

Exploring The Challenges And Strategies Of Inclusive Education For Sustainable Development: A Mixed Method Of Inclusive Elementary Schools In Indonesia

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Abstract. This study aims to explore in depth the challenges and strategies of inclusive schools in the context of elementary schools in Indonesia as an effort to achieve sustainable development. Additionally, it examines perceptions of inclusive schools and sustainable development. The research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining analysis, interviews, and surveys from a random sample to gather information from key stakeholders in the field. The subjects of the study are elementary schools in the Kebumen region, Central Java, Indonesia, consisting of two elementary schools. The research instruments include in-depth interviews, observations, document studies, and questionnaires. Qualitative data analysis is conducted using the Miles, Huberman, & Saldana model, while the analysis of questionnaire results is performed using descriptive quantitative methods. The findings indicate that the challenges faced by schools in achieving sustainable development include a lack of awareness and understanding that all children have equal rights to education, limited resources, and minimal parental and community involvement. The strategies implemented by schools include raising awareness in the surrounding community about inclusive education, enhancing the capacity and competence of teachers in inclusive learning, creating an inclusive and child-friendly school environment, and establishing partnerships with parents and the community. The perceptions of prospective teachers suggest that they believe the implementation of inclusive schools from the elementary level is an effort to achieve sustainable development.

Keywords: challenges, strategies, inclusive education, perceptions, sustainable development

Introduction

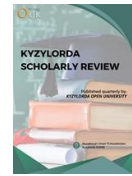
Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is a global agenda that is considered very comprehensive and ambitious with a variety of goals and targets that will guide the world in achieving sustainable development [1]. One of the SDGs targets that is still an important issue and problem in several countries is the issue of education. Education in the SDGs is listed in goal 4 (SDG4), namely ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education, and increasing lifelong learning opportunities for all [2], [3]. SDG4 has seven targets and three ways of implementing it with the principles of fairness, inclusive, gender equality, quality education, capacity building, global cooperation, and lifelong learning opportunities [3], [4], [5].

UNESCO has formulated the 2030 agenda for SDGs as a development agreement that encourages change following human rights and equality to encourage progress in various aspects of life, such as education [6], [7]. Education is the key that allows other SDG goals to be realized. Education is also one of the pillars of human development. SDGs require inclusive and equitable education for the entire community [8]. SDGs provide direction and guidelines for countries around the world to achieve sustainable development, including in the field of inclusive education. UNESCO also promotes inclusive education policies and practices to address global challenges by promoting inclusive education for sustainable development [9], [10].

The quality of education in Indonesia is still a topic of serious discussion. As the results of the World Population Review data show, Indonesia is ranked 54th out of 78 countries included in the world education rankings [11], [12]. In addition, it is still evident in the field that some children from marginalized and vulnerable groups have difficulty obtaining access to quality education [1]. The gap in access to education hinders the achievement of the 2030 SDGs targets related to innovation, industry, and infrastructure. On the same side, Indonesia was ranked 112th out of 193 countries worldwide on the Human Development Index in 2022 [13]. Based on official statistical news No. 85/11/Th. XXVII, November 15, 2024, Indonesia's human development index 2024 reached 75.02 or increased by 0.85% compared to the previous year of 74.39. This increase has not been able to equalize Indonesia with other countries in the very high human development category.

This condition shows Indonesia's challenges in producing quality human resources, specifically regarding inclusive education. Inclusive education is regulated in the Indonesian National Education System Law No. 20/2003, further strengthened in Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture No. 70/2009 [14]. This policy shows the need for efforts to optimize access and quality of inclusive education. This is important to create equality and justice in education for all children. Inclusive education is not only related to access to education for all children, but also to creating a friendly environment for children with various social, economic, and cultural backgrounds [15]. They can develop their potential and talents to the maximum and contribute to achieving the 2030 SDGs by utilizing science and technology as a way to realize positive change in society. The quality of inclusive education is a catalyst in producing competent and reliable human resources, as well as encouraging the achievement of other SDG goals such as educational inequality [16], [17]. Thus, an inclusive education strategy is needed to realize the SDG's goals.

