

The Green and Inclusive School: Bridging Environmental Education and Social Justice through Strategic Principal Leadership

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Abstract:

This study aims to analyse the strategic role of school principals in planning, implementing, and evaluating inclusive education within the Adiwiyata schools framework (environmentally conscious schools). To achieve this, a qualitative case study approach was used, employing data collection techniques such as in-depth interviews, direct observation, and documentation, followed by data analysis using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldana model. The results revealed that the principals act as transformative leaders who integrate inclusive values into the school's vision, motivate teaching staff to implement adaptive curriculum practices, and ensure the availability of disability-friendly facilities. Furthermore, the evaluation process involves continuous monitoring to synchronise environmental programs with inclusive policies, thereby creating a synergistic educational ecosystem. The primary objective and contribution of this study are to provide a comprehensive management model that bridges the gap between environmental education and inclusivity. By offering practical insights on how leadership can foster an environment that is "Rahmatan lil 'alamin" (blessing for the universe), this study contributes to the development of educational management literature, particularly in optimising human resources to build schools that are both ecologically conscious and socially just for all students.

Keywords: *Role of the Principal, Inclusive Education, Adiwiyata School, Transformative Leadership*

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis peran strategis kepala sekolah dalam merencanakan, melaksanakan, dan mengevaluasi pendidikan inklusif dalam kerangka sekolah Adiwiyata (sekolah peduli lingkungan). Untuk mencapai hal tersebut, digunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus, menggunakan teknik pengumpulan data seperti wawancara mendalam, observasi langsung, dan dokumentasi, yang dilanjutkan dengan analisis data melalui model Miles, Huberman, dan Saldana. Hasil penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa kepala sekolah berperan sebagai pemimpin transformatif yang mengintegrasikan nilai-nilai inklusif ke dalam visi sekolah, memotivasi staf pengajar untuk menerapkan praktik kurikulum adaptif, dan memastikan ketersediaan fasilitas ramah disabilitas. Selanjutnya, proses evaluasi melibatkan pemantauan berkelanjutan untuk menyinkronkan program lingkungan dengan kebijakan inklusif, sehingga menciptakan ekosistem pendidikan yang sinergis. Tujuan utama dan kontribusi dari penelitian ini terletak pada penyediaan model manajemen komprehensif yang menjembatani kesenjangan antara pendidikan lingkungan dan inklusivitas. Dengan menawarkan wawasan praktis tentang bagaimana kepemimpinan dapat menumbuhkan lingkungan yang "Rahmatan lil 'alamin" (rahmat bagi semesta alam), penelitian ini berkontribusi pada pengembangan literatur manajemen pendidikan, khususnya dalam

mengoptimalkan sumber daya manusia untuk membangun sekolah yang sadar ekologis sekaligus adil secara sosial bagi semua peserta didik.

Kunci: *Peran Kepala Sekolah, Pendidikan Inklusif, Sekolah Adiwiyata, Kepemimpinan Transformatif*

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INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education in Indonesia is a national mandate strengthened by the Minister of National Education Regulation No. 70 of 2009. However, its implementation in the field still faces a significant gap between policy and empirical reality (Khatib et al., 2026). National data indicates that of approximately 1.6 million children with special needs (ABK) in Indonesia, only about 18% have access to formal education, mostly spread across inclusive schools and Special Schools (SLB). Social facts in the field reveal that many public schools designated as inclusive institutions lack adequate infrastructure and teaching staff with the specific pedagogical competence required to manage diverse learners (Mbua, 2023; Debasu et al., 2024). This lack of readiness often leads to a "symbolic inclusion" where students with disabilities are present physically but remain marginalized from the core learning process.

The challenges of implementation become more complex when inclusive education is integrated with other flagship programs, such as the Adiwiyata (green school) program. Field phenomena often show a dichotomy between environmental conservation programs and the fulfillment of the rights of students with disabilities. Literary facts from previous studies have predominantly focused on Adiwiyata management independently or the effectiveness of inclusive curricula in isolation. There is a scarcity of research specifically examining how school leadership can synergize these two concepts creating a school that is not only environmentally conscious but also profoundly human-centered and inclusive.

