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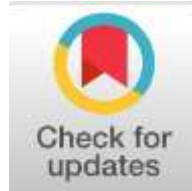
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Innovative Principal Leadership Strategies for Optimizing Teacher Collaboration and Internal Resources for Inclusive Education Services in Remote Areas
Inovasi Strategi Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah dalam Mengoptimalkan Kolaborasi Guru dan Sumber Daya Internal untuk Pelayanan Pendidikan Inklusif di Wilayah Terpencil

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Abstract

General Background Inclusive education demands systematic collaborative professional support to provide equitable learning opportunities for all students. **Specific Background** However, educational institutions in geographically remote areas, such as SMP Negeri 2 Sandaran, face severe shortages of specialized personnel and adaptive learning materials, causing fragmented and individualized responses to student needs. **Knowledge Gap** Existing literature lacks comprehensive exploration regarding how administrators cultivate sustainable teamwork practices to support equitable education specifically within isolated environments. **Aims** This study investigates the administrative approaches used to develop educator teamwork for sustaining educational services in a remote junior high setting. **Results** Findings from this qualitative case study indicate that teamwork was cultivated through internal professional development, shared case discussions, open communication, and developmental academic supervision. Furthermore, specialized support was maintained by optimizing locally available instructional materials rather than depending on advanced facilities. **Novelty** This research demonstrates that adaptive leadership and a robust collegial culture serve as vital compensatory mechanisms for sustaining equitable education in geographically isolated areas lacking formal specialized personnel. **Implications** To ensure long-term sustainability, institutions operating in limited contexts must transition from informal interpersonal cooperation to formally structured professional learning communities with systematic documentation for differentiated instructional planning and student progress monitoring.

Highlights

- Internal capacity development and shared case discussions successfully compensate for specialized staff shortages.
- Developmental academic supervision transforms standard performance evaluation into continuous professional mentoring for educators.
- Sustainable equitable learning requires institutionalizing informal collegiality into formally structured professional learning communities.

Keywords

Inclusive Education; School Leadership; Professional Learning Communities; Teacher Competence; Special Educational Needs

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is a commitment to include all learners, offering equitable access to meaningful, safe, and high-quality educational opportunities irrespective of individual differences. Inclusive education in the context of junior secondary schools is more than just enrolling students with disabilities or other special educational needs (SEN) in regular classrooms. It requires schools to develop adaptive instructional practices, equitable assessment systems, collaborative professional support, and learning environments that meet the diverse characteristics and needs of all students. Thus, the quality of inclusive education mainly depends on the ability of the school to build systematic, collaborative and sustainable support services that allow the full participation of all learners in the educational process (UNESCO, 2020; Ainscow, 2020). The challenges of implementing inclusive education in geographically remote areas are many folds than the urban areas. Schools in isolated areas often lack access to special education teachers, psychologists, therapists, professional development opportunities and adaptive instructional resources. Such limitations often curtail the capacity to provide customised educational assistance to students with special educational needs. Still, resource limitations should not be a barrier to educational equity. Instead, school leaders are expected to exhibit adaptive leadership by empowering teachers, fostering collaborative professional cultures, and leveraging existing school resources to ensure that inclusive education is effective despite contextual limitations (Hallinger, 2020; UNESCO, 2020).

SMP Negeri 2 Sandaran is a public junior high school located in Sandaran, East Kutai Regency, East Kalimantan, Indonesia. The school serves students from coastal and geographically isolated communities and faces considerable challenges with regard to access to specialized educational services and professional support. Initial observations indicate that some students continue to struggle with learning, especially in literacy, numeracy, attention regulation and social adjustment. Some slow learner students are integrated into regular classrooms and require instructional adaptations, differentiated learning strategies, individualized assistance, and frequent progress monitoring to participate in classroom learning. Moreover, early school data indicate that these educational challenges are exacerbated by low levels of professional collaboration among teachers. In general, classroom teachers, subject teachers and school counselors deal with students' learning difficulties on their own and without systematic coordination. Communication about students' educational needs is informal and inconsistent and regular professional forums such as case conferences, inclusive education teams and professional learning communities have yet to be formalized. Consequently, the educational support of students with special educational needs is usually fragmented, poorly documented and inconsistent between academic semesters. Such conditions can limit the effectiveness of inclusive instructional practices and impede students' academic engagement and development.

