

The Managerial Role of Principals in Implementing Inclusive Education for Students with Special Needs

Dwi Sartica¹

¹State Christian Institute of Palangka Raya (IAKN)

* e-mail: dwisartica02@gmail.com

Abstract

The principal plays a vital role in managing and developing educational activities within the school. SD Negeri 4 Palangka has accepted Students with Special Needs (PDBK) since July 2019 and was designated as a pilot school for the SELARAS Inclusive Education Development Strategy Program in Palangka Raya City in October 2023. In the 2025/2026 academic year, the school serves 24 PDBK from grades 1–6 with diverse needs. Its reputation as an inclusive referral school and experienced leadership attracts parents of PDBK. This study aims to analyze the principal's managerial role in implementing inclusive education through planning, organizing, actuating, and controlling. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. The findings indicate that the principal conducts inclusive admissions planning, resource organization, teacher guidance, policy socialization, performance evaluation, and follow-up actions, providing a reference for principals in implementing inclusive education programs.

Keywords: Principal Managerial Role; Inclusive Education; Students with Special Needs; School Leadership; Educational Management;

How to cite : Sartica, D. (2026). The Managerial Role of Principals in Implementing Inclusive Education for Students with Special Needs. *Pedagogi: Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan*, 26(1).
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.24036/pedagogi.v26i1.2943>



Licenseses may copy, distribute, display and perform the work an make derivative and remixes based on it only if they give the author or licensor the credits (attribution) in the manner specified by these. Licenseses may copy, distribute, display, and perform the work and make derivative works and remixes based on it only for non-commercial purposes

INTRODUCTION

Modern education greatly needs school leaders who can guide the school to achieve its goals and programs. The school principal, with all their roles, must understand the complexity and uniqueness of the school as an organization and execute each role well. According to (Mulyasa, 2011), the roles inherent in a school principal consist of 7 roles, namely the principal as an educator, administrator, supervisor, leader, innovator, motivator, and manager. Each of these roles is performed through various forms of activities or different strategies. For example, the principal's role as a manager can be realized by carrying out management functions, starting from planning, organizing, directing, and evaluation.

One of the educational programs currently being developed in regular schools across Indonesia is inclusive education. To support the realization of inclusive education, inclusive schools are necessary. An inclusive school is a regular school that coordinates and integrates regular students and students with disabilities in the same program. In an inclusive school, students with special needs receive special education according to their respective potentials, and regular students receive special services to develop their potential. Thus, both students with

special needs and regular students can jointly develop their respective potentials and be able to live an active and harmonious life in society.

School leaders must play a crucial role in ensuring an inclusive environment for students with disabilities by building an inclusive and supportive school culture (Esposito, 2024). The school and its leadership are the main keys to the successful implementation of inclusive education. Principal leadership must focus on creating an inclusive environment through supportive managerial and pedagogical practices (DeMatthews, D. E., & Mueller, 2022). Effective principals play a vital role in influencing student and overall school performance (Grissom, J. A., Egalite, A. J., & Lindsay, 2021). However, to achieve success in inclusive education, principals need to have certain qualifications and abilities that support the goal of inclusion (Gumus, S., Bellibas, M. S., Sen, S., & Hallinger, 2024). Regular schools that implement inclusive education may contribute for achieving the national educational goals for all students without discrimination, as essentially, every child has the right to a proper education (Sartica, 2013). This achievement is greatly influenced by the contribution and role of a school principal, who is also supported by the school community.

Based on the Decree of the Head of the Palangka Raya City Education Office Number 800/2855/Disdik.Um-Peg/X/2023, SD Negeri 4 Palangka is one of the elementary schools in Palangka Raya City designated as a pilot project school for the development of SELARAS inclusive education program in Palangka Raya City as shown in FIGURE 1. This means that, as of now, the school has been operating with the status of a reference school for developing inclusive education for approximately 2 years. Based on interviews with the principal, the school had already begun accepting and handling students with special needs since 2019, even before the designation based on the aforementioned decree. The trust and evaluation of parents of Students with Special Needs (PDBK) regarding the principal's integrity and performance in handling PDBK is one of the reasons why SD Negeri 4 Palangka is always be the number one choice for an inclusive school.

