but they are not sufficient to guarantee the quality of IEP implementation.

The striking difference in practice between Teacher A and Teacher B, even though both had relatively similar perception scores, shows that the relationship between perception and practice is not linear. This finding indicates the existence of mediating factors that influence how perceptions are manifested in pedagogical actions. Teacher A, who demonstrated more systematic assessment and learning adjustment practices, not only had higher perceptions but also showed professional initiative, direct involvement in initial assessments, and pedagogical reflection on student learning needs. Conversely, Teacher B tends to leave the assessment and individual planning processes to special assistant teachers, thereby limiting their pedagogical involvement in the

implementation of IEPs. However, assessment is the main foundation for the development of individual learning services, so weaknesses at this stage will have a direct impact on the quality of the IEP designed (Irvan, 2020).

These findings indicate that professional initiative, reflective experience, and a sense of ownership of the learning process act as mediating factors between teachers' perceptions and competencies. Positive perceptions do not necessarily result in adaptive practices if they are not accompanied by assessment skills, mastery of differentiated learning strategies, and active involvement of classroom teachers in the entire IEP process. In other words, differences in practice among teachers are more influenced by professional capacity and pedagogical work patterns than by differences in perception alone.

In the context of inclusive elementary schools in Indonesia, this gap cannot be separated from structural factors, particularly the limited number of special assistant teachers and the high administrative burden on classroom teachers. The research findings show that the role of special assistant teachers is often very dominant in the assessment process and the preparation of IEP documents, while classroom teachers play more of a role as implementers of daily learning. This condition is in line with the findings of Suherman et al. (2024) which highlight the ideal ratio of special assistant teachers in Indonesian inclusive schools, thereby encouraging a disproportionate transfer of responsibility.

The dominance of the special guidance teachers role in administrative and assessment aspects has the potential to reduce the involvement of classroom teachers as the main actors in inclusive learning. In fact, inclusive education requires equal pedagogical collaboration, not merely an administrative division of roles (Nurfadhillah et al., 2022). When classroom teachers are not directly involved in assessment and individual planning, the continuity between assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation of learning becomes fragmented, which ultimately impacts the quality of IEP implementation (Barsihanor & Anindia, 2019).

In addition, the high administrative burden on classroom teachers also affects the use of IEPs. Analysis of the documents shows that IEPs tend to be prepared as a fulfillment of administrative obligations, with learning objectives that are still general in nature and descriptions of learning barriers that are not yet specific. Layered administrative pressures, coupled with routine learning demands, limit teachers' time and space for reflection in developing IEPs in a thorough and assessment-based manner (Concepcion et al., 2025; Ediyanto et al., 2023). These findings are in line with Ilagan (2024) and Mavropoulou et al. (2021) who criticize the administrative orientation in the implementation of IEPs, which has the potential to obscure their pedagogical function. These findings also indicate limitations in teachers' pedagogical content knowledge in the context of inclusive learning (Kremsner, 2023; Mumpuniarti et al., 2020).

Thus, the results of this study confirm that the main challenge in implementing IEP in inclusive elementary schools is not teachers' rejection of inclusive education, but rather their limited technical competence, which is influenced by individual and structural factors. Teachers' positive or moderate perceptions provide an important initial foundation, but will only be meaningful if supported by the strengthening of pedagogical competencies, the active involvement of classroom teachers in assessment and planning, and realistic institutional support for the conditions of inclusive schools in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that teachers' perceptions of the implementation of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) in inclusive elementary schools range from moderate to high, but these perceptions are not directly proportional to teachers' competencies in teaching practices. Relatively positive perceptions serve as a foundation for initial attitudes toward inclusive education, but they are not sufficient to guarantee the quality of IEP implementation without the support of adequate pedagogical competence, particularly in the areas of diagnostic assessment, individualized learning planning, and adaptive learning implementation.

The research findings also reveal a gap between perception and practice that is influenced by mediating factors, such as teachers' professional initiatives, direct involvement in the assessment process, and reflective experience in inclusive learning. In addition, structural factors in the context of inclusive elementary schools in Indonesia, particularly the limited number of special guidance teachers and the high administrative burden on classroom teachers, also shape the practice of IEP implementation. These conditions encourage IEPs to be positioned more as administrative documents than as pedagogical instruments that are used consistently in learning.

This study has a few limitations. First, it was conducted in one inclusive elementary school with a limited number of subjects, so the findings are not intended to be generalized broadly. Second, the use of the SACIE-R instrument in this study served as an initial mapping of teachers' perceptions. Third, the focus of the study was limited to the perspectives and practices of classroom teachers, so it did not fully describe the dynamics of collaboration with special assistant teachers and relevant agencies in greater depth.

Based on these findings and limitations, the implications of this study emphasize the importance of teacher professional development that not only focuses on improving attitudes toward inclusive education but also on strengthening technical competencies in assessment and adaptive learning. Further research is recommended to involve a more diverse school context, expand the research subjects, and examine the effectiveness of mentoring or continuous training models in improving the quality of IEP implementation in inclusive elementary schools.

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