Previous studies have conducted similar topics. First, research conducted by [18] shows that inclusive education is successful in maximizing student participation and



abilities and adapting to environmental changes. Second, one study found that teachers play an important role in developing inclusive education [19]. Teachers must have knowledge and skills in curriculum management and special strategies in learning for students with special needs. Third, another study found that various strategies can be implemented to realize quality education, such as equal access to education, improving the quality of teachers and education personnel, and using technology in learning [20], [21]. The study also recommends that good coordination and collaboration be carried out by various parties to realize the goals of the SDGs in inclusive education.

Fourth, research [20] shows that Indonesia has taken several stages in improving the quality of education through a 12-year compulsory education program with various other challenges. Fifth, research by [22] resulted in findings of government and various parties' efforts to improve inclusive education for people with disabilities in Indonesia during the Covid-19 pandemic. These efforts are carried out by providing information and support for people with disabilities, implementing inclusive distance learning programs, and developing technology for people with disabilities. Sixth, [23] have found that the implementation of inclusive education has a positive impact on child development, and better social, academic, and emotional growth holistically for children with special needs. The strategy used is to create comfortable and friendly inclusive education through professional school management and competent educators in their fields. This is done so that inclusive students feel accepted and appreciated by the environment.

However, several previous studies still have several aspects that have not been accommodated in previous studies, especially in the context of inclusive education in elementary schools. No study specifically analyzes and describes in detail the challenges and appropriate strategies in inclusive education in elementary schools to realize the SDGs. The study of inclusive education in elementary schools can provide a broad picture of strengthening the abilities and skills of children with special needs in facing global challenges in the future. Through the study of inclusive education strategies in elementary schools, children with special needs can learn effectively and obtain all the needs to face the Industrial Revolution 4.0 and develop solutions to global problems related to inclusive education. Specifically, this study aims to examine the challenges and strategies of inclusive education in elementary schools to realize the goals of the SDGs.

Methods

This study This study employs a mixed-methods approach [24] combining analysis, interviews, observations, and surveys from a random sample to gather information from key stakeholders in the field. The research subjects are elementary schools in the Kebumen region, Central Java, Indonesia, consisting of two elementary schools. Additionally, questionnaires were distributed to 75 prospective teachers to assess their perceptions of the implementation of inclusive schools as part of achieving sustainable development. The research instruments include in-depth interviews, observations, document studies, and questionnaires. Qualitative data analysis follows the Miles, Huberman, & Saldana model [25] which consists of three steps: data condensation, data display, and data verification/conclusion. Data condensation

involves first collecting data and then sorting it based on research needs. If there is deemed irrelevant data, it is disregarded. In data reduction, classification is also done based on variables. The data is divided into two main aspects: Data on the challenges and strategies of implementing inclusive schools in achieving sustainable development. The next stage involves presenting the data in various forms, including descriptions, tables, and figures, allowing readers to understand the meaning of the research data. The final step is verification/conclusion drawing, where existing data is summarized based on the research objectives, and overall conclusions are made from the conclusions of each objective. Meanwhile, the analysis of questionnaire data was conducted using a quantitative descriptive approach.

Results and Discussion

Distribution of Demographic Characteristics of HIV/AIDS Patients() This study was conducted through an in-depth analytical study on the implementation of inclusive schools in Indonesia, particularly in Kebumen, Central Java. Two elementary schools that implement inclusive education were examined, focusing on the challenges and strategies these schools employ to achieve sustainable goals. Based on observational data from inclusive schools, there are approximately 39 students with disabilities receiving education in these two schools. The following is a description of the types of disabilities among students with special needs in these inclusive schools.

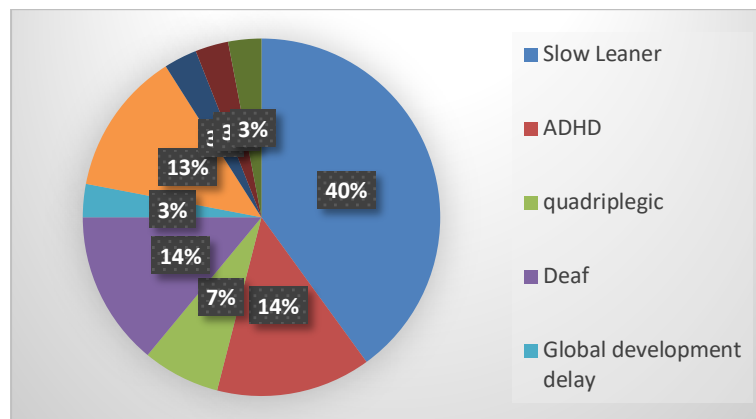


Figure 1. Types of Student Disabilities

Figure 1 shows that the most common type of disability among students in inclusive schools is slow learners, accounting for 40% of the total. Other types of disabilities include ADHD (14%), quadriplegic (7%), deaf (14%), global developmental delay (3%), intellectual disabilities (13%), dysphasia (3%), epilepsy (3%), and dysgraphia (3%).

