From Policy to Practice: Understanding the Implementation of Individualized Educational Programs (IEPs) in Inclusive Primary Schools

Wirza Feny Rahayu[1], Rahmadianti Aulia[2], Audia Syaidina[3], Nurul Hidayah[4]

(wirza.feny@fpk.unp.ac.id[1], rahmadianti@fpk.unp.ac.id[2], audisyaidinaa@gmail.com[3], nurulhidayah252711@gmail.com[4])

Faculty of Psychology and Health, Universitas Negeri Padang, Padang, Indonesia[1234]

Abstract. This study examines the implementation of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) in inclusive primary schools in Padang, focusing on teachers' perspectives and experiences. Using a qualitative sequential exploratory design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 11 teachers and analyzed using thematic analysis in Nvivo15. Findings reveal four themes: effective implementation marked by high teacher engagement and motivation; partially effective implementation hindered by limited awareness of special needs and fluctuating teacher confidence; ineffective implementation due to inadequate teacher-to-student ratios, insufficient parental involvement, and limited training in IEP design and execution; and expected implementation reflecting aspirations for systemic support, regular training, and stakeholder collaboration. These findings highlight systemic barriers in inclusive education, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions such as enhanced teacher training, collaborative strategies, and policy-level reforms. This research contributes to the discourse on improving IEP implementation to ensure equitable learning opportunities in inclusive educational settings.

Keywords: Inclusive education, IEP implementation, teacher experiences, thematic analysis, systemic barriers

1. Introduction

The implementation of inclusive education has garnered significant attention worldwide as an effort to provide equitable learning opportunities for all students, including those with special needs [1]. A critical component of successful inclusive education is the development and implementation of Individualized Educational Programs (IEPs), which are specifically designed to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities [4]. IEPs serve as a bridge between policy goals and classroom practices, ensuring that students receive the necessary support and accommodations to succeed both academically and socially [1] .

In Indonesia, the government's commitment to inclusive education is evident through various policies and regulations, such as the Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture No. 70 of 2009, which emphasizes the importance of integrating students with special needs into

mainstream schools. Despite these advancements, the practical implementation of IEPs in inclusive settings remains a complex and challenging process [5]. Teachers, school administrators, and parents often face numerous obstacles, including limited resources, inadequate training, and varying levels of understanding of inclusive practices [6].

Padang, as one of Indonesia's prominent cities, has made strides in adopting inclusive education, particularly at the elementary school level. However, the practical application of IEPs in these settings warrants closer examination [7]. Questions arise regarding how IEPs are developed, who is involved in the process, and how these plans are translated into daily teaching and learning activities. Understanding these aspects is crucial to identifying gaps between policy and practice and proposing strategies to enhance the effectiveness of IEP implementation [8].

This study aims to explore the implementation of IEPs in inclusive elementary schools in Padang, focusing on the experiences and perspectives of the teachers. By employing a qualitative approach, this research seeks to uncover the realities of IEP application in the local context, highlighting successes, challenges, and potential improvements in supporting students with special needs. Ultimately, the findings of this study are expected to contribute to the broader discourse on inclusive education and inform policymakers, educators, and practitioners about best practices and actionable recommendations for improving IEP implementation in Indonesia.

2. Method

This research employs a qualitative approach to explore the implementation of Individualized Educational Programs (IEPs) in inclusive elementary schools in Padang. The methodology is designed to provide an in-depth understanding of the practices, challenges, and successes associated with IEP development and application [9]. The diagram of the research can be seen in Figure 1.
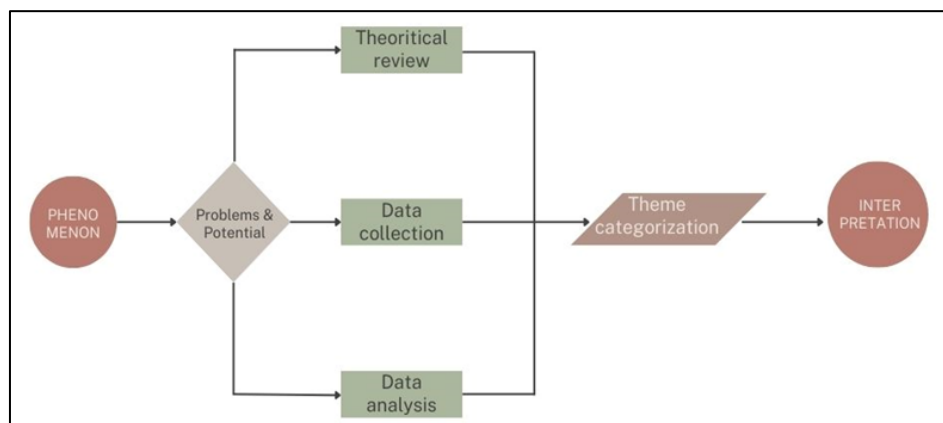

Figure 1. Diagram of Qualitative Exploratory

2.1. Research Design

The study adopts a case study methodology, enabling a detailed examination of IEP practices within the specific context of inclusive elementary schools in Padang. This design allows for a comprehensive exploration of the perspectives and experiences of key stakeholders involved in the IEP process.