Therefore, through this research, the author aims to analyze the role of the school principal in implementing inclusive education for students with special needs at SD Negeri 4 Palangka, specifically from the perspective of the principal's role as a school manager. The principal's managerial role can be analyzed through the activities of planning, organizing, directing, and evaluating the implementation of inclusive education in this school.



Figure 1. Decree of the head of the Palangka Raya City Education Office about Appointment and Pilot Project School for The Inclusive Education Development Strategy SELARAS in Palangka Raya City

This research uses some theories related to the topic, which consist concept of principal's roles, inclusive education, and Students with Special Needs (PDBK).

Concept of Principal's Roles

In general, the functions and duties of the school principal can be grouped into seven roles. The principal as an educator plays a role in character building based on educational values. As a manager, principal plays a role in managing resources to achieve institutional goals effectively and efficiently. As an administrator, principal plays a role in regulating the school's administrative system so that it is effective and efficient. As a supervisor, principal plays a role in helping to develop the professionalism of teachers and educational staff. As a leader, principal plays a role in influencing people to cooperate in achieving the shared vision and goals. As an innovator, principal plays a role in being a dynamic and creative individual who is not stuck in routines. And as a motivator, principal plays a role in providing encouragement so that all educational components can develop professionally. In carrying out the role as a manager, the school principal must be able to execute the management process which refers to the management functions, and must understand and implement the substance of educational activities. The principal must be capable of performing management functions well, including planning, organizing, directing/actuating, and controlling.

Based on Siti's research (2023), there are several indicators for the achievement of each managerial function. The achievement of the planning function can be measured using the indicators of school administration planning, supervision program planning, financial budgeting, facilities and infrastructure, and evaluation of program plans. Meanwhile, the organizing function can be measured using the indicators of determining school resources, the process of organizational planning and development, assignment, and delegation of authority. The actuating function can be measured using the indicators of directing to achieve goals and providing work motivation to subordinates both in meeting forums and personally. While the controlling function can be measured using the indicators of setting research instruments, assessment or evaluation, and correction and follow-up.

Inclusive Education

The legal basis for inclusive education in Indonesia, according to Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, article 5 paragraph 2, affirms that individuals with physical, emotional, mental, intellectual, or social disabilities have the right to receive appropriate educational services (Kemdikbud, 2003). Government Regulation Number 13 of 2020 concerning inclusive education mandates that inclusive schools must accept and provide educational services to children with special needs, provide adequate facilities, and train teachers in the field of inclusive education (Indonesia, 2022). Based on this legal foundation, Indonesian government is committed to providing learning opportunities to all children, including those with special needs, and encourages the implementation of inclusive education in all educational institutions in Indonesia (Kemdikbud, 2003). As a leader, the school principal has an important role in continuously educating about the importance of accepting individual differences with special needs in general schools, gradually but surely within the framework of the inclusive education program (Lalak Muslimin, L. L. Y., & Muqowim, 2021). Inclusive education provides opportunities for all children, including children with disabilities, to participate in the same education as other children. It aims to ensure that Children with Special Needs (PDBK) receive equal opportunities for quality education, in accordance with the principles of equality and fundamental rights (Biantoro, 2024). Fostering equality by offering the best possible education for all students is one of the main goals of inclusive schools (Lambrech et al., 2022). As a leader in the school, the principal should set an example of how to accept and provide the right service system for individuals with special needs (Lalak Muslimin, L. L. Y., & Muqowim, 2021).