In special education, collaboration among teachers should move beyond the usual communication or administrative meetings. Effective collaboration means working together to identify students' educational needs, develop comprehensive learner profiles, create differentiated instructional approaches, adapt learning objectives and assessments, implement positive behaviour supports, engage parents, and monitor student progress on an ongoing basis. Therefore, it is important to focus on the quality of collaboration, measured by its contributions to the improvement of instructional practices and the promotion of student learning engagement, rather than by the frequency of teacher interactions (Friend & Cook, 2017; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2019). In this context, the principal is strategically positioned as an instructional leader tasked to develop a collaborative school culture. Apart from their administrative tasks, principals are expected to create a common vision of inclusive education, encourage professional collaboration, arrange inclusive supervision, promote teachers' professional learning, make effective use of available resources and develop monitoring systems to ensure the continuous improvement of inclusive educational services. Leadership practices that foster collaborative efforts have been repeatedly recognized as important drivers of successful inclusive school implementation (Leithwood et al., 2020; Hallinger, 2020).

While there is a rich body of research on instructional leadership and inclusive education separately, there have been few studies on how school principals strategically foster teacher collaboration to improve inclusive education in resource-limited rural schools. Earlier work has focused mostly on teacher competence, inclusive instructional strategies or policy implementation. Research on leadership mechanisms that can facilitate sustainable collaborative practices, especially in remote-area schools in Indonesia, is limited. This gap points to the need for context specific qualitative inquiries that explore the ways in which school leadership mobilizes available human resources to support inclusive educational services. Under these circumstances, this study aims to explore the principal's strategy of SMP Negeri 2 Sandaran in developing teacher collaboration to support inclusive education service. Specifically, the study aims to explore the initiation, implementation and sustainability of collaborative practices; to identify the facilitators and constraints of teacher collaboration; and to investigate how these leadership strategies enhance the educational services provided to students with special educational needs in regular classrooms. The results are expected to contribute to the growing body of knowledge in inclusive education and educational leadership and to offer practical suggestions to schools in remote areas that want to improve their collaborative support systems for inclusive learning.

METHOD

This study used qualitative research with a single case study design to understand in depth the principal's strategy in developing teacher collaboration to provide inclusive education services at SMP Negeri 2 Sandaran, East Kutai Regency, Indonesia. A qualitative case study was chosen as the research was intended to explore leadership practices, collaborative processes and participants' experiences in their natural setting, rather than to test predetermined hypotheses. In particular, the study examined how the principal initiated, facilitated and sustained collaborative practice among teachers in responding to the educational needs of students with special educational needs (SEN). The research was conducted in SMP Negeri 2 Sandaran, a public junior secondary school located in a geographically remote area in East Kalimantan, which provides inclusive education, despite the limited access to specialized educational services. The participants were selected

by means of purposive sampling, since they were directly involved in inclusive educational practices. The key informants included the principal, the vice principal for curriculum, the subject teachers, the homeroom teachers and the school counsellor (if applicable). The parents of students with special educational needs were included as complementary informants, when there was a need for more information about the students' educational support. Relevant school documents such as school work plans, curriculum documents, student profiles, instructional plans and records related to inclusive education were also examined to enrich the data.

Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, non-participant classroom and school observations and document analysis. Interviews aimed to explore participants' perceptions of the principal's leadership strategies, teacher collaboration, and challenges faced in the implementation of inclusive education. The data focused on collaborative practices amongst teachers, differentiated instructional practices, classroom support for students with SEN and the principal's role in facilitating collaboration. Through interviews and observations, information was corroborated by documentary evidence to achieve a thorough understanding of the phenomenon studied. To ensure the credibility of the findings, the study used several validation strategies such as triangulation of sources, methods, and time, prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and member checking. Data were analyzed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's interactive model with data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, and constant verification throughout the research process. Through this iterative analytic process, recurring themes were identified that relate to leadership strategies, teacher collaboration, factors that facilitate and impede, and how they contributed to the strengthening of inclusive education services in the school.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Description of the Research Site

SMP Negeri 2 Sandaran State Junior Secondary School Sandaran District, East Kutai Regency, East Kalimantan, Indonesia. The school is geographically located in a coastal and relatively remote area, which has limited access to specialized educational services, professional development opportunities, educational consultants, psychologists, and adaptive learning resources. These contextual conditions play a significant role in the implementation of inclusive education, particularly in providing appropriate support to students with special educational needs (SEN). Notwithstanding these limitations, the school is still committed to providing all students with equal educational opportunities irrespective of their learning characteristics. SMP Negeri 2 Sandaran is a public school that serves the surrounding community, and accepts students from diverse socioeconomic, cultural, and academic backgrounds. The diversity also includes students with a variety of learning challenges who need extra educational support. The school takes an inclusive approach and admits children with special educational needs to ordinary classes, where they can learn with their peers. However, the implementation of inclusive education is still in progress as the school has not yet set up comprehensive support facilities, permanent special education teachers and fully structured inclusive education programs. However, school personnel are very dedicated to providing educational services sensitive to the individual learning needs of students.