2.2. Participants

The participants of this study are teachers who teach in inclusive elementary schools in Padang. Purposeful sampling is employed to select teachers who are directly involved in developing and implementing IEPs. The inclusion criteria for participants are:

(1) Teachers who have experience in developing or implementing IEPs.

(2) Teachers currently teaching students with special needs in an inclusive classroom setting.

The participants in this study consist of 11 teachers (N=11) who are actively teaching in inclusive elementary schools in Padang and are directly involved in the development and implementation of Individualized Educational Programs (IEPs). These participants were selected through purposive sampling, a non-random sampling method commonly used in qualitative research to ensure the inclusion of individuals with specific expertise and experience relevant to the research objectives [9].

The criteria for participant selection include professional experience: teachers must have experience teaching students with special needs in an inclusive classroom setting, availability and consent, and teachers willing to participate in the study and provide informed consent.

Purposive sampling was chosen to ensure that the data collected is rich, relevant, and reflects diverse perspectives [10] from those most knowledgeable about IEP implementation in the study context. This approach supports the research's aim to explore in-depth the challenges and successes associated with IEP practices.

Table 1. Interview participant demographics.

Teacher (pseudonym)	Gender	Years teaching	Undergraduate Major	Type of Special Needs Students Taught
Nm	F	1	Public health	ADHD
Ald	M	11	Astronomy	ADHD and Slow Learner
Nn	F	2	Math	Autism
Hn	F	3	Arts	Autism
Dn	F	2	Science	Hearing Impairments
Az	F	1	History	Visual Impairments
Don	M	1	History	Autism
Srh	F	4	Social Study	Learning Disabilities
And	F	3	Public health	ADHD
Sl	F	5	Sociology	ODD
Jt	F	3	Math	Hearing Impairments

2.3. Data Collection Method

The study utilizes multiple data collection methods to ensure the richness and validity of the data [9]:

(1) In-depth interviews are conducted with teachers to gain insights into their experiences, perceptions, and challenges related to IEP implementation.

(2) Relevant documents, including IEP plans and related teaching materials, are reviewed to understand the formal procedures and practical applications of IEPs.

(3) Classroom Observations: Observations of classroom practices are carried out to examine how IEPs are implemented in daily teaching activities.

In this study, data collection involved conducting semi-structured interviews guided by a well-developed interview protocol [9]. The interviews were conducted directly by the research team, who visited several inclusive elementary schools across Padang. Each interview session was audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed for analysis. The interview guidelines were designed to explore various aspects of IEP implementation in inclusive elementary schools, including general practices, teachers' experiences, and dynamics, their competencies and engagement, as well as the challenges and expectations they face. These interview protocols were developed by the researchers based on a comprehensive theoretical review of IEP implementation and the various dynamics involved, drawing from numerous previous studies in the field. (see Table 2). This approach ensured the depth and relevance of the information gathered, providing comprehensive insights into the realities of IEP implementation in this context.

Table 2. Interview protocol

1	IEP Implementation
	1) Can you describe your experience in creating and implementing IEPs for students with special needs at this school? 2) Do you find the IEPs you create effective in meeting the educational needs of students with special needs? Why do you think so? 3) Based on your experience, what challenges do you often face when creating IEPs? 4) Do you feel supported by the school in the process of implementing IEPs? If yes, what types of support have been most helpful to you? 5) How do you collaborate with parents or guardians when creating IEPs? 6) How do IEPs impact the learning progress of students with special needs in your class?
2	Teacher's competence