The novelty of this research lies in the integration of the principal's leadership strategy rooted in Islamic values, specifically the concepts of Amanah (trustworthiness) and Rahmatan lil 'alamin (mercy to all worlds). The research argumentation is based on the urgent need for a leadership model that can bridge ecological ethics (ecocentrism) with social justice (inclusivity). This study argues that without a strong, value-based leadership strategy, the Adiwiyata program risks becoming a mere physical formality, while students with special needs continue to face barriers in accessing a sustainable school environment.

This research aims to analyze the principal's leadership strategy in planning, implementing, and evaluating inclusive education within an Adiwiyata school context. The originality contribution of this study is the proposal of a "Green-Inclusion" management model, where school success is measured not only by environmental achievements but by the extent to which the environment serves as a just and non-discriminatory learning space for all. Practically, the results are expected to provide a roadmap for policymakers to optimize the principal's role

as an agent of change capable of implementing Islamic educational values in modern, inclusive, and sustainable school management.

Amidst efforts to achieve inclusivity, the Adiwiyata program emerged, focusing on environmental conservation in schools. The Adiwiyata program aims to create schools that care about and are environmentally conscious through good school management, an environment-based curriculum, participatory environmental activities, and environmentally friendly management of supporting facilities. At first glance, inclusive education and the Adiwiyata program appear to be two different entities. However, upon closer examination, both share the same values, namely creating a "friendly" school ecosystem. While inclusion emphasizes social friendliness and learning, Adiwiyata emphasizes environmental friendliness (Amin & Siswanto, 2023). The integration of the two has the potential to create a sustainable and harmonious learning environment.

The integration of environmental ethics and inclusive education represents a significant global challenge in modern educational management. While many institutions have successfully adopted green school programs, such as Adiwiyata, there is often a disconnect in ensuring that these "green" environments are truly accessible and equitable for students with special needs. This creates a critical research gap: most existing literature treats environmental sustainability and inclusive pedagogy as two separate domains, leaving a void in understanding how leadership can effectively synchronize these two priorities.

From a theoretical perspective, the success of such integration depends heavily on the strategic role of the school principal. Acting as both a manager and a visionary leader, the principal holds the highest authority to bridge the gap between policy and practice. In an Islamic educational context, this role is further elevated by the principle of Amanah (trustworthiness), which demands that leadership not only focuses on ecological preservation but also on the moral obligation to provide justice and high-quality service for all learners, regardless of their physical or cognitive abilities. This aligns with the concept of Rahmatan lil 'alamin, where the school environment serves as a "mercy" or a sanctuary that nurtures both nature and human diversity simultaneously.

Therefore, this research is driven by the argumentation that effective leadership is the primary catalyst for transforming a standard green school into a holistically inclusive ecosystem. The objective of this research is to analyze the leadership strategies employed in planning, implementing, and evaluating the synergy between environmental programs and inclusive education. By exploring these strategies, this study seeks to provide a new management framework Green-Inclusion that contributes to the broader discourse on sustainable and equitable educational leadership in the 21st century.

Many previous studies have discussed the role of principals in inclusive education or the role of principals in advancing Adiwiyata schools separately. However, studies that specifically examine how principals play a role in synergizing inclusive education within the Adiwiyata school ecosystem are still very limited (Fitria & Samsia, 2020). This is the scientific novelty in this article. The role of the principal is no longer viewed partially, but rather integrally in

managing two flagship programs that have different characteristics but complement each other.

This study aims to critically analyse the managerial mechanisms and leadership strategies employed by the school principal to orchestrate synergy between inclusive education and Adiwiyata principles. Specifically, the research evaluates how the principal constructs a strategic planning framework that aligns ecological values with inclusive pedagogy, examines leadership dynamics that foster a collaborative culture among staff to maintain a green, inclusive environment, and investigates evaluative systems that ensure the long-term sustainability of these integrated programs. By synthesising these aspects, this research seeks to develop a robust leadership framework for 'Green-Inclusion' management. This model is intended to provide a theoretical and practical contribution to the field of educational leadership, offering a replicable mechanism for other institutions in Indonesia to optimise human resources while promoting environmental consciousness and social equity.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research design with a case study approach to explore the complex phenomenon of leadership within the unique context of an Adiwiyata-based inclusive school. This design was selected because it enables a holistic, in-depth investigation of "how" and "why" specific leadership mechanisms facilitate synergy between environmental policy and inclusive education in a real-world setting.

