

1. Introduction

Inclusive education has emerged as a central paradigm in global educational reform, emphasizing the right of all children including those with special educational needs to access equitable, meaningful, and quality learning opportunities within mainstream schooling systems. International frameworks on inclusive education consistently highlight that inclusion is not merely a matter of physical placement, but a comprehensive transformation of school culture, policies, and practices to accommodate learner diversity (Kamarullah *et al.*, 2024; Muslimah *et al.*, 2024; Somad *et al.*, 2024). Despite widespread policy endorsement, the implementation of inclusive education remains uneven, particularly at the primary school level, where foundational learning and socio-emotional development take place (Arif *et al.*, 2025; Younas *et al.*, 2024).

At the primary education stage, inclusive schooling poses distinctive challenges related to teacher preparedness, instructional differentiation, resource availability, and institutional coordination. Empirical studies indicate that many schools struggle to translate inclusive education policies into effective classroom practices due to limited professional capacity, inadequate infrastructure, and weak systems of collaboration among teachers, parents, and support services (Apriliani *et al.*, 2024; Muslimah *et al.*, 2024). These challenges are further compounded when inclusive education requires individualized planning, such as the development and implementation of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), which demand sustained collaboration, time, and specialized expertise (Kamarullah *et al.*, 2026; Muksalmina *et al.*, 2024; Rashid & Wong, 2023).

Within this broader global context, Islamic primary schools including madrasah and Islamic elementary institutions face additional layers of complexity in managing inclusive education. Islamic schools are expected not only to respond to learner diversity but also to align educational practices with religious values, moral education, and culturally embedded pedagogies (Pandia *et al.*, 2023; Utari *et al.*, 2024). While Islamic educational philosophy inherently promotes values of justice (*‘adl*), compassion (*rahmah*), and human dignity, empirical evidence suggests that these values are not always systematically translated into inclusive management structures and pedagogical practices for children with special needs (Bakti *et al.*, 2025; Susani *et al.*, 2025).

Research conducted in Islamic education settings reveals persistent challenges in inclusive implementation, particularly in teacher-centered instructional traditions, limited exposure to inclusive pedagogy, and institutional reliance on administrative compliance rather than pedagogical transformation (Istiaryah *et al.*, 2024; Normawati *et al.*, 2024; Susani *et al.*, 2025; Umairah, 2025). In many cases, inclusion is formally acknowledged through policy statements, yet classroom practices remain uniform, with insufficient differentiation to address the diverse cognitive, sensory, and behavioral needs of students with disabilities (Adiyono *et al.*, 2025; Zulkifli *et al.*, 2022). Such gaps highlight that inclusive education in Islamic primary schools requires not only normative commitment but also deliberate managerial strategies that integrate religious values with evidence-based inclusive practices.

From a management perspective, inclusive education is increasingly understood as an institutional process that involves leadership, curriculum planning, teacher professional development, resource allocation, and stakeholder collaboration. Studies across diverse educational contexts demonstrate that school leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping inclusive cultures by fostering shared vision, supporting teacher capacity building, and establishing systems for monitoring and evaluation (Apriliani *et al.*, 2024; Yati *et al.*, 2025). In Islamic educational institutions, leadership is further tasked with mediating between religious traditions and contemporary inclusive education frameworks, ensuring that inclusion is framed not as a concession, but as an ethical and pedagogical imperative grounded in Islamic values (Bakti *et al.*, 2025; Istiaryah *et al.*, 2019; Utari *et al.*, 2024).

Several empirical investigations in Islamic and faith-based schools have identified promising strategies for managing inclusive education, including collaborative leadership models, adaptive curriculum design, differentiated instruction, and sustained engagement with families and local communities (Adiyono *et al.*, 2025; Fitriya & Wahid, 2024). These strategies suggest that inclusive education can be effectively implemented when management practices move beyond isolated classroom interventions toward coordinated, whole-school approaches. However, the literature also indicates that such strategies are often context-specific and fragmented, with limited synthesis regarding how challenges and solutions intersect at the managerial level in

Islamic primary schools (Rif'an, 2025; Pandia *et al.*, 2023).

Despite a growing body of research on inclusive education and Islamic pedagogy, there remains a notable gap in the literature concerning systematic analyses of challenges and management strategies specific to inclusive education for children with special needs in primary Islamic schools. Existing studies tend to focus either on pedagogical practices in isolation, policy-level discussions, or inclusive education in general schooling contexts, leaving limited integrative insight into how inclusive education is managed holistically within Islamic primary education systems (Muslimah *et al.*, 2024; Somad *et al.*, 2024).