Because the school is isolated, the principal must rely heavily on internal school resources rather than external professional support. As such, leadership practices emphasize on improving teacher collaboration, open communication, and professional discourse on students' learning needs as well as maximizing the use of instructional resources at one's disposal. The main is to promote joint problem solving activities actively among teachers to make educational decisions as a group and provide students with special educational needs with continuous support throughout the learning process. These collaborative efforts have been a critical strategy to sustain inclusive education in a resource constrained environment. The school has an organizational culture where people are close to one another and there is a strong sense of collegiality among staff. The family-like atmosphere facilitates informal communication and mutual support among teachers. Yet the study found that these collaborative interactions have not been fully institutionalized in systematic professional practices. Collaborative activities are not generally conducted on a regular basis but are in response to immediate student issues such as documented case discussions or professional learning communities. Therefore, strengthening the formal mechanism of collaboration is an important opportunity to improve the quality and sustainability of inclusive education services at SMP Negeri 2 Sandaran.

Principal's Strategy for Enhancing Teachers' Competence and Understanding in Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs

One of the principal's main strategies to strengthen inclusive education in SMP Negeri 2 Sandaran is to improve the teachers' competence and understanding of the education of students with special educational needs (SEN). The results show that the principal recognizes the teachers as the main actors in the implementation of inclusive education, mainly because the school does not have a permanent special education teacher (SET). Thus, enhancing teachers' knowledge, teaching skills, and professional attitudes has become a strategic priority for students with different learning needs to have access to equitable educational opportunities in regular classrooms. Rather than requiring teachers to start from ideal inclusive practices, the principal adopts a gradual capacity building approach, responding to the contextual challenges and resources available in the school. The first strategy is to identify the professional learning needs of teachers before the designing of any capacity building initiatives. The principal first examines the challenges faced by teachers in supporting the SEN students by observing classes, informal chats, staff meetings and reflective discussions after teaching in classrooms. These interactions show that many teachers are unclear about their ability to identify the various types of learning difficulties, conduct classroom-based assessments, provide differentiated instruction, modify learning activities, and assess students whose learning progress differs from their peers. Most teachers do not have formal education backgrounds in

special education, so the principal feels it is important to first understand the challenges and then figure out the appropriate professional development strategies. This diagnostic approach allows the principal to plan support activities that respond to practical needs of teachers rather than relying on generic training programs.

After identifying teachers' needs, the principal promotes internal professional development through school-based learning activities. Instead of relying only on external workshops, which can be hard to access because of the school's geographical isolation, the school runs regular sharing sessions, collaborative discussions and case-based learning among teachers. These activities provide an opportunity for teachers to share their experiences, talk about the challenges their students have in learning, and explore together the instructional solutions that have worked in their classrooms. Typical topics include characteristics of special needs students, simplifying classroom instructions, developing step-by-step learning activities, using concrete learning materials, providing positive reinforcement, supporting students with attention and concentration difficulties, etc. The work-based discussions are relevant and directly applicable to teachers' teaching practices because they are based on real classroom situations.

The findings further indicate that academic supervision is a vehicle for continuous professional learning rather than administrative evaluation. During supervision the principal will observe how teachers organize instruction in the classroom, how they communicate learning objectives, how they interact with students with learning difficulties, how they adapt instructional materials, how they manage classroom participation and how they assess student achievement. Supervisory feedback is about improving instructional practices that facilitate inclusive participation instead of focusing on adherence to administrative dictates. Reflective conversations with teachers are held by the principal after observations to determine instructional strengths, discuss difficulties encountered in the classroom, and develop plans for improvement. Such developmental supervision promotes the perspective of classroom observation as an opportunity for professional development rather than an inspection of performance and helps to develop a culture of continuous improvement in the school.