	1) How do you feel about your ability to teach students with special needs?
	2) Do you feel confident in creating and implementing IEPs? Why do you feel this way?
	3) Have you ever faced moments when you struggled with creating or implementing an IEP? How did you overcome those struggles?
	4) What factors do you believe influence your confidence in teaching students with special needs and creating IEPs?
	5) Has the training or education you received helped improve your confidence in implementing IEPs?
	6) How actively are you involved in the learning process of students with special needs in your class? What motivates you to stay actively engaged?
	7) Do you feel engaged in the process of implementing IEPs? Can you explain further?
	8) Are there any factors that reduce your engagement in the process of implementing IEPs? If yes, what are those factors?
	9) How important is teacher engagement in the successful implementation of IEPs in inclusive schools?
	10) How do you maintain your motivation and engagement in teaching students with special needs, especially when creating and implementing IEPs?
3	Experience, Learning, and Expectations
	1) Have you had any significant experiences while creating or implementing IEPs? What did you learn from those experiences?
	2) How is the evaluation of IEPs conducted at this school, and how are you involved in the process?
	3) What suggestions or recommendations do you have to improve the implementation of IEPs in inclusive elementary schools?
	4) What are your future hopes regarding the creation and implementation of IEPs at this school?

2.4. Data Analysis

The data collected from the interviews will be analyzed using an exploratory qualitative approach. This method aims to identify key themes emerging from the responses [11], providing insights into the experiences and challenges of implementing IEPs in inclusive elementary schools. The findings will then be interpreted and discussed within the context of relevant literature on inclusive education and IEP implementation, highlighting both theoretical and practical implications.

The data collected through interviews, document analysis, and observations are analyzed using thematic analysis with the aid of NVivo 2015 software. The steps involved in the analysis include:

(1) Importing all qualitative data into NVivo 2015 to ensure organized and systematic analysis.

(2) Familiarization with the data through repeated readings and preliminary coding within the software.

(3) Utilizing NVivo's coding tools to identify recurring themes and patterns related to IEP development, teacher roles, and implementation challenges.

(4) Categorizing themes into broader categories to understand systemic issues and contextual factors using the software's classification and visualization tools.

(5) Interpreting findings concerning the research objectives and relevant theoretical frameworks, leveraging NVivo's analytic capabilities to ensure rigor and depth in the analysis.

2.5. Ethical Consideration

The study adheres to ethical research practices, including obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity of participants' identities, and seeking approval from relevant institutional review boards and educational authorities.

3. Result And Discussion

3.1. Result

This research was conducted using a qualitative method with a sequential exploratory design [9]. The study began by determining the research setting, which included inclusive elementary schools in Padang, to examine the implementation of IEP development. A theoretical perspective review was then conducted to guide the researchers in collecting and analyzing data related to the dynamics of IEP implementation. This was carried out at the UPTD Disability Services for Inclusive Education (LDPI) in Padang City.

Subsequently, the research proceeded to the setting by collecting data through semi-structured interviews with teachers from inclusive elementary schools in Padang (N=11). The data collection was followed by qualitative data analysis [11], enabling the researchers to derive a comprehensive understanding of the research object in the form of several qualitative sub-themes processed using thematic analysis in NVivo. The sub-themes included variations in teacher experiences and perceptions across schools, the suboptimal provision of specialized training on IEP implementation, limited resources, insufficient time for IEP preparation, minimal parental support and collaboration, and school support that remains less than fully effective. For more details, see Figure 2.
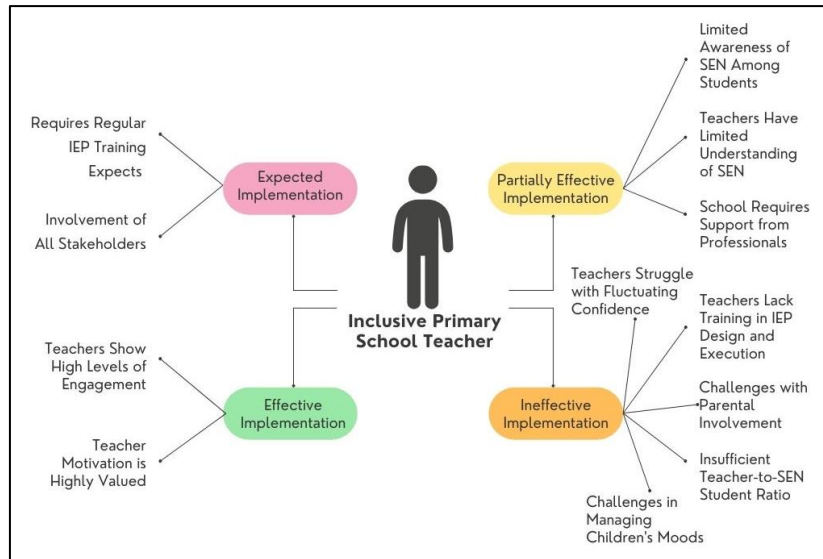
Figure 2. Concept Map Nvivo

The results from interviews with inclusive primary school teachers in Padang identified four major categories of IEP implementation: Effective Implementation, Partially Effective Implementation, Ineffective Implementation, and Expected Implementation. Each category reflects teachers' experiences, challenges, and aspirations, supported by prior research to contextualize and strengthen these findings.