Addressing this gap, the present article aims to examine the challenges and strategies in managing inclusive education for children with special needs in primary Islamic schools through a comprehensive review of relevant national and international literature. By synthesizing empirical and conceptual studies, this article seeks to identify recurring managerial challenges, highlight effective strategies grounded in both inclusive education theory and Islamic educational values, and provide implications for school leaders, policymakers, and educators committed to strengthening inclusive practices in Islamic primary education.

2. Materials and Methods

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative multi-case study design to explore how principal This study employed a systematic literature review (SLR) with a qualitative thematic synthesis approach to examine challenges and management strategies in implementing inclusive education for children with special needs in primary Islamic schools (Al Maktoum & Al Kaabi, 2024). A literature review design was selected to allow for the integration of empirical findings and conceptual insights across diverse educational contexts, particularly where inclusive education intersects with Islamic

educational values and institutional management practices.

The review followed principles commonly applied in qualitative evidence synthesis, emphasizing transparency in source selection, systematic coding, and thematic integration of findings (Flemming & Noyes, 2021). This approach was appropriate given the study's objective to identify recurring patterns of challenges and strategies rather than to quantify effect sizes or causal relationships.

Data Sources and Search Strategy

The literature search was conducted using multiple academic databases and journal repositories to ensure comprehensive coverage of national and international scholarship on inclusive education and Islamic education management. Primary sources included (1) scopus-indexed and international journals, (2) National accredited journals (Sinta-indexed), and (3) open-access proceedings and peer-reviewed conference papers.

Key databases and publishers included Taylor & Francis, MDPI, Springer-linked open journals, national journal portals, and institutional repositories. Search terms were combined using Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT) and included (a) *inclusive education, special needs, children with disabilities*, (b) *islamic education, Islamic schools, madrasah, Islamic primary schools*, and (c) *education management, school leadership, inclusive management strategies*. This strategy aligns with previous inclusive education reviews that emphasize multi-database searches to reduce selection bias (Afifi *et al.*, 2023; Carcassi & Sbardolini, 2023).

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To ensure relevance and quality, articles were selected based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria (see Table 1). These criteria reflect best practices in systematic and narrative reviews of inclusive education (Mohamed *et al.*, 2020).

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criteria Type	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Publication type	Peer-reviewed journal articles and conference proceedings	Opinion pieces, editorials, non-reviewed reports
Time frame	2012-2025	Publications before 2012
Educational level	Primary education (including madrasah and Islamic elementary schools)	Secondary or higher education only
Focus	Inclusive education for children with special needs; management or pedagogical strategies	Studies without inclusion or management focus
Context	Islamic education settings or general education with transferable implications	Studies unrelated to school-based education

Table 2. Data Extraction Matrix

Author(s) & Year	Context	Methodology	Key Challenges Identified	Key Strategies Identified
Apriliani <i>et al.</i> (2024)	Islamic schools	Qualitative case study	School readiness, lack of programs	Structured management, special guidance teachers
Susani <i>et al.</i> (2025)	PAI in public schools	Qualitative study	Teacher-centered pedagogy, weak institutional support	Pedagogical reorientation
Adiyono <i>et al.</i> (2025)	Primary Islamic schools	Qualitative study	Classroom heterogeneity	Differentiated instruction
Bakti <i>et al.</i> (2025)	Inclusive madrasah	Conceptual review	Institutional rigidity	Value-based inclusive leadership
Zulkifli <i>et al.</i> (2022)	Islamic learning context	Qualitative case study	Lack of adaptive materials	Multisensory and digital strategies

Article Selection Process

An initial pool of articles was identified through keyword searches. Titles and abstracts were screened for relevance, followed by full-text reviews to assess methodological rigor and alignment with the study focus. Articles that explicitly addressed challenges, strategies, or management practices related to inclusive education were retained.

After screening and eligibility checks, a total of 18 peer-reviewed articles were included in the final synthesis. These articles represented a mix of qualitative studies, literature reviews, systematic reviews, and conceptual analyses conducted in Islamic and general education contexts.

Table 2 showed the relevant data from each selected article were extracted using a structured

review matrix to ensure consistency and comparability across studies. This matrix facilitated cross-study comparison and supported the identification of dominant themes in the literature (Afifi *et al.*, 2023).