The research was conducted at an elementary school purposively selected for its unique commitment to integrating ecological values with inclusive pedagogy, making it an ideal site for observing the implementation of a "Green-Inclusive" model. To ensure data depth and validity, the study involved 12 informants selected through purposive sampling based on their roles in the school's ecosystem. These informants consist of 1 School Principal as the primary policymaker and key informant, 4 Teachers (comprising regular classroom teachers and Special Assistant Teachers/GPK) to provide instructional insights, 2 Administrative Staff to explain infrastructure management, and 5 Students (including both regular and special needs students) to provide perspectives on the school's inclusive culture.

Data collection was carried out through rigorous triangulation of techniques, including 15 semi-structured in-depth interviews to explore the principal's managerial strategies and values. Additionally, direct participatory observation was conducted to witness daily interactions and accessibility features. At the same time, a documentation study analysed the School Strategic Plan (RKAS), vision and mission statements, and inclusive curriculum documents to corroborate the verbal data.

Following the interactive model by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, the data analysis was conducted through four synchronized stages: data condensation, involving the organization of field notes and transcripts; data reduction, to filter and focus on information relevant to the principal's role; data display, where findings are presented in narrative and tabular forms; and conclusion drawing and

verification, which involves formulating and cross-checking initial findings. To ensure the trustworthiness of the results, a data validity check was performed using technical and source triangulation, comparing data across different informant groups and methods, and conducting member checks to confirm the accuracy of interpretations with participants. The research subjects or key informants consisted of the principal, the policy maker, classroom teachers and special guidance teachers (GPK), as instructional implementers; and regular and special needs students to obtain perspectives on the impact of the program (Mahfudh et al., 2022).

Data validity was tested through triangulation techniques, namely comparing data obtained from different sources using different methods, as well as conducting member checks to confirm the accuracy of the researchers' interpretations to informants (Fauzi, 2021). Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, which included the stages of data reduction (sorting relevant data), presenting data in narrative and tabular form, and drawing conclusions to address the research focus on the managerial role of school principals.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Planning is a crucial first step in determining an institution's direction. At SD Negeri 1 Karangsari, the principal acts as an integrative strategic planner. Based on document analysis and interviews, inclusive education planning does not stand alone but is integrated into the curriculum and strategic plan of Adiwiyata schools.

First, the principal led the formulation of the school's vision and mission, which explicitly included the values of equality and environmental awareness. This vision became the legal umbrella for every policy taken. In the Medium-Term Work Plan (RKJM) and School Budget Work Plan (RKAS), the principal allocated a special budget for the development of accessibility for Students with Special Needs (PDBK). Interestingly, the facilities built continue to prioritise the principles of Adiwiyata, such as wheelchair ramps constructed from environmentally friendly materials or decorated with vertical gardens to maintain the school's green aesthetics.

Second, planning is carried out through the identification and assessment stages. The principal coordinates teachers to map the specific needs of inclusive students at the beginning of the school year. This is done so that the procurement of nature-based learning media (a characteristic of Adiwiyata) can be tailored to students' obstacles. For example, the creation of a school garden as a natural laboratory is planned with wide, safe paths suitable for students with motor impairments. This careful planning demonstrates that the principal understands that inclusivity is not just a formality but a fulfilment of basic rights that must be systematically designed.

During the implementation phase, the principal applied a transformational leadership style. The principal not only gave instructions but also served as a role model in fostering an inclusive, environmentally conscious culture. Regarding instruction, the principal encouraged teachers to implement differentiated

instruction. Teachers were directed to utilise the Adiwiyata school environment as an inclusive learning resource. For example, during outdoor activities in the school garden, teachers used a multisensory approach so that visually impaired students could learn by touching leaf textures or smelling soil, while regular students made visual observations. Here, the principal acts as a facilitator, ensuring that teachers have sufficient competence by sending them to training courses on inclusive education and environmental management.