1. Effective Implementation

   This category includes teachers who demonstrated strong dedication and engagement in the IEP process. Their intrinsic motivation was a key factor in achieving effective implementation.

   - Sub-theme: High levels of teacher engagement

   Teachers emphasized their active involvement in designing, implementing, and evaluating IEPs. Prior studies have highlighted that teacher engagement significantly enhances the quality of IEP implementation and supports better outcomes for students with SEN [12] [13].

   > "*I always try to be directly involved in every step of the IEP development because it's crucial for the student's progress.*"

   - Sub-theme: Teacher motivation is highly valued

   Recognition from stakeholders, such as parents and administrators, motivated teachers to put more effort into inclusive practices. The research found that teachers' perceived value of their efforts correlates with their commitment to inclusive practices [14].

   > "*Seeing the improvement in my students' abilities makes me feel appreciated and drives me to do more.*"

2. Partially Effective Implementation

This category reflects teachers who recognize the importance of IEPs but face limitations in execution due to insufficient resources, knowledge, or support.

- Sub-theme: Limited awareness of SEN among teachers

Teachers highlighted the lack of knowledge and exposure to the diverse needs of students with SEN. Similarly, research noted that an inadequate understanding of SEN reduces teachers' confidence in addressing diverse needs in inclusive settings [15].

"We need more opportunities to understand the unique needs of children with disabilities to better support them."

- Sub-theme: School requires professional support

Teachers expressed the need for access to psychologists and therapists for expert guidance and collaboration with specialists enhances the success of inclusive practices [16]

"Having specialists to guide us would greatly enhance how we approach IEPs for our students."

3. Ineffective Implementation

This category includes significant systemic and practical challenges that hinder IEP implementation, including insufficient resources and lack of stakeholder involvement.

- Sub-theme: Lack of training in IEP design and execution

Inadequate professional development was a recurring issue. Research emphasized that regular and structured training in IEP design improves teachers' capacity to cater to students with SEN effectively [17].

"Without proper training, it's difficult to know the right steps to take when creating an IEP."

- Sub-theme: Challenges with parental involvement

Teachers reported minimal engagement from parents, which limited the effectiveness of IEPs. Research shows that parental collaboration is a critical factor for IEP success [18].

"It's challenging to get parents to dedicate time to discuss and support the IEP process. Some of them are reluctant or don't understand the importance of their role."

- Sub-theme: Insufficient teacher-to-student ratio

Large class sizes were identified as a major barrier to individualized instruction. An appropriate teacher-to-student ratio is essential for differentiated instruction in inclusive classrooms [1].

"With so many students in one class, it's impossible to give enough attention to those who need it most."

- Sub-theme: Challenges in managing students' moods

Teachers struggled to manage the fluctuating emotions of students with SEN due to limited behavioral resources. The need for specialized strategies to address behavioral challenges in inclusive settings [19].

"Some students can't be engaged when they're upset, and it's hard to know how to help them effectively."

4. Expected Implementation

This category reflects teachers' aspirations for the ideal IEP process, emphasizing professional development, stakeholder collaboration, and systemic support.

- Sub-theme: Requires regular IEP training

Teachers identified ongoing training as essential to improving their ability to create and implement IEPs effectively. The importance of consistent professional development for sustainable inclusive practices [20].

"We need routine training to continuously improve our understanding of IEPs and their implementation."

- Sub-theme: Involvement of all stakeholders

Collaboration with parents, administrators, and specialists was seen as a critical factor. This is consistent with Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, which highlights the importance of systemic collaboration in education [18].

"Collaboration with all stakeholders is the key to achieving the best outcomes for our students."

3.2. Discussion

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the experiences and challenges faced by inclusive primary school teachers in implementing Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). The discussion integrates the results with existing literature to provide a deeper understanding of the successes and barriers encountered.

1. Effective Implementation

Teachers who demonstrated high levels of engagement and intrinsic motivation highlighted the importance of active participation in IEP design and execution. Teacher engagement significantly contributes to IEP effectiveness by fostering a tailored approach to meet students' needs [13]. Additionally, the recognition of teachers' efforts, as identified in this study, highlights that appreciation is a driving force for motivation, ultimately strengthening teachers' commitment to inclusive practices [21].