Students with Special Needs (PDBK)

Children with special needs (ABK) are children who require an education adapted to the individual learning barriers and needs of each child. Furthermore, children with special needs are children with specific characteristics that differ from regular children in general, showing physical, intellectual, and emotional characteristics that are lower or higher than their normal peers. Children with special needs are also often outside the normal standards that apply in society (Kushalnagar, 2020). According to (Munandar, 2014), children with special needs are categorized into five specifications, namely visually impaired, hearing impaired, intellectually disabled, physically disabled, and emotionally/behaviorally disturbed. Children with special needs refer to children who experience limitations in one or several abilities, whether physical, such as visual and hearing impairment, or psychological, such as autism and ADHD (Fakhiratunnisa, S. A., Pitaloka, A. A. P., & Ningrum, 2022)

METHODS

This research uses a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach, which aims to reveal the subjective experiences of participants in the form of a description. With this method, the researcher can deeply understand the role of the school principal as a manager in implementing inclusive education for Students with Special Needs (PDBK) at SD Negeri 4 Palangka as shown in **FIGURE 2**. The data was collected through primary and secondary sources. Primary data was obtained based on direct interviews with the school principal with the aim of exploring information about the planning, organizing, actuating, and controlling of inclusive education activities. Meanwhile, secondary data was obtained through school data, journals, articles, and books relevant to the research topic. The data collection techniques used was interview, observation, and documentation study. Data validity was tested using technique, source, and time triangulation. The data analysis technique employed interactive analysis, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing.

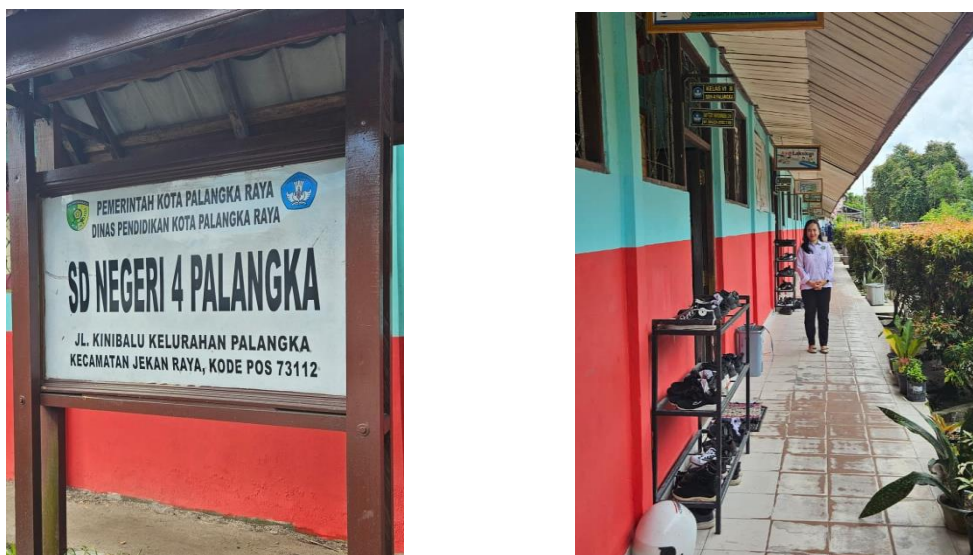


Figure 2. Location of SD Negeri 4 Palangka

FINDING AND DISCUSSIONS

The school data recorded on June 30, 2024 shows that SD Negeri 4 Palangka has totally 24 students with various types of special needs and distributed across eight classes from grade 1 to grade 6 as shown in **TABLE 1**. So, for more than 2 years, the principal has been performing her managerial roles in implementing inclusive education for students with special needs. These roles can be reflected in the application of the principal's managerial functions, starting from planning,

organizing, actuating, and controlling. Based on the results of observation, interviews, and documentation, the managerial roles can be described as follows.