Instruments Data Analysis: Thematic Synthesis

To synthesize findings across the reviewed studies, data analysis was conducted using a thematic synthesis approach. This approach enabled the systematic integration of diverse qualitative and review-based evidence related to challenges and management strategies in inclusive education within primary Islamic schools. The analysis was carried out through three iterative stages, as summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Stages of Thematic Synthesis in Data Analysis

Stage of Analysis	Analytical Process	Output of the Stage
Initial Coding	Relevant statements and findings related to challenges and strategies were coded inductively from each selected article.	A set of preliminary codes capturing recurring issues such as teacher competence, instructional rigidity, lack of resources, and collaborative practices.
Category Development	Similar codes were clustered into broader descriptive categories.	Descriptive categories including teacher competence, institutional readiness, curriculum adaptation, resource support, and leadership and policy support.
Theme Construction	Descriptive categories were synthesized into higher-order analytical themes.	Overarching themes representing core challenges and effective management strategies in inclusive education within primary Islamic schools.

3. Result and Discussion

Result

This section presents the findings derived from the thematic synthesis of the reviewed literature. Based on the three-stage analytical process initial coding, category development, and theme construction the analysis yielded five overarching themes that capture the core challenges and management strategies in implementing inclusive education for children with special needs in primary Islamic schools.

Theme 1: Teacher Capacity and Pedagogical Readiness

Across the reviewed studies, limited teacher capacity emerged as one of the most persistent challenges in managing inclusive education. Teachers in primary Islamic schools often lacked sufficient training in inclusive pedagogy, differentiated instruction, and individualized learning planning for students with special needs. As a result, classroom practices frequently remained teacher-centered and uniform, limiting teachers' ability to accommodate diverse cognitive, sensory, and behavioral needs (Adiyono *et al.*, 2025; Susani *et al.*, 2025).

In many cases, teachers expressed uncertainty in adapting instructional materials, managing heterogeneous classrooms, and designing assessments aligned with students' functional profiles. This lack of pedagogical readiness constrained the effectiveness of inclusive education and reduced opportunities for meaningful participation of children with special needs in classroom learning activities.

Theme 2: Institutional Readiness and School Management

Institutional readiness was identified as a critical determinant of inclusive education implementation. The literature revealed that inclusive education in primary Islamic schools was frequently approached as an administrative requirement rather than as a comprehensive school-wide reform. Leadership commitment to inclusion was often inconsistent, and mechanisms for supervision and evaluation of inclusive practices were either weak or absent (Apriliani *et al.*, 2024; Somad *et al.*, 2024).

Several studies highlighted the absence of clear operational guidelines for inclusive education, resulting in fragmented practices across classrooms and grade levels. In Islamic primary schools, these managerial challenges were further complicated by the need to harmonize inclusive education policies with religious traditions and institutional norms.

Theme 3: Curriculum and Instructional Adaptation

Another prominent theme concerned the rigidity of curricula and instructional approaches. Many studies reported that curricula in Islamic primary schools were designed primarily for homogeneous learners and provided minimal flexibility for adaptation to individual needs. Individualized planning mechanisms, such as Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), were often inconsistently implemented or reduced to formal documentation without substantive instructional impact (Rashid & Wong, 2023; Zulkifli *et al.*, 2022).

The lack of adaptive learning materials, multisensory instructional resources, and flexible assessment strategies limited teachers' capacity to respond effectively to diverse learning profiles. Consequently, children with special needs were frequently expected to conform to standardized instructional expectations rather than receiving instruction tailored to their abilities and developmental trajectories.

Theme 4: Resource Availability and Support Systems

Resource availability and support systems emerged as significant constraints in inclusive education management. The reviewed literature consistently pointed to shortages in physical infrastructure, assistive learning tools, specialist personnel, and allocated instructional time for students with special needs (Muslimah *et al.*, 2024; Younas *et al.*, 2024).

In several contexts, limited collaboration with psychologists, special educators, or therapists further restricted schools' capacity to conduct accurate assessments and provide targeted interventions. These resource-related challenges interacted with pedagogical and institutional limitations, reinforcing systemic barriers to inclusive education within primary Islamic schools.

Theme 5: Values-Based and Collaborative Strategies

Despite these challenges, the synthesis also identified a range of effective management strategies grounded in Islamic values and collaborative practices. Studies conducted in Islamic schools and boarding schools emphasized the role of values such as justice (*'adl*), compassion (*rahmah*), and social responsibility in shaping inclusive school cultures (Bakti *et al.*, 2025; Utari *et al.*, 2024).