Despite these successes, ensuring effective implementation requires ongoing institutional support. Sustaining teacher engagement depends on continuous professional development and collaborative opportunities to meet the evolving needs of students with SEN [13].

2. Partially Effective Implementation

The partially effective implementation reveals a gap between teachers' awareness and their ability to implement IEPs effectively. Teachers expressed a limited understanding of SEN and a need for professional support, emphasizing the importance of comprehensive knowledge and adequate resources in inclusive education [22].

Moreover, the dependence on professional support, as identified in this study, highlights how collaboration with specialists strengthens teachers' confidence and enhances their ability to address complex student needs [23].

3. Ineffective Implementation

The challenges of ineffective implementation primarily arise from systemic issues, including limited parental involvement, inadequate training in IEPs, high teacher-to-student ratios, and difficulties in managing student behaviors. Without active parental engagement, the goals of IEPs often remain unfulfilled [6].

Teachers' limited training in IEP design and implementation underscores the need for ongoing professional development programs. Structured training workshops can equip teachers with the essential skills to develop and effectively implement IEPs [20].

Additionally, the study highlights the adverse effects of an imbalanced teacher-to-student ratio on individualized instruction, emphasizing the importance of smaller class sizes for effective differentiated instruction. Teachers' difficulties in managing students' fluctuating moods further underscore the need for behavioral management training to equip them with strategies for addressing behavioral challenges in inclusive classrooms [24].

4. Expected Implementation

Teachers' aspirations for an effective IEP process highlight the significance of ongoing professional development and stakeholder collaboration. Regular training opportunities play a crucial role in enhancing teachers' capacity for sustainable inclusion [25]. Additionally, the call for systemic collaboration is supported by Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, which underscores the role of interconnected systems parents, teachers, administrators, and specialists - in shaping successful educational outcomes [18].

The expectation for stakeholder involvement in IEP implementation underscores the importance of shared responsibility. Inclusive education is most effective when all stakeholders collaborate to address the needs of students with SEN [26].

4. Conclusion

This study provides an in-depth understanding of the implementation of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) in inclusive primary schools, focusing on the perspectives and experiences of teachers in Padang. The findings highlight both successes and challenges, offering valuable insights into improving inclusive practices. Teachers who demonstrated effective IEP implementation exhibited high levels of engagement and intrinsic motivation, underscoring the importance of professional dedication in inclusive education. However,

partially effective and ineffective implementation revealed significant barriers, including limited teacher training, insufficient parental involvement, inadequate teacher-to-student ratios, and challenges in managing student behaviors. These issues emphasize the systemic and institutional gaps that hinder the optimal execution of IEPs.

Expected implementation insights from participants reflect aspirations for continuous professional development, collaborative stakeholder involvement, and systemic support to ensure that IEPs are both meaningful and impactful. These aspirations align with best practices in inclusive education, which advocate for collective responsibility and sustainable support mechanisms. The study reinforces the critical need for comprehensive training programs, enhanced collaboration among stakeholders, and the provision of adequate resources to support teachers in inclusive classrooms. Furthermore, the importance of involving parents as active partners in the IEP process cannot be overstated, as their engagement significantly influences the success of inclusive education.

In conclusion, while progress has been made in implementing IEPs in inclusive primary schools, achieving fully effective and sustainable practices requires addressing systemic challenges, fostering collaboration, and empowering teachers with the necessary skills and resources. By prioritizing these areas, inclusive education can better meet the diverse needs of students with Special Educational Needs (SEN), ensuring equitable and meaningful learning opportunities for all.

Implications and Limitation

These findings suggest several actionable implications for improving IEP implementation: 1) Enhanced Training Programs: Regular, structured training focused on IEP design and execution is essential to equip teachers with the skills to address diverse student needs effectively [20]; 2) Parental Engagement: Schools should actively involve parents in the IEP process through workshops and regular communication to strengthen home-school collaboration [27] [28]; 3) Specialist Support: Increased access to psychologists, therapists, and other professionals can provide teachers with the necessary expertise to handle complex cases [2]; and 4) Systemic Collaboration: Policies encouraging collaboration among all stakeholders should be prioritized to ensure a cohesive approach to inclusion [2]. While this study provides valuable insights, it is limited to the perspectives of teachers in one region. Future research could explore the perspectives of parents and administrators to gain a more comprehensive understanding of IEP implementation challenges. Additionally, longitudinal studies could examine how sustained interventions impact the effectiveness of IEPs over time. By addressing these gaps, future research can contribute to the development of more effective and inclusive education systems that cater to the needs of students with SEN.

Acknowledgement.

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