Table 1. Data of Students with Special Needs Based on Special Needs Categories

Categories of Special Needs	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A	Class IV-B	Class V-A	Class V-B	Class VI
Intellectual Disability (ID) and Cerebral Palsy (CP)	1							
ADHD and Speech Delay	1							
Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)	1							
Hearing Impairment	1							
ADHD	1							
Autism		1	1	1	1		1	1
Autism and Hyperactive		1		1				
Hyperactive		1	1	2	2			
Learning Disabilities			1					1
Mild Intellectual Disability (Mild ID)							1	
Moderate Intellectual Disability (Moderate ID)						1	1	

Planning

As a manager of the implementation of inclusive education, the principal of SD Negeri 4 Palangka has done a planning. Based on the results of interviews and documentation, the principal has prepared a routine one-year activity plan contained in the School Work Plan. One of the routine activities that is always carried out is New Student Admission (PPDB). The principal begins to prepare the technical aspects and procedures for the PPDB selection system, specifically for prospective students with special needs. The principal forms the PPDB committee, which consists of teachers and educational support staff. In committee meeting, the principal directs the committee to be selective in choosing applicants by adhering to the rules and regulations. The committee jointly designs the technical implementation of PPDB so that it can run well and transparently. During registration, parents of prospective students with special needs are required to attach a specialist's certificate stating that the child indeed has special needs.

After completing the administrative files, parents and students with special needs will be interviewed by the principal, and other committee members will assess the accuracy of the information from the parents by observing the student concerned during the interview activity. This activity aims to make it easier for school to identify and synchronize the type of special needs of the prospective ABK students, both from the specialist's statement and from what has been directly observed by the committee. In addition to finalizing the technical aspects and procedures of PPDB for ABK, the principal maps the number of ABK to be accepted and identifies the needs of the ABK based on the results of interviews and observations during the PPDB activity. Other forms of planning are reflected in the principal's efforts to program PPDB socialization activities for ABK, as well as socialization related to inclusive schools for ABK to parents or the wider community, with the aim that the community cares and participates in the success of inclusive education implementation.

Organizing

The organizing carried out by principal of SD Negeri 4 Palangka is reflected in the division of tasks according to each respective role. This school has eight study groups or classes, from grade 1 to 6, where each class has 2 to 4 Children with Special Needs (ABK). Because of having 24 students with various types of special needs, the principal divides tasks among the classroom teachers and the special education teacher, so that they can synergize in handling these students in the class proportionally. Teachers must ensure that students can participate and acquire knowledge. According to the observation and interview, SD Negeri 4 Palangka has six special education teachers that are recruited from a private foundation and they have background in

Guidance and Counseling Education. Besides that, the principal also gives freedom for parents to choose whether they want to use the special education teacher provided by the school or choose their own. The result shows that several parents determine their own special education teacher, namely from close family circles. For example, the grandmother and mother of students with special needs become the shadow teacher for helping and supporting the students. **FIGURE 3** shows that the special education teacher and or the shadow teacher accompany the students in classroom during learning activities.



Figure 3. Special Education Teachers or Shadow Teachers Involvement During Learning Activities in Classroom

Besides organizing special education teachers or shadow teacher for students with special needs, the principal also delegates teachers and GPK alternately to be actively involved in education and training, socialization, and seminars related to inclusive education and ABK. The purpose of this delegation is to provide space and opportunity for classroom teachers, GPK, and other educational staff to gain experience and understand about inclusive education and ABK. For an example as shown in **FIGURE 4**, the principal of SD Negeri 4 Palangka chooses and assigns several teachers and staff to join in a webinar program related to inclusive education and ABK.