Collaborative strategies including partnerships with parents, community involvement, and shared leadership models were

found to enhance institutional capacity for inclusion. These approaches supported more holistic responses to students' needs and contributed to the sustainability of inclusive practices by fostering shared responsibility and collective commitment (Fitriya & Wahid, 2024; Rifan, 2025).

To provide an overview of the thematic findings derived from the analysis, Table 4 summarizes the core challenges and management strategies identified across the reviewed studies (see Table 4).

Discussion

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on inclusive education by synthesizing evidence on how inclusive education is managed within primary Islamic schools. The findings suggest that inclusive education in this context is shaped by interrelated pedagogical, institutional, curricular, and resource-based challenges, reinforcing the view that inclusion must be approached as a systemic rather than fragmented endeavor. This interpretation aligns with broader inclusive education scholarship that emphasizes whole-school transformation over isolated classroom interventions (Muslimah *et al.*, 2024; Younas *et al.*, 2024).

A key issue identified in this review is teacher capacity and pedagogical readiness, which consistently emerged as a foundational determinant of inclusive education quality. Similar to findings in general and faith-based education contexts, limited teacher preparation in inclusive pedagogy constrains the effective

implementation of differentiated instruction and individualized learning support (Adiyono *et al.*, 2025; Susani *et al.*, 2025). Previous studies have shown that at the primary education level, early instructional practices significantly influence long-term learning trajectories for children with special needs, underscoring the critical role of teacher competence in inclusive settings (Muslimah *et al.*, 2024; Younas *et al.*, 2024). The present synthesis extends this literature by demonstrating that, in Islamic primary schools, pedagogical challenges are further compounded by expectations to integrate religious instruction within largely traditional teaching models.

Beyond classroom-level practices, the findings highlight institutional readiness and school management as pivotal factors shaping inclusive education implementation. Consistent with Apriliani *et al.* (2024) and Somad *et al.*, (2024), this review found that inclusive education is often enacted as an administrative mandate rather than as a sustained institutional reform. Weak leadership commitment and limited monitoring mechanisms reduce schools' capacity to translate inclusive policies into coherent practices. This pattern reflects wider critiques in inclusive education research that emphasize the centrality of leadership in building inclusive school cultures and ensuring policy/practice coherence (Younas *et al.*, 2024). In Islamic primary schools, these managerial challenges are intensified by the need to reconcile inclusive education principles with religious traditions and community expectations.

Table 4. Summary of Thematic Findings on Inclusive Education Management in Primary Islamic Schools

Theme	Core Issues Identified	Management Implications
Teacher Capacity and Pedagogical Readiness	Limited training in inclusive pedagogy; teacher-centered instruction; difficulty implementing differentiated learning	Sustained professional development; mentoring in inclusive pedagogy; instructional support systems
Institutional Readiness and School Management	Inclusion treated administratively; weak leadership commitment; limited monitoring mechanisms	Strengthening inclusive leadership; school-wide inclusive policies; systematic supervision
Curriculum and Instructional Adaptation	Rigid curriculum; limited flexibility; superficial implementation of IEPs	Flexible curriculum planning; adaptive instructional design; meaningful individualized planning
Resource Availability and Support Systems	Inadequate facilities; lack of assistive tools; shortage of specialists	Strategic resource mobilization; collaboration with external professionals and institutions
Values-Based and Collaborative Strategies	Integration of Islamic values; parent and community collaboration	Values-driven leadership; shared responsibility; sustainable inclusive school culture

The issue of curriculum rigidity and instructional adaptation further illustrates the systemic nature of inclusive education challenges. The reviewed literature confirms that standardized curricula designed for homogeneous learners offer limited flexibility for individualized planning, particularly for children with special needs (Istiarysyah *et al.*, 2024, 2025; Rashid & Wong, 2023; Yuliawanti, 2019). Similar concerns have been raised in studies examining religious education contexts, where traditional pedagogical approaches often limit opportunities for adaptation and differentiation (Susani *et al.*, 2025; Zulkifli *et al.*, 2022). This synthesis reinforces calls in the literature to reconceptualize curriculum management as a dynamic process that accommodates learner diversity while remaining aligned with institutional and religious goals.

Resource constraints also emerged as a critical barrier, echoing findings from inclusive education research across diverse settings. Shortages in infrastructure, assistive learning tools, specialist personnel, and instructional time have been widely documented as factors that undermine inclusive education effectiveness (Muslimah *et al.*, 2024; Younas *et al.*, 2024). The present review adds nuance to this literature by highlighting how limited collaboration with external professionals such as psychologists and special educators further restricts the capacity of Islamic primary schools to provide targeted support for students with special needs.