The diversity of disabilities among students demonstrates that each child with disabilities has unique characteristics. This variation can serve as a reference for teachers in developing students' talents and potential.

1. Challenges of Inclusive Schools in Achieving Sustainable Development

The challenges faced by inclusive schools in achieving sustainable development include a lack of awareness and understanding that all children have equal rights to education, limited resources, and minimal parental and community involvement.

a. Lack of Awareness and Understanding That All Children Have Equal Rights to Education

Awareness that all children have equal rights to education is not yet fully understood by the community. Based on interviews with school principals, it was found that many people still lack a complete understanding of children with special needs. Some members of the community still hold the belief that children with special needs should attend special schools rather than regular schools. On the other hand, some people continue to perceive children with special needs as different and, at times, still associate them with negative stigmas. This presents a challenge for schools in implementing inclusive education [26]. UNESCO states that social stigma from the community is a significant challenge in the implementation of inclusive education. Community awareness plays a crucial role in creating an inclusive environment that values diversity..

The success of implementing inclusive education requires not only support from the government and educational institutions but also significant support from the community. With active community involvement, an inclusive and high-quality educational environment can be created for all children, allowing them to grow and develop optimally according to their potential. Based on interviews with school principals, it was found that the community plays a crucial role in the implementation of inclusive schools. Without the support of the community, it remains very challenging to raise awareness about the importance of inclusive education for children, particularly for those with special needs.

The community plays an important role in actively participating to educate the broader public about what inclusion is and how to support it, particularly as an effort to achieve sustainable development. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemdikbudristek) mentions several roles of the community in inclusive education, such as building and raising awareness about children's rights to receive education. Furthermore, the community also plays a role in expanding access to education and employment opportunities for children with special needs, such as creating job and business opportunities and providing skills training. The most important role is that the community plays a significant part in exercising social control over government policies [27].

b. Limited Resources

Resources are a very important factor in the implementation of inclusive schools. School resources, particularly teachers, school buildings, textbooks, and other facilities, impact the quality of inclusive education at schools. Based on interviews with school principals, it was found that the implementation of inclusive schools faces significant challenges in terms of resources, especially human resources. The principal acknowledged that not all teachers in inclusive schools understand the characteristics of children with special needs, particularly those who are deaf. The majority of teachers still do not understand sign language. This is also supported by teachers, who expressed that they still face difficulties in guiding children with special needs, especially deaf children. They are unable to understand sign language, making it very challenging to interact with them.

In addition to human resources, learning resources such as reading books and teaching materials that can facilitate children with special needs pose a unique

challenge for inclusive schools. Adequate learning resources, such as the availability of Braille materials and other media like videos, images, and other tools, are needed to support the abilities of children with disabilities. Child-friendly and disability-friendly school facilities also present a challenge for inclusive schools, particularly in achieving sustainable development. Disability-friendly school facilities are crucial for creating an inclusive and equitable learning environment for all students. Some important factors to consider include accessibility for children with disabilities and comfortable and safe school facilities. Disability-friendly school facilities are not only about meeting physical standards but also about creating an environment that supports students socially and emotionally. Based on interviews with teachers, accessibility at inclusive schools still needs improvement, as it is not yet fully safe and comfortable for children with disabilities to access.