Another key aspect of the principal's strategy is to strengthen teachers' understanding of differentiated instruction. Teachers are reminded that students have different learning profiles and thus require different instructional supports. In everyday classroom practice, differentiated instruction is implemented through relatively simple but meaningful adjustments such as simplifying learning materials, providing concrete examples, breaking down complex assignments into smaller learning steps, allocating additional learning time and allowing students to demonstrate their understanding in different forms of assessment. The principal always emphasizes that educational equity does not mean treating all students the same, but it means providing personalized assistance so that all students can achieve realistic learning outcomes according to their capacity and educational needs. Given the scarcity of institutional resource, this perspective offers differentiated instruction as a potential strategy to enhance learning accessibility in inclusive classrooms. In addition to technical skills, the principal also gives a lot of importance to developing positive attitudes in teachers towards students with special educational needs. The study indicates that successful inclusive education depends not only on pedagogical knowledge, but also on teachers' acceptance, empathy, patience, commitment and willingness to support every learner. As a result, the principal always sends the message that students with special educational needs should not be perceived as additional burdens, but rather as integral members of the school community whose educational rights need to be acknowledged. This positive mindset is cultivated by daily communication, personal example, motivational encouragement and a family-based leadership style that fosters mutual support among school staff. The principal establishes an inclusive school culture by consistently showing care for teachers and students alike where teachers are encouraged to collaborate, openly discuss instructional challenges, and remain committed to improving educational services for all learners. In conclusion, these strategies are indicative of a leadership style that combines instructional leadership with transformational and servant leadership styles, focusing on teacher empowerment as a basis for sustainable inclusive education.

Principal's Strategy for Enhancing Teachers' Competence and Understanding in Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs

According to the principal, the results show that teacher competence is the basis for the success of inclusive education in SMP Negeri 2 Sandaran. Because there is no permanent Special Education Teacher (SET) and because the school is geographically remote and has limited access to professional support services, the provision of educational services to students with special educational needs (SEN) is mainly the responsibility of classroom teachers, subject teachers, homeroom teachers and the school counselor. The head teacher is aware of this and thinks that the most important thing is to improve teachers' knowledge, their teaching skills and their professional attitude, so that they can apply inclusive practices with existing resources without only depending on external help.

Among the simple strategies adopted by the principal is the systematic identification of teachers' professional development needs prior to the commencement of capacity building programmes. Rather than assuming that teachers have similar competencies, the principal first seeks to understand the challenges they experience in supporting students with SEN. This needs assessment is done through continuous classroom observations, informal discussions with teachers after lessons, staff meetings, academic supervision and reflective discussions about classroom experiences. The principal also pointed out the common challenges teachers face in these activities: identification of students' characteristics with special educational needs, carrying out classroom-based assessment, implementation of differentiated instruction, adaptation of learning materials, modification of assessment procedures and provision of personalised support to students with different educational profiles. Results also indicate that many teachers have mostly general education backgrounds with limited formal special education training. They therefore rely on their own teaching experience rather than evidence-based inclusive instructional practices. This diagnostic approach allows the principal to appreciate the real needs of teachers before designing appropriate interventions for professional development. This will ensure that capacity building activities are

relevant to classroom realities and are not based on theoretical expectations.

After identifying teachers' needs, the principal encourages ongoing professional learning by conducting capacity-building activities within the school. Professional development is conducted through regular teacher meetings, collaborative discussions, experience sharing sessions and case-based learning on students with special educational needs due to limited opportunities for the school to participate in external training programmes. During these activities, teachers candidly discuss instructional challenges they have faced in their classrooms and collaboratively consider practical solutions that their peers have successfully implemented. Typical topics include identification of different learning characteristics, simplification of classroom instructions, design of sequential learning tasks, use of concrete instructional materials, use of positive reinforcement, management of students with attention difficulties, and literacy development for slow learners. Unlike traditional workshops, which typically emphasize theoretical knowledge, these school-based learning activities focus on real classroom experiences, enabling teachers to link new knowledge directly to their daily instructional practice. The mutual sharing of successful teaching strategies and the joint reflection on classroom experiences among teachers contribute to the gradual emergence of a collaborative learning culture, which in turn leads to an increased confidence in dealing with inclusive classrooms in a context of limited availability of institutional resources.

The study also shows that academic supervision is another significant strategy for enhancing teachers' professional competence. The principal uses a developmental model that emphasizes instructional improvement and reflective practice, as opposed to traditional supervision focused on administrative compliance. The principal, during classroom observations, particularly notes teachers' communication of learning objectives, classroom instructions, organization of learning activities, management of student participation, use of instructional media and responsiveness to students experiencing learning difficulties. Special attention is paid to the possibility for students with special educational needs to actively participate in the classroom learning process together with the peers, by means of the teaching methods used. Following each observation, the principal meets individually with teachers to give feedback on classroom strengths, discuss instructional challenges, and brainstorm practical recommendations for improvement. The principal sees supervision not as a supervisory function but as a professional dialogue for collaboration that pushes teachers to think critically about their instructional decisions and to try out different ways of teaching. Academic supervision is thus an ongoing professional learning process that supports teachers in improving inclusive teaching practices and alleviating the anxiety often associated with formal classroom observations.