Importantly, the findings also point to values-based and collaborative strategies as distinctive strengths of Islamic education contexts. Previous studies have argued that faith-based values can play a constructive role in inclusive education by fostering ethical commitment and social responsibility (Bakti *et al.*, 2025; Utari *et al.*, 2024). The present synthesis supports this argument by demonstrating that Islamic values such as justice (*'adl*), compassion (*rahmah*), and collective responsibility can serve as ethical foundations for inclusive leadership and school management. When integrated into institutional practices, these values legitimize inclusion as a moral imperative rather than a purely technical requirement.

Consistent with (Fitriya & Wahid, 2024) and (Rif'an, 2025), collaborative management models involving parents, communities, and external stakeholders were found to enhance the sustainability of inclusive practices. Such collaboration aligns with inclusive education literature that emphasizes shared responsibility

and multi-stakeholder engagement as essential for addressing complex educational needs. In Islamic primary schools, communal values and strong social networks provide a culturally grounded basis for such collaboration.

Taken together, this discussion suggests that inclusive education in primary Islamic schools requires a holistic management framework (see Figure 1) that integrates pedagogical innovation, institutional leadership, curriculum flexibility, resource mobilization, and Islamic ethical values. The framework illustrates how pedagogical, institutional, curricular, and resource-related challenges interact systemically, and how effective management strategies reinforced by Islamic ethical principles function as key levers in achieving sustainable and meaningful inclusion for children with special needs. By synthesizing these elements, this study extends existing inclusive education research and demonstrates how Islamic primary schools can leverage their unique ethical and cultural resources to support inclusive education while remaining aligned with their educational mission.

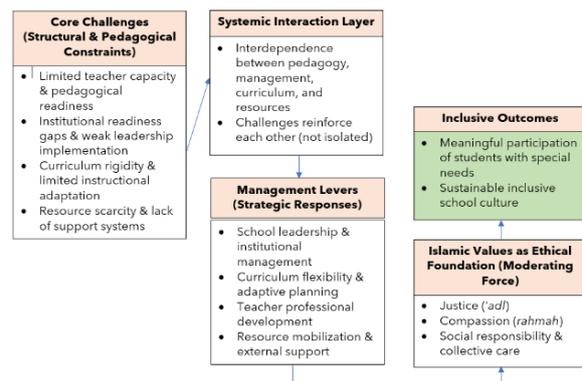


Figure 1. Holistic Management Framework for Inclusive Education in Primary Islamic Schools

Despite its contributions, this study is not without limitations. As a thematic literature review, the findings are inherently dependent on the scope, quality, and availability of existing studies included in the analysis. The reviewed literature is dominated by qualitative and context-specific studies, which may limit the generalizability of the proposed framework across diverse educational settings. In addition, variations in policy contexts, institutional characteristics, and interpretations of inclusive education within Islamic primary schools may not be fully captured through secondary data alone. The absence of primary empirical validation also means that the proposed framework reflects a synthesized conceptual model rather than tested causal relationships. Nevertheless, by

systematically integrating pedagogical, institutional, curricular, resource-related, and ethical dimensions, this study provides a robust analytical foundation that can guide future empirical research and context-sensitive implementation of inclusive education in primary Islamic schools.

4. Conclusion and Suggestions

This study shows that inclusive education for children with special needs in primary Islamic schools is shaped by interconnected pedagogical, institutional, curricular, and resource-related challenges that operate systemically rather than independently. Limited teacher capacity, weak institutional readiness, rigid curricula, and constrained support systems collectively hinder meaningful inclusion when addressed through fragmented approaches.

At the same time, primary Islamic schools possess ethical and cultural resources that can be strategically leveraged to support inclusive education. Islamic values such as justice (*‘adl*), compassion (*rahmah*), and collective responsibility provide a strong moral foundation for inclusive leadership, curriculum planning, and teacher professional development, while collaborative management involving families, communities, and external support systems enhances institutional capacity and sustainability.

Based on these findings, this study proposes a Holistic Management Framework for Inclusive Education in Primary Islamic Schools, which conceptualizes inclusion as a dynamic system where core challenges interact with strategic management levers grounded in Islamic ethical values. Future efforts should prioritize whole-school leadership, strengthened teacher competence in inclusive pedagogy, curriculum flexibility, and collaborative support systems, while further empirical research is needed to test and refine the framework across diverse educational contexts.

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