This finding is relevant to the research conducted by Malida, which highlights that the limited availability of resources, such as a lack of textbooks that support inclusive learning, inadequate facilities, and a shortage of trained educators, are major obstacles and significant challenges in implementing inclusive education [28]. Averoes explains that the availability of trained and competent human resources in the field of inclusive education is crucial. The lack of teachers with expertise in inclusive education, limited teaching materials that support inclusive learning, and insufficient facilities and infrastructure are major barriers to the implementation of inclusive education. Therefore, improving the quality of human resources involved in inclusive education is essential [29]. Safe and comfortable facilities for students with disabilities remain an additional responsibility for inclusive schools to improve. Additionally, having support teachers in inclusive schools would greatly assist classroom teachers in developing the potential of children with special needs [30].

c. Limited Parental and Community Involvement

The challenges in implementing inclusive education not only stem from within the school but also from external factors, such as the lack of parental and community involvement. The limited involvement of parents and the community impacts the quality of education. Based on interviews with the school principal, it was mentioned that one of the challenges in providing quality inclusive education is the lack of parental and community involvement. Through partnerships, an environment can be created that supports children's development more effectively, provides them with broad knowledge and skills, and helps improve their achievements [31]. Meanwhile, the outcomes of this collaborative process are not only seen in terms of increased student participation and the achievement of program goals but also in the heightened community involvement in the madrasah (religious school). This is because one of the characteristics of a good madrasah is the collaboration between the madrasah and relevant parties [32].

2. Strategies of Inclusive Schools in Achieving Sustainable Development

The strategies implemented by the school include raising awareness in the community about inclusive education, enhancing the capacity and competence of teachers in inclusive teaching, creating an inclusive and child-friendly school environment, and establishing partnerships with parents and the community.

a. Socialization to the Community About Understanding Inclusive Education

The purpose of the socialization activities is to provide the community with an understanding of the importance of inclusive education. Based on interviews with the school principal, it was stated that socialization is always conducted at the beginning of the school year during parent-school meetings. This socialization helps increase the community's understanding of the concept of inclusive education, its benefits for all children, and how it is implemented in schools. Additionally, it addresses negative stigma and discrimination against children with disabilities and encourages the community to accept and appreciate differences. The ultimate goal of this socialization is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development.

Based on interviews with teachers, socialization is also commonly carried out by maximizing existing social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp to spread information about inclusive education widely. The use of social media is currently very helpful for educational institutions in introducing inclusive education to the wider community. By effectively utilizing these platforms, schools can increase visibility, build a positive image, and ultimately attract broader community interest.

This finding is consistent with several previous studies that show the important role of media in the successful implementation of inclusive education. The development of society as a whole is greatly influenced by media activities. The information a person receives through various forms of media affects their perspective on a subject and the actions they take in response to that perspective. Media becomes a key component in the process of externalization, objectification, and internalization whenever variables or phenomena are investigated. The communication provided by media is fast and widespread, enabling rapid and even instant societal development [33], [34], [35].

b. Increasing the Capacity and Competence of Teachers in Inclusive Education

Improving the capacity and competence of teachers in inclusive education is key to the successful implementation of inclusive schools. Some of the actions taken by the school include involving teachers in workshops about running an inclusive school. Based on interviews with teachers, every month, teachers participate in training sessions organized by the Department of Education in collaboration with teachers from special schools. The routine agenda focuses on how to socialize with and develop the talents of students with special needs. During these activities, teachers engage in discussions with experts to better understand the development of the children with special needs they teach.

c. Creating an Inclusive and Child-Friendly School Environment

The learning conducted at the school aims to create an inclusive and child-friendly environment. The learning is developed based on the characteristics of the students and the school. This means that teachers design more flexible learning experiences. Teachers also do not impose the expectation that children with special needs must acquire the same knowledge as typically developing children. Teachers have their own criteria for assessing the understanding of children with special needs, following guidelines provided by the Department of Education.

Based on interviews with the school principal, it was found that the school has implemented a child-friendly school declaration. This declaration is one of the forms of the school's commitment to implementing government programs. Some of the

programs that are expected to be applied in the implementation of the independent curriculum include 25 healthy lifestyle patterns from the Ministry of Health, 11 anti-corruption values, anti-violence and child-friendly policies, adherence to traffic rules, tax compliance, and so on. The inclusive school has conducted a child-friendly school declaration, with the main goal being to ensure that students feel comfortable learning and are committed to preventing bullying practices.