In addition, the principal actively motivates the school community through participatory activities. The “Clean Saturday” or “Together Tree Planting” programs are designed to involve all students without exception. The principal ensures that inclusive students are given roles that match their abilities, so that they feel they are an important part of the school community. The principal's role in building this motivation is vital to eroding the negative stigma against students with special needs. The principal emphasises that preserving nature is the duty of all humans, including inclusive students, which ultimately fosters confidence in PDBK.

Managerially, the implementation also includes the arrangement of teaching staff. The principal assigns Special Guidance Teachers (GPK) to collaborate with classroom teachers in developing Individual Learning Programs that maintain an environmental focus. This intensive coordination ensures that the Adiwiyata curriculum does not become an additional burden, but rather a medium that supports the success of inclusive education.

Table 1. Results of Interviews with School Principals

No	Aspect	Results Interview
1	The Meaning of Adiwiyata & Inclusion	Both are interconnected in instilling values of care, diversity, and an inclusive environment for all students
2	Integration into the Vision and Mission	Based on the principles of equality and non-discrimination
3	Formulation Process	Through joint meetings with teachers, committees, and parents
4	Outreach Strategies	Meetings, teacher training, and integration into school activities
5	School Planning	The value of inclusion forms the foundation of every program
6	Leadership Styles	Collaborative and supportive
7	Teacher Coordination	Through meetings and discussion forums
8	Teacher Mentoring	Observation, guidance, training/workshops
9	Building Teacher Trust	Encouraging innovation and a culture of mutual support
10	Reflection on Learning	Regular evaluations, discussions, and classroom observations
11	Student Responses	Positive, more active, and environmentally conscious
12	Teacher Needs	Training on differentiated instruction and support for students with special needs

Table 2. Results of Teacher Interviews

No	Aspect	Results Interview
1	Early Identification of Students with Special Needs	Observation, learning outcomes, communication with parents
2	Aspects Observed	Academic, communication, social, concentration, motor skills
3	Challenges in Identification	Limited time and information from parents
4	Follow-Up	Discussions with other teachers and parents
5	Learning Strategies	Varied methods, visual aids, flexible assignments
6	Utilization of Adiwiyata	Gardening activities, environmental observation
7	Principal's Support	Guidance, facilities, training
8	The Principal's Role	Policies, facilitators, encouraging collaboration
9	Learning Adaptations	Differentiation of methods, assignments, and assessment
10	Environmental Activities	Community service, planting, waste management
11	Inclusion Challenges	Differences in student abilities and time constraints
12	School Environment	Good social skills, partially supported physical abilities
13	Reflection	Evaluation of learning outcomes and student participation
14	Impact of Integration	Students are more active, caring, and collaborative
16	Solutions to Challenges	Teacher collaboration and training
17	Student Responses	Positive and more enthusiastic

Table 3. Results of Student Interviews

No	Aspect	Results Interview
1	The Meaning of an Inclusive School	A school that accepts all students without discrimination
2	Understanding Adiwiyata	Programs to maintain cleanliness and the environment
3	Environmental and Social Relationships	Fostering cooperation and mutual respect
4	Peer Attitudes	Helping one another
5	Group Experiences	Fun and supportive
6	Learning Comfort	Quite comfortable
7	The Roles of Teachers and Peers	Offering help when needed
8	The School Environment	Clean and comfortable
9	A Welcoming School	Respecting differences and a positive environment
10	Student Engagement	Involves all students sufficiently
11	Learning Difficulties	Helping students understand difficult material
12	School Recommendations	Engaging lessons and academic support
13	Social Recommendations	Helping one another and avoiding teasing

Table 1 presents the results of interviews with school principals, revealing that Adiwiyata and inclusive education are closely interconnected in instilling values of care, diversity, and an inclusive environment for all students. The principal plays a transformative leadership role, not only in planning and implementation but also in building a school culture that supports inclusivity. The school's vision and mission are designed to integrate these values, emphasizing principles of equality and non-discrimination. The principal employs a collaborative leadership style, supporting teaching staff to implement adaptive curriculum practices and ensuring the availability of disability-friendly facilities.