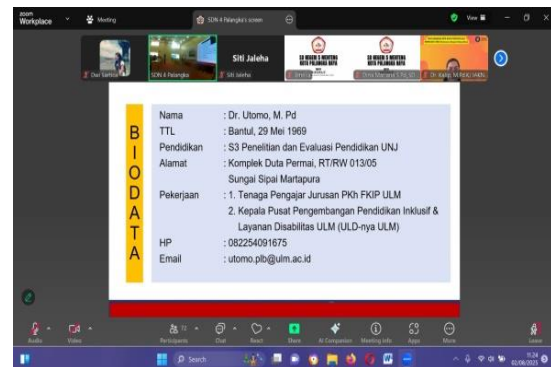


Figure 4. Webinar Program about Inclusive Education Implementation Attended by Teachers and Parents of ABK from SD Negeri 8 Palangka

Furthermore, the principal forms a working team through learning community meetings for ABK along with classroom teachers and GPK. Through these meetings, each member can present the challenges they face, so that the working team can find solutions. In addition, the principal builds internal and external cooperation in implementing inclusive education. Within the internal scope of the school, the principal has collaborated with educators, educational staff, and the committee regarding the division of tasks in making the implementation of inclusive education successful. Externally, the principal has collaborated with the Palangka Raya City Education Office, Disability Service Units, child psychologists, and foundations providing GPK, with the aim of the school receiving guidance and assistance as shown in **FIGURE 5**.



Figure 5. Collaboration between SD Negeri 4 Palangka and Psikolog in Training Program for Parents

Actuating

The school principal acts as an actuator for all school members through open communication, both through formal and informal meetings. Good coordination helps overcome constraints and other struggles during the teaching and learning process for ABK in the classroom. In addition, the principal approaches classroom teachers, GPK (Special Education Teachers), and other staff by providing motivation, either personally or through heart-to-heart discussions, or generally during open meetings. The principal encourages all educators and staff to dedicate themselves to their respective duties faithfully and consistently, and to sincerely serve the school in accordance with its vision and mission. Theory of (Arifin, S., Zaini, A. W., & Sanjani, 2024) states that teachers do not only teach religion and knowledge in the classroom, but also bring religion into the community. Therefore, in addition to being professionals, teachers must also carry a religious mission or value in their work. The principal of SD Negeri 4 Palangka always provides motivation through a personal and comprehensive approach so that teachers can love their profession sincerely and compassionately, especially in serving, assisting, educating, and teaching ABK students. **FIGURE 6** shows that the principal is giving warm welcome to the guest and giving motivation to the staff and parents in a simple meeting in the principal office.



Figure 6. The Principal Greets the Guest and Motivate Staff and Parents

Controlling

In terms of controlling, the principal performs an evaluation of the learning progress of ABK (Children with Special Needs) and the performance evaluation of classroom teachers and GPK (Special Education Teachers). The principal actively participates in compiling evaluation reports by involving teachers and school operators to ensure data accuracy, as shown in **FIGURE 7**. At the end of each semester up to the promotion to the next grade, classroom teachers and GPK are required to submit reports in descriptive form to the principal regarding the development of the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects of ABK students. This report is beneficial for the principal to assess the achievement or constraints in the process of handling and academic services for ABK at the school. Furthermore, this report becomes the basis for determining subsequent policies or solutions that can be developed for the progress of ABK education. Therefore, the principal regularly holds meetings with classroom teachers and GPK for monitoring. The results of the ABK academic report must also be communicated to the parents of the ABK with the aim of creating continuity in the education received by the ABK both at school and at home. For an example as in **FIGURE 8**, it shows that there is a special room, namely Inclusive Room, which is used as a special room or an “isolated room” for students who are in a sudden period of uncontrolled anger or bad temper.

In addition, the principal also evaluates the performance of teachers while teaching and educating ABK students. If, based on the evaluation, there are constraints experienced directly by the teacher, the principal and the teacher will jointly seek solutions so that these constraints can be minimized in the future.