Another important aspect of the principal's approach is to raise teachers' awareness of differentiated instruction as a key principle of inclusive education. The principal continually emphasizes to teachers that students are very different, in terms of their readiness levels, their rate of learning, their cognitive abilities, their interests, and their educational needs. Thus, identical instruction to every student cannot be considered an equitable educational practice. Instead, teachers are prompted to adapt learning content, instructional processes, learning products and classroom environments according to the individual characteristics of students. Teachers differentiate by: simplifying instructional materials, providing concrete examples prior to presenting abstract concepts, breaking down complex assignments into manageable steps, providing additional learning time, decreasing task complexity where appropriate, and allowing students to demonstrate learning outcomes through alternative means of assessment. The principal often emphasizes that fairness in education should be interpreted as providing the appropriate support according to the needs of individual learning, rather than treating all students the same way. This understanding slowly opens teachers' minds to change their instructional orientation from standardized classroom teaching to more flexible and student-centered learning practices that render education more accessible to students with special educational needs.

Apart from the principal's efforts to improve the teachers' pedagogical competence, the principal also gives much attention to the development of positive attitudes towards the students with special educational needs. The findings showed that successful inclusive education does not only depend on teachers' competence in teaching but also requires teachers' willingness to accept learner diversity, empathy, patience and commitment in assisting learners with learning difficulties. Therefore, the principal always sends the message that students with special educational needs cannot be seen as extra burdens or impediments to the teaching process in the classroom but as learners whose educational rights should be equally respected and supported. This perspective is based on regular communication, leading by example, encouragement and a family-type leadership style, where school staff are encouraged to look after each other and to take collective responsibility. The principal encourages teachers when they have difficulties with students with special educational needs, creates opportunities for collaborative discussions and reassures them that difficulties are not instructional failures but opportunities for professional growth. These leadership practices foster an organizational climate of psychological safety where teachers feel safe to share classroom challenges, ask colleagues for help, try out new teaching approaches, and reflect openly about their professional experiences. Overall, the results showed that the principal's strategy combined the principles of instructional leadership, transformational leadership, and servant leadership, simultaneously developing the professional competence, collaborative capacity, and commitment of teachers to provide equal educational opportunities for all students.

Data Triangulation

In this study, both source triangulation and method triangulation were used to increase credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. To triangulate the sources, data collected from the principal, vice principal for curriculum, subject teachers, homeroom teachers, school counselor, and parents of students with special educational needs (SEN) were compared. Meanwhile, methodological triangulation consisted of the comparison of evidence collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom and school observations and document analysis. The researcher used multiple informants and multiple data collection techniques to check for consistency in the findings and to minimize the potential bias that could be a result of

using a single source of information. Through triangulation, a high consensus was found on the leadership strategies of the principal to enhance teacher collaboration for inclusive education. Across all participant groups it was agreed that the Principal played a key role in fostering collaborative practices, through open communication, regular coordination meetings, case discussions and academic supervision. The teachers reported that the collaborative discussions helped them to better understand the learning characteristics of their students and relieved the pressure of individually supporting students with special educational needs. The principal also stressed that inclusive education is not the task of a single teacher, but a shared commitment of all members of the school community.

Observational data collected during classroom visits and school events confirmed the findings of the interview. It emerged that teachers frequently gave extra explanations, simplified instructions on how to learn, increased the time permitted for a task and offered individual help to students struggling with learning. There was also mention of informal communication between subject teachers, homeroom teachers and the school counselor in regard to students in need of extra support. These collaborative interactions showed that inclusive practices were already embedded in teachers' everyday instructional practices, although not necessarily through formal institutional structures. The findings of the interview and observation were generally confirmed by document analysis, but also revealed several significant gaps. Teachers indicated that they implemented differentiated instructional practices as part of classroom activities, but these adaptations were not always reflected in lesson plans, instructional modules or student support records. Likewise, discussion of students with special educational needs was common, but systematic documentation such as meeting minutes, individualised learning plans or structured records of progress monitoring were still lacking. This discrepancy suggests that inclusive practices at the school have been established primarily through teachers' professional commitment and collaborative culture, rather than through standardized administrative procedures. Therefore, improving documentation systems is an important area for future improvement to ensure continuity and accountability of inclusive educational services.