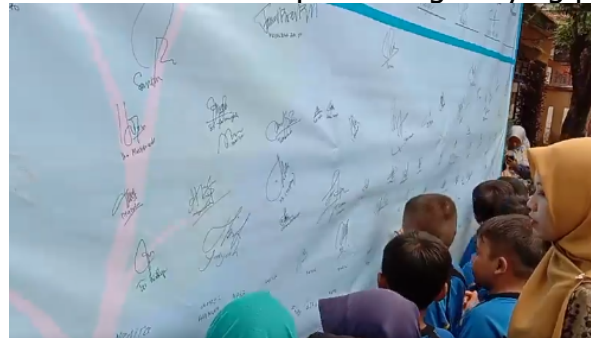


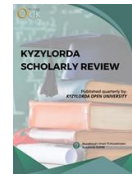
Figure 2. Child-Friendly School Declaration

Figure 2 illustrates that the child-friendly school declaration is the choice of the inclusive school in implementing government programs. This declaration strengthens the school in organizing inclusive education, which is a school that is comfortable for anyone to learn, without exception. Furthermore, this declaration forms a collective commitment to preventing bullying practices. The anti-bullying program is one of the government initiatives that is expected to be implemented in schools. Bullying is an attitude that must be eradicated in the educational world because many studies have shown that bullying negatively impacts the quality of education. For example, bullying can lead to an increase in school dropout rates. Anti-discrimination for children plays a significant role in reducing dropout rates. Discriminatory behaviors make children less confident and uncomfortable in school, thus demotivating them to attend. This is supported by research from Rokhmaniyah et al., which shows that bullying is one of the factors influencing the increase in school dropout rates at the elementary education level [36].

McWhirter et al. state that discriminatory attitudes shown by teachers toward children contribute to the high number of school dropouts [37]. Discrimination affects a child's performance and learning, and tends to lead to school dropout. Similarly, the findings by Assari & Caldwell show that discriminatory attitudes exhibited by teachers have a significant impact on students' achievements [38]. The findings of Lee et al. also show that bullying activities in schools lead to children having a tendency to drop out of school [39]. Similarly, the findings of Bilige & Gan indicate that school and peer factors have a significant relationship with the school dropout rate [40]. Therefore, the anti-bullying program helps children feel more comfortable learning at school and fosters better relationships among students. Bernardo et al. found that students who are victims of bullying are more likely to consider dropping out of school than students who are not victims of bullying [41]. Children who are victims of bullying are those who are socially isolated at school. Therefore, support from classmates can reduce the likelihood of children dropping out of school.

d. Establishing partnerships with parents and the community

Collaboration between schools and parents has a positive impact on children's development. Based on interviews with teachers, the school has formed a Parent-



Teacher Association as a form of concern from both the school and parents in supporting the children's development at school. The existence of POMG is very helpful for the school in monitoring children's progress and for parents, it serves as a form of attention to their children while at school. This is consistent with several studies that have been conducted, such as the research by Chasanah et al., which found that POMG activities have many advantages, including improving the relationship between parents and the school, serving as a medium for socializing school programs, and providing a platform for discussions between parents and teachers, especially discussions about children's development [42]. Another study by Suhartono et al. also found that parenting classes through parent-school associations are important to be conducted at schools in order to monitor education within the family environment [43].

When schools understand the education of children within the family, it becomes easier for schools to develop students' talents, interests, and character. Even the Ministry of Education and Culture, in its technical partnership guidelines, explains that the family's role is crucial in the child's development. In the context of education, the family's role can be carried out in various ways, including: 1) creating a fun learning environment at home that encourages the development of children's creativity; 2) establishing warm and loving interactions and communication with the child; 3) providing motivation and instilling self-confidence in children to achieve; 4) maintaining active communication and relationships with the school to create a conducive learning culture; and 5) involving and actively participating in school activities [44].

3. Perception of prospective teachers about the implementation of inclusive education in achieving sustainable development

Prospective teachers, as the vanguard of education in the future, play a crucial role in realizing sustainable inclusive education. The perception of prospective teachers indicates their readiness to implement inclusive education in their classrooms. They are enthusiastic about learning differentiated teaching strategies, the use of adaptive technology, and how to build effective communication with diverse students. Some of the roles of prospective teachers in organizing inclusive education are: 1) Creating an Inclusive Classroom: Prospective teachers play an important role in creating an inclusive classroom where all children feel accepted, valued, and have equal opportunities to learn and develop. 2) Developing Relevant Learning: Prospective teachers can develop learning that meets the needs of students and connects it to sustainable development issues, such as gender equality. 3) Becoming Change Agents: Prospective teachers can become agents of change in the community by spreading information about the importance of inclusive education and encouraging parents and the community to participate in realizing an inclusive school.