Figure 7. Observing and Evaluating the Progress of ABK



Figure 8. Special Inclusive Room for Students of They Experience a Meltdown Immediately

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings and discussion, it can be concluded that in implementing inclusive education for Students with Special Needs, the principal of SD Negeri 4 Palangka has carried out managerial roles starting from planning, organizing, actuating, to controlling. The principal conducts planning in the form of preparatory activities for the New Student Admission (PPDB) selection system for ABK, identification of ABK needs, and socialization activities related to inclusive schools. In organizing, the principal clearly divides the tasks and functions of the teachers and GPK (Special Education Teachers) in teaching and assisting ABK in the classroom, delegates teachers alternately to enhance competence through training or similar activities related to inclusive education and ABK, forms a joint learning community space for classroom teachers and GPK, and collaborates and builds partnerships with both internal and external parties. Furthermore, the principal performs actuating in the form of routine or conditional meeting activities as a space for open, transparent, and focused communication for the principal, teachers, GPK, and staff, as well as providing motivation for teachers to be responsible for their respective duties. The principal also conducts controlling in the form of evaluation activities regarding the learning outcomes of ABK and the evaluation of teacher performance in educating and teaching ABK in the classroom.

REFERENCES

- DeMatthews, D. E., & Mueller, C. (2022). Principal Leadership for Inclusion: Supporting Positive Student Identity Development for Students with Disabilities. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education*, 315–332. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19427751211015420>
- Arifin, S., Zaini, A. W., & Sanjani, M. A. F. (2024). Manajemen Pengembangan Kurikulum Berbasis Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah dalam Best Practice Pendidikan Islam. *Educazione: Journal of Education and Learning*, 1(2), 28–44.
- Biantoro, O. F. (2024). Kebijakan dan Tantangan Pendidikan Inklusif Di Indonesia. *Afkaruna: International Journal of Islamic Studies (AIJIS)*, 1(2), 24–33.
- Esposito, C. (2024). Indocyanine green (ICG)-GUIDED lymphatic sparing laparoscopic varicocelectomy in children and adolescents. Is intratesticular injection of the dye safe? A mid-term follow-up study. *Journal of Pediatric Urology*, 20(2), 282. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpuro.2023.11.018>
- Fakhiratunnisa, S. A., Pitaloka, A. A. P., & Ningrum, T. K. (2022). Konsep Dasar Anak Berkebutuhan Khusus. *Masaliq*, 2(1), 26–42. <https://doi.org/10.58578/masaliq.v2i1.83>
- Grissom, J. A., Egalite, A. J., & Lindsay, C. A. (2021). "How Principals Affect Students and Schools: A Systematic Synthesis of Two Decades of Research." <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/principalsynthesis>.
- Gumus, S., Bellibas, M. S., Sen, S., & Hallinger, P. (2024). *Educational Management Administration and Leadership*. 52(1), 28–51.
- Indonesia, M. of E. and C. of. (2022). *Pedoman Layanan Bimbingan dan Konseling di Sekolah Dasar*. Kemendikbudristek.
- Kemdikbud. (2003). *Undang- Undang Nomor 20 tahun 2003 tentang Sistem Pendidikan Nasional Pasal 5 ayat 2*. Kemdikbud.
- Kushalnagar, P. (2020). Adverse Childhood Communication Experiences Associated With an Increased Risk of Chronic Diseases in Adults Who Are Deaf. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 59(4), 548–554. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2020.04.016>
- Lalak Muslimin, L. L. Y., & Muqowim, M. (2021). Peran Kepala Sekolah Terhadap Kebijakan Pendidikan Inklusi di Tingkat Sekolah Dasar. *Jurnal Kependidikan. Jurnal Hasil Penelitian*

Dan Kajian Kepustakaan Di Bidang Pendidikan, Pengajaran Dan Pembelajaran, 7(3), 708.
<https://doi.org/10.33394/jk.v7i3.3468%5C>

Mulyasa, E. (2011). *Menjadi Kepala Sekolah Profesional*. PT Remaja Rosdakarya,.

Munandar, U. (2014). *Pengembangan kreativitas anak berbakat*. Rineka Cipta.

Sartica, D. (2013). *The Strategies of The Inclusive Elementary Schools or SD Inklusi in Salatiga Used to Facilitate The Learning of Students With Special Needs*.