The triangulation process also demonstrated the effect of contextual variables on inclusive education implementation. Data collected from the principal and teachers indicated that the school has limited resources and funds, such as no permanent special education teacher (SET), inadequate opportunities for specialized professional training, and inadequate adaptive instructional facilities. Yet, the shortcomings did not hinder the school from taking inclusive actions as shown by the documentary and the observational evidence. Rather, the principal tried to make the best use of present resources by cultivating collegial relationships, fostering teacher collaboration, employing basic instructional media, and urging school personnel to work on problems together. These results indicate that leadership and organizational culture can be important compensatory factors to enable the school to sustain inclusive education with limited institutional resources. The overall triangulation findings therefore confirm that the principal's strategies have contributed positively to developing collaborative practices among teachers and improving educational support for students with special educational needs. At the same time, triangulation identifies several aspects requiring further strengthening, particularly the systematic documentation of differentiated instruction, individualized educational planning, collaborative decision-making, and inclusive monitoring procedures. These findings reinforce the conclusion that the implementation of inclusive education at SMP Negeri 2 Sandaran has progressed beyond initial awareness toward practical classroom implementation, although further institutionalization is necessary to ensure the long-term sustainability of inclusive educational services.

Research Theme	Interview Findings	Observation Findings	Document Analysis	Triangulation Conclusion
Teacher Competency Development	Teachers expressed the need for greater knowledge of students with SEN and adaptive instructional strategies.	Teachers provided individualized assistance and additional instructional support for students experiencing learning difficulties.	Professional development records and instructional documents only partially reflected inclusive teaching practices.	Teacher capacity-building initiatives have been implemented but require a more systematic and sustainable professional development framework.
Teacher Collaboration	Teachers reported discussing students with learning difficulties collaboratively rather than addressing problems individually.	Informal communication and coordination among subject teachers, homeroom teachers, and the school counselor were regularly observed.	Documentation of collaborative meetings and case discussions remained limited.	Teacher collaboration has developed positively, although formal documentation and structured collaborative procedures need further strengthening.
Differentiated Instruction	Teachers simplified assignments, repeated explanations, and provided additional learning time according to students' needs.	Students with SEN received individualized instructional support during classroom activities.	Lesson plans and instructional modules did not consistently include explicit differentiation strategies.	Differentiated instructional practices are evident in classroom implementation but are insufficiently reflected in instructional planning documents.
Learning Resources and Facilities	Teachers relied primarily on simple instructional media and locally available learning resources.	Concrete teaching materials, visual supports, and direct instructional approaches were frequently utilized.	The inventory of adaptive instructional resources remained limited.	Inclusive learning is supported through resource optimization rather than comprehensive specialized facilities.
Monitoring and Evaluation	The principal conducted academic supervision, teacher meetings, and reflective evaluations concerning inclusive	Supervision focused on instructional quality, classroom participation, and student engagement.	Specialized instruments for monitoring inclusive educational practices were not yet fully available.	Monitoring and evaluation are regularly conducted but require more comprehensive instruments specifically designed for inclusive

	education.			education.
Reading comprehension	The student experienced difficulty identifying main ideas and answering comprehension questions.	The student became able to identify main ideas and answer most simple comprehension questions correctly.		
Reading fluency	Reading was hesitant and lacked confidence.	Reading fluency improved, and the student demonstrated greater confidence during oral reading activities.		
Narrative writing	Writing consisted of short, poorly organized sentences requiring extensive teacher assistance.	The student was able to compose simple narratives with more logical sequencing, although occasional guidance on spelling remained necessary.		
Learning motivation	The student showed limited confidence and participation during literacy instruction.	The student became more motivated and actively participated in reading and writing activities.		
Learning independence	The student depended heavily on teacher guidance.	The student gradually initiated reading and writing activities independently.		

Table 1. *Triangulation of Research Findings by Theme*

The results showed that the principal's strategy for developing teacher collaboration to support inclusive education in SMP Negeri 2 Sandaran could be synthesized into five major themes. Teacher competence is developed by means of internal professional development, case discussions in collaboration, developmental academic supervision, and differentiated instruction training, as well as developing a positive attitude towards students with special educational needs. The initiatives are designed to build teachers' technical knowledge and to foster the confidence and professional commitment to implement inclusive instructional practices. Second, the principal promotes teacher collaboration through open communication, scheduling coordination meetings, providing opportunities for case discussions, clarifying professional roles, and developing a collegial school culture. Such approaches help to move the responsibility for the support of students with special educational needs from an individual to a collective school-wide responsibility. Third, the support for inclusive education is enhanced by optimizing existing learning resources rather than depending on sophisticated facilities. Teachers are encouraged to use simple instructional media, concrete learning materials, digital resources and collaborative partnerships with external stakeholders wherever possible. Fourth, the collaborative culture of the school manifests itself more in everyday leadership practices and professional relationships than in overarching written policies or operational guidelines. Finally, monitoring and evaluation are done through academic supervision, classroom observations, meetings for teacher reflection and ongoing discussions on students' progress, though specialized monitoring instruments for inclusive education are underdeveloped. Overall, these findings show that the biggest strength of SMP Negeri 2 Sandaran is the ability of the principal to unite the teachers and build collaborative professional practices, despite the large contextual constraints. However, sustainable inclusive education in the long term requires strengthening of institutional systems, especially concerning: systematic documentation of assessment, differentiated instructional planning, simplified Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), structured collaborative forums and comprehensive monitoring of the academic and socio-emotional development of students. These enhancements could lead to the present collaboration practices becoming a more structured and sustainable inclusive education system.