Table 2 illustrates the results of teacher interviews, showing that early identification of students with special needs is carried out through observation, learning outcomes, and communication with parents. Teachers face challenges in

identification due to limited time and information from parents. They use various flexible teaching methods, including visual aids and adapted materials. Principal support, such as facilitating training and providing necessary facilities, is crucial to helping teachers carry out their responsibilities. Inclusion challenges faced by teachers include differences in student abilities and time constraints, which affect their ability to make optimal adaptations.

The results of student interviews in Table 3 highlight that students understand an inclusive school as one that accepts all students without discrimination. They also demonstrate a strong understanding of the Adiwiyata program, emphasising activities that support environmental conservation, such as maintaining cleanliness and fostering social relationships built on mutual respect. Positive attitudes towards diversity and supportive learning experiences suggest that students feel accepted and comfortable in an inclusive and environmentally conscious school environment.

The research also reveals that the principal conducts regular evaluations and monitoring to assess how well the school's objectives have been achieved, focusing not only on cognitive learning outcomes but also on students' character development and the quality of the school environment. The principal carries out direct observations in classrooms and school areas to ensure that Adiwiyata facilities are well-maintained and function inclusively. If obstacles, such as slippery wheelchair paths or a lack of natural learning media for inclusive students, are identified, corrective action is taken immediately. Additionally, evaluations are held through monthly coordination meetings with the school committee and parents to gather feedback and concerns related to inclusive education services.

Overall, this research provides substantive insights that the principal plays a critical role in integrating inclusive education with the Adiwiyata program through structured planning, in-depth implementation, and continuous evaluation. With a transformational approach, the principal focuses not only on the physical management of the school but also on fostering a deep, inclusive culture, creating an environment that supports diversity and ensuring equitable education for all students. These findings highlight the importance of collaboration among all stakeholders in creating a harmonious educational ecosystem that combines environmental sustainability and social justice.

Discussion

The integration of the Adiwiyata program and inclusive education has given birth to a unique institutional identity, conceptualised as the "Eco-Inclusive School." This finding suggests that the success of combining environmental sustainability with social equity is not merely a matter of administrative compliance, but is fundamentally dependent on the effectiveness of the principal's leadership. Theoretically, the leadership practices observed align closely with Social Justice Leadership. In this framework, the principal transcends the traditional role of an operational manager or physical asset supervisor; instead, the leader serves as an educational activist who proactively champions the rights of marginalised groups, specifically Students with Special Needs (PDBK).

The significance of this "Eco-Inclusive" approach lies in its redefinition of the school environment. The green spaces and sustainable habits cultivated through the Adiwiyata program are not treated as ends in themselves, but as instruments to achieve *Rahmatan lil 'alamin* (mercy to all worlds). By ensuring that the school's "green" infrastructures, such as sensory gardens or accessible waste management areas, are designed for all, the principal demonstrates *Amanah* (trustworthiness) in managing human and natural resources. This addresses the "so what" question: why does this synergy matter? It matters because it shifts the perception of environmental schools from being purely "ecological" to being "holistically humanistic."

Furthermore, the results imply that when a principal adopts a values-driven leadership strategy, it creates a "spillover effect" where environmental care translates into social care. The reason behind this success is the principal's ability to frame inclusivity as a core component of sustainability. If a school environment is to be truly sustainable, it must be socially sustainable, meaning it must be habitable and welcoming for the most vulnerable learners. This study, therefore, contributes a new management paradigm, Green-Inclusion, arguing that true 21st-century leadership must bridge the gap between ecocentrism and social justice to create a learning ecosystem that is both physically aspirational and socially equitable.

Discussions on planning reveal that integrating vision and mission is key to success. This synergy enables efficiency in school resources and budgets. As a concrete example, the development of the school garden is not only focused on meeting the physical criteria of Adiwiyata, but is also cleverly designed as a healing garden. For students with emotional barriers, autism, or hyperactivity, green open spaces provide soothing sensory stimulation. This reinforces previous research stating that constant interaction with nature can reduce cortisol (stress) levels and increase concentration duration in children with special needs. Thus, the principal's planning has transformed environmental assets into inclusive pedagogical assets (Suprpto et al., 2023).