The prospective teachers who participated as respondents in this study totaled 75, with the following profile.

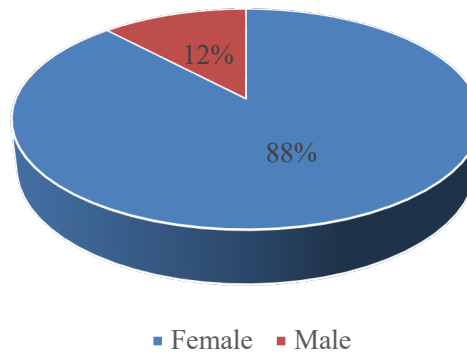


Figure 3. Respondent profile by gender

Figure 3 shows that the respondent profile consists of 88% female and 12% male. The table provides information about the age range of the respondents.

Table 1. Respondent profile by age

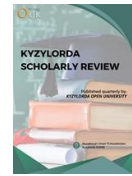
| Age (Year) | Freq (%) |
|------------|----------|
| 19-20 | 46 |
| 21-22 | 42 |
| 23-24 | 12 |

Table 1 shows that the majority of respondents are between the ages of 19-20, accounting for 46%, while the remaining respondents are aged 21-24.

The perception measurement was carried out using a Likert scale with four alternative answer choices, along with a description of their confidence regarding the readiness of educational institutions in Indonesia to implement inclusive schools for sustainable development.

Table 2. Prospective teachers' perception of inclusive schools and sustainable development

| Statements | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| I am aware of the access to quality education for all children in Indonesia | 52,18 | 47,82 | | |
| Access to quality education and education for all are covered in the policies in Indonesia. | 53,9 | 42,30 | 3,8 | |
| Persons with physical disabilities should be able to receive quality and inclusive education in Indonesia, starting from elementary school. | 88,47 | 11,53 | | |
| Regular/general schools are not for persons with physical disabilities in Indonesia. | 15,38 | 30,87 | 46,15 | 7,6 |
| Persons with physical disabilities should be allowed to attend regular classes in Indonesia, starting from elementary school. | 11,55 | 57,69 | 26,92 | 3,84 |



| Statements | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| Persons with physical disabilities should not have access to education in Indonesia. | | | 34,61 | 65,39 |
| There are adequate special education teachers for persons with physical disabilities in inclusive schools in Indonesia. | 69,24 | 30,76 | | |

Table 2 shows that the respondents are aware of the importance of access to quality education for all children in Indonesia. Although some respondents disagreed with the concept of inclusive schools, the majority of respondents agreed with the existence of inclusive schools. In fact, they expect that children with disabilities should have access to quality and inclusive education in Indonesia starting from the elementary school level. In terms of confidence level, 92.4% of respondents are very confident that inclusive education is an effort to achieve sustainable development. Meanwhile, 7.6% do not believe that inclusive education is an effort to achieve sustainable development. Some of the reasons respondents are confident that inclusive schools can become quality and sustainable educational institutions is due to support from various parties, both governmental and non-governmental, to build infrastructure that is friendly for children with disabilities. This result is relevant to the research conducted by Kusimo & Chidozie, which states that a country must accept the existence of inclusive education to achieve SDG Goal 4, which is inclusive and equitable. The aim is to reduce stigma and discrimination from the surrounding community against children with disabilities [45].

Conclusion

Based on The analysis results show that the challenges faced by schools in achieving sustainable development include a lack of awareness and understanding that all children have the same right to education, limited resources, and minimal involvement of parents and the community. Strategies that have been implemented by schools include providing socialization to the surrounding community about inclusive education, enhancing teachers' capacity and competence in inclusive learning, creating an inclusive and child-friendly school environment, and establishing partnerships with parents and the community. The perceptions of prospective teachers indicate that they believe the implementation of inclusive schools from the most basic education level is an effort to achieve sustainable development. Recommendations for future research could examine the roles of schools, parents, and the community as the three educational centers in inclusive schools to realize sustainable development.

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