Discussion

The results of this study show that the principal of SMP Negeri 2 Sandaran plays a strategic role in developing teacher collaboration as the basis for promoting inclusive education in a resource-limited school environment. Instead of the presence of specialist staff or sophisticated facilities, the focus is on the development of professional competence of teachers, a culture of collaboration and organisational commitment to students with special educational needs (SEN). This finding is consistent with the concept of instructional leadership which states that good school leaders focus both on the improvement of teaching and learning processes and not just administrative responsibilities. Instructional leadership in the context of inclusive education is about the responsibility of the principals to ensure that all students, irrespective of their learning characteristics, have equal opportunities to access meaningful learning experiences. The current findings suggest that this leadership role is evidenced by the principal's ongoing efforts to identify teachers' professional needs, to promote internal capacity building activities, to conduct developmental academic supervision, and to encourage teachers to implement adaptive instructional practices in the face of institutional limitations. The importance of teacher competence is particularly relevant because teachers are the main providers of inclusive educational services in regular classrooms. Most teachers at SMP Negeri 2 Sandaran lack a formal background in special education, so professional development is a prerequisite to effective inclusive practice. The findings show that the principal deliberately starts with the diagnosis of teachers' instructional difficulties before developing appropriate professional support. This approach allows professional development activities to be customized to real classroom challenges, such as understanding students' learning features, differentiating instructions, modifying classroom tasks, doing classroom-based assessments, and managing different student

behaviors. Internal workshops, collaborative discussions, and case-based learning are practical strategies that fill the void in the school's access to external professional training. These activities promote collective learning among teachers from their actual classroom experiences, turning individual experiences into collective professional knowledge. Therefore, professional learning is incorporated in the daily practice of the school rather than relying on external capacity building initiatives.

Another important finding is the implementation of academic supervision as a developmental process, rather than an evaluative one. The focus is not only on the quality of instruction but also on classroom observations of how accessible learning is for students with special educational needs. Feedback after classroom observations is meant to improve teachers' teaching strategies, develop reflective practice and help teachers to find better ways of promoting student participation. The finding suggests that academic supervision is continuous professional mentoring, not administrative inspection. This method is especially relevant in the context of inclusive education as teachers need constructive feedback to judge how much of their instructional practices are genuinely responsive to learner diversity. The study also shows that the development of competence is not only about pedagogical knowledge but also about teachers' attitudes to diversity. The principal regularly encourages teachers to see students with special educational needs as full members of the school community, with an equal right to education. You can see some aspects of transformational leadership and servant leadership here, where school leaders have a vision and inspire others to share that vision, while also helping teachers to develop professionally by encouraging and empathizing with them and working through problems together.

The findings further indicate that the main mechanism through which inclusive education is put into practice at the school is teacher collaboration. The principal actively promotes collaboration through open communication, coordination meetings, collaborative case discussions, and clear distribution of professional responsibilities among subject teachers, homeroom teachers, school counselors, and parents. This collaborative structure fits with the principles of distributed leadership, which proposes the sharing of leadership responsibilities among members of the school community, rather than keeping them exclusively within the authority of the principal. Information from several professionals is needed to tackle the multidimensional nature of students' educational needs as students' learning difficulties often affect academic achievement, classroom behaviour, social participation and emotional adjustment concurrently. Such collaborative discussions therefore enable teachers to develop holistic understandings of students' learning profiles while ensuring consistency of educational support across learning contexts. The results show that such collaborative practices help reduce the feeling of isolation among teachers, and to build a shared sense of responsibility for improving the educational outcomes of students with special educational needs. Collaborative practices have evolved in a positive way, but the study also reveals some structural limitations that need to be addressed. Most collaboration still happens through informal communication and not through systematically organized professional learning communities or structured case conferences. There is inconsistent documentation of collaborative decision-making, individualized instructional plans, and student learning progress which can challenge continuity of educational support over time. These findings suggest that collaboration has to be shifted from interpersonal cooperation to institutionalized professional practice with written procedures, regular meeting schedules, documented case records, and systematic follow-up mechanisms. The establishment of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) would provide teachers with continuous opportunities to analyze student data, reflect on instructional practices, assess the effectiveness of interventions, and work together to develop new strategies for inclusive education. PLCs can supplement schools that do not have permanent special education teachers with a powerful professional support system by building teachers' collective expertise and decreasing their reliance on outside consultants.