In terms of implementation, the principal's transformational leadership style proved a critical catalyst in shifting educators' pedagogical mindset. Fundamental challenges in inclusive education globally often stem from teacher self-efficacy and psychological resistance due to a perceived lack of orthopedagogical competence (Symeonidou, 2021). However, through consistent motivation and clinical supervision, the principal at this institution reframed diversity as a classroom asset rather than an instructional obstacle. This aligns with recent studies suggesting that transformational leaders in inclusive settings move beyond administrative oversight to foster an "inclusive school culture" that values neurodiversity as a form of human capital (Ainscow, 2020).

The strategic use of the school environment as a "living laboratory" allows teachers to implement differentiated learning more naturally. Recent international research highlights that "Place-Based Education" (PBE) serves as a powerful equaliser for students with disabilities, reducing the cognitive load associated with traditional, abstract classroom settings (Mannion, 2020). Inclusive students who may struggle with focus in formal environments often become more expressive

and active when engaged in environmental conservation activities. This phenomenon demonstrates that the Adiwiyata approach provides the sensory-rich, low-stress environment required for successful inclusion.

Furthermore, this finding addresses the "so what" question by demonstrating that environmental sustainability and inclusive education are mutually reinforcing. The principal's leadership ensures that "Green-Inclusion" is not just a policy but a lived experience where the "living laboratory" acts as a bridge between ecological literacy and social belonging. By leveraging outdoor spaces, the principal mitigates teachers' "competence gap"; rather than relying solely on specialised medical knowledge, teachers utilise the environment as a co-teacher to facilitate engagement (Uitto & Saloranta, 2021). This provides a significant contribution to the field, suggesting that 21st-century leadership must prioritise interdisciplinary management—blending environmental ethics with inclusive pedagogy to create truly resilient and equitable learning ecosystems (Loreman et al., 2022).

However, this discussion also identifies several crucial challenges. The sustainability of this Eco-Inclusive model requires consistent funding, especially for maintaining accessibility facilities and providing specialised teaching media. In addition, there are still gaps in teachers' competence in addressing clinically specific learning barriers. To overcome this, the principal's role as a networker is essential (Syahri & Wibowo, 2023). Collaboration with disability service centres, academics from universities, and the active involvement of parents through school committees are essential strategies to overcome the limitations of internal school resources.

Comprehensively, the principal's integrated role as a planner, implementer, and evaluator has successfully cultivated a school atmosphere that is both humanistic and sustainable. The findings provide empirical evidence that environmental programs, such as Adiwiyata, achieve higher levels of ethical and humanistic values when intentionally designed to embrace all children without discrimination. This synergy directly aligns with the global mandate of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all learners. Ultimately, the 'Green-Inclusion' leadership model identified in this study serves as a vital blueprint for educational institutions aiming to harmonise environmental stewardship with social justice. By prioritising values-driven management, schools can transform from mere physical green spaces into holistic learning ecosystems that foster lifelong learning opportunities and dignity for every student, regardless of background or ability.

CONCLUSION

The research concludes that the principal's strategic role in harmonising Adiwiyata and inclusive programs creates an innovative "Eco-Inclusive School" model in which environmental sustainability and social justice are treated as a unified ecosystem. The most important lesson from these findings is that the success of a green school should not be measured solely by its ecological aesthetics, but by its ability to utilise the environment as a "living laboratory" that provides equitable and comfortable learning for all students. By integrating the principles

of Amanah and Rahmatan lil 'alamin into managerial functions planning, implementing, and evaluating the principal effectively transforms potential instructional barriers into pedagogical assets, ensuring that a "green" culture inherently fosters a humanistic and non-discriminatory school atmosphere.

Scientifically, this study contributes a new "Green-Inclusion" management framework to the field of educational leadership, bridging the existing gap between ecocentrism and inclusive pedagogy in 21st-century schooling. However, this research is limited by its focus on a single case study in a specific elementary school context, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to different educational levels or geographical regions. Future research is encouraged to explore the longitudinal impact of this Eco-Inclusive model on the social-emotional development of students with special needs and to examine the scalability of this leadership strategy across more diverse institutional settings.

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