Resource management is another important part of the principal's leadership strategy. The study found that SMP Negeri 2 Sandaran did not have complete adaptive facilities, but the principal was able to improve the optimal use of existing resources by using creative teaching methods. Teachers are encouraged to use concrete learning materials, visual aids, simplified worksheets, peer support, flexible seating arrangements and locally available resources to support the learning of the students. These results suggest that inclusive education should not be viewed only in terms of specialized resources, but also by the ability of teachers to modify the instructional environments to meet students' learning needs. But the study cautions that optimizing existing resources will not replace long-term planning to develop more extensive adaptive facilities. The allocation of resources should increasingly be based on the systematic assessment of students' educational needs so that future investments directly support improvements in inclusive learning environments. In addition, the school's geographical limitations, however, can be compensated by strengthening collaboration with external institutions such as special schools, educational authorities, healthcare professionals and community organizations to provide specialized educational support. Another important factor for successful inclusive education is the creation of a collaborative school culture. The results suggest the intentional creation of an organizational climate by the principal that is characterized by openness, mutual trust and shared responsibility through regular communication, teacher mentoring, collaboration meetings and family-oriented leadership. These practices build psychological safety, making teachers feel safe to talk about instructional challenges without fear of criticism and to collaborate on finding solutions. From the transformational leadership perspective, the principal succeeds in developing a shared vision that inclusive education is a professional obligation and moral commitment. At the same time, the findings echo elements of inclusive leadership, where diversity is embraced as a natural part of school life, not as an educational problem. The study also suggests that the current family based culture should gradually transition towards a more professional collaborative culture supported by systematic planning, evidence based decision making, regular evaluation and clearly defined professional responsibilities. Such institutionalization would help make inclusive practices sustainable beyond individual leadership efforts.

The last component of the principal's approach to sustaining teacher collaboration and inclusive education is monitoring and evaluation. The findings revealed that the principal often conducted classroom visits, academic supervision, teacher meetings, and reflective conversations to assess instructional delivery and students' educational progress. It is important to remember that the evaluation covers not only students' academic performance but also their classroom participation, communication, behavioral development, task completion and learning independence. This type of multidimensional assessment reflects current conceptions of inclusive assessment, which involve the holistic development of students, and not only standardized academic results. However, the study shows that there are no specific instruments of monitoring of

differentiated instruction, collaborative interventions and the individual progress of the students. Practical monitoring tools would allow teachers to record intervention strategies, assess their efficacy and provide evidence for ongoing instructional improvement. Therefore, monitoring can be conceptualized as a continuous process of using student progress to inform the development of instruction, using supervision to identify professional development needs, and using collaborative conversations to make evidence-based decisions that improve the quality and sustainability of inclusive educational services.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that the principal of SMP Negeri 2 Sandaran plays an important role in strengthening inclusive education by improving the professional competence of teachers, building collaborative practices, optimizing existing educational resources, building a collaborative school culture, and implementing continuous monitoring and evaluation of inclusive practices. There is no permanent special education teacher and the adaptive facilities and professional support are limited. The principal tries to engage teachers through internal professional development, academic supervision, collaborative case discussion and open communication to help teachers address the diverse learning needs of students with special educational needs (SEN) together. The findings suggest that, in resource-constrained schools, the sustainability of inclusive education is not only a function of the availability of infrastructure, but also of effective instructional leadership, collaborative professionalism, and a shared commitment by school personnel to provide equitable learning opportunities for all students. Findings imply that principals should institutionalize teacher collaboration through structured professional learning communities, systematic documentation of differentiated instruction and continuous professional development on inclusive education. Teachers are encouraged to develop their skills in differentiated instruction and adaptive assessment and to build skills in collaborative planning and reflective practice. Educational authorities must continuously support with special training, mentoring programs and provision of Special Education Teachers (SETs) to enhance inclusive school capacity. In addition, schools should create more thorough inclusive education policies, individualized learning support systems, and evidence-based monitoring mechanisms, and future research is suggested to explore the effectiveness of collaborative leadership models in wider educational contexts and their influence on students' academic, social, and emotional development.

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