

ACADEMIC IDENTIFICATION OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS THROUGH INDIVIDUAL LEARNING PROGRAMS IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION SCHOOLS IN MAJALENGKA REGENCY

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive education aims to provide equal learning opportunities for all children, including children with special needs. One important aspect of inclusive education is academic identification, which aims to understand the learning needs of children with disabilities in order to design an appropriate individualized learning program. In practice, many primary schools offering inclusive education still face challenges in optimally identifying the academic needs of children with disabilities so that solutions can be found. Therefore, this study examines how academic identification is carried out in inclusive primary schools and how the implementation of PPI can help improve the academic development of children with disabilities. With a good identification system, it is hoped that each student with disabilities will receive an education that suits their potential and needs. This research method uses qualitative with a case study approach. The purpose of this research is to find out the academic problems and academic strategies for children with special needs through individualized learning programs in schools that provide inclusive education. The results showed that the majority of students experienced barriers in literacy, numeracy, motor coordination, and behavioral adaptation with visual learning style tendencies. Individualized learning programs based on visual media, concrete methods, kinesthetic activities, and social-emotional support proved effective in improving students' academic skills and social adaptation because they are based on individual needs, the use of adaptive learning media, structured psychomotor exercises, intensive social-emotional approaches and teacher training in inclusive education.

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of inclusive education is an effort to ensure that every child, regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, or sensory conditions, has the same opportunity to learn and develop according to their potential. In inclusive education, general schools are expected to adapt their learning systems to accommodate the needs of every student, including children with special needs (ABK), through various specially

designed strategies (Olivia, 2017). One approach used in inclusive education is the Individualized Education Program (IEP).

This study is in line with the findings of several previous studies that show that children with special needs face difficulties in basic literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional skills (Cole, et al, 2023; Mackey et al, 2025). However, most previous studies were conducted in the context of overseas education or special schools that have more structured resources and support systems. On the other hand, in the Indonesian context, particularly in elementary schools implementing inclusive education, there remains a significant gap in the implementation of individualized learning strategies, such as ongoing teacher training and systematic evaluation of the progress of children with special needs. This underscores the urgency of contextual research based on local needs and focused on optimizing the implementation of inclusive education at the elementary school level, which serves as the frontline for the initial integration of children with special needs into the general education system.

This program is designed to meet the individual learning needs of students by adapting to their characteristics and abilities. Through PPI, it is hoped that every student with special needs can obtain appropriate educational services so that they are not left behind in the teaching and learning process. However, in practice, the implementation of inclusive education still faces various challenges, especially in terms of academic identification of students with special needs (Issabayeva, et al., 2024). Many schools do not yet have an optimal academic identification system, which affects the effectiveness of individual learning programs. Additionally, the readiness of educators and infrastructure at schools implementing inclusive education also plays a crucial role in the success of PPI implementation.

This study focuses on academic identification of children with special needs through individual learning programs in elementary schools that provide inclusive education in Majalengka Regency. Academic identification focuses on academic aspects and performance (reading, mathematics, psychomotor skills, behavioral adaptation, and learning styles). This research is important to understand how the academic identification process is conducted and how the implementation of individualized learning programs can help improve the academic achievements of students with special needs. Inclusive education is based on the principle that all children, including those with special needs, have the right to receive quality education in a non-discriminatory environment. (Jamaris, 2018).

Inclusive education is an educational system that provides equal opportunities for all children by adapting the teaching system to meet the individual needs of students (Santrock, 2006). In this context, academic identification is a very important first step in providing appropriate educational services for children with special needs. Academic identification involves the process of gathering information about the learning conditions and needs of children with special needs in order to determine appropriate learning strategies. This process must be conducted systematically and data-driven to ensure valid results that can serve as the basis for developing individualized learning programs (Agustin, 2022). Academic identification is the initial process in determining appropriate educational services for students, particularly for students with special needs..

The purpose of academic identification is (1) to understand the characteristics and learning needs of students, as each student with special needs has different conditions, both cognitively, socially, and emotionally. Therefore, detailed mapping of their academic abilities and learning obstacles is required, (2) to determine appropriate learning strategies. Based on the results of the identification, teachers and other educators can develop appropriate strategies to support students' academic development, and (3) to adapt the curriculum and learning methods, namely through proper academic identification and a curriculum that can be adapted to be more flexible in accommodating the needs of students with special needs (Ainnayyah et al., 2019). There are several methods that can be used in academic identification for students with special needs, such as formal and informal assessments, classroom observations, interviews with parents, and psychological tests.

The Individualized Learning Program (ILP) is an approach designed to ensure that every child receives educational services tailored to their needs. The ILP is developed based on (1) academic assessment results, which identify students' strengths and weaknesses in both academic and non-academic areas, (2) specific learning objectives, which involve designing realistic and achievable goals within a specified timeframe, (3) appropriate learning strategies and methods, which involve using approaches tailored to students' needs and potential, and (4) regular evaluation, which involves continuously monitoring students' progress to ensure the program's effectiveness (Halligan & Cryer, 2022). Although PPI has been widely recognized as an effective approach, many schools still face difficulties in its implementation, especially in the context of inclusive education in Indonesia. Many teachers in inclusive schools do not yet have a deep understanding of how to conduct accurate academic identification. Most teachers still face difficulties in

identifying the academic needs of students with disabilities due to limitations in knowledge and assessment skills (Poh et al., 2017). This is compounded by the lack of training for teachers in the field of inclusive education. Many teachers have not received specialized training on how to conduct academic identification and develop effective PPI. As a result, many students with disabilities do not receive educational interventions tailored to their needs. Elementary schools that provide inclusive education often face challenges in terms of supporting facilities.

Some schools do not yet have special rooms or adequate tools to support the learning process of children with special needs. In addition, the availability of support staff, such as psychologists, therapists, and special assistant teachers (GPK), is also very limited. As a result, the academic identification process cannot be carried out optimally due to limited human resources and supporting facilities. The research questions in this study are as follows: (1) to identify academic issues faced by children with special needs through individual learning programs in schools that provide inclusive education; and (2) to identify academic strategies for children with special needs through individual learning programs in schools that provide inclusive education. This research is designed to have a significant impact on the academic skills of students with special needs, especially in inclusive education, so that they have the opportunity to obtain a good and meaningful education. This research topic has not been widely studied, especially in terms of academic aspects, namely reading skills, mathematics, pricomotor skills, behavioral adaptation, and learning styles. The research by Ainnayyah et al (2019) only refers to the social interaction of students with special needs because identifying communication alone will not have a profound impact on the needs of students in improving their skills. Therefore, academic identification of students with special needs can have a comprehensive impact, making it a strength of this research.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research method used in this study is qualitative with a multiple case study approach. Case studies are included in descriptive analysis research, which is research conducted in a focused manner on a specific case to be observed and analyzed thoroughly. The case in question can be singular or plural, in the form of individuals or groups (Afrizal, 2014). The subjects of this study are students from five schools in Majalengka District, namely SDN Sindang 1, SDN Kadipaten VII, SDN Sukaraja Wetan II, SDN Sangiang I, and SDN Rajagaluh 1. Each school has five students with special needs,

five school principals, and five special education teachers. The research location was chosen because most elementary schools implementing inclusive education are managed by special education teachers, so the research results will be more significant and have a comprehensive impact..

Data collection was carried out through participatory observation as follows: (1) observation of students with special needs to obtain data during learning activities, (2) interviews with the principal and special assistant teachers to determine the learning abilities of students with special needs, (3) documentation to explore data on the PPI (Individual Learning Program) model used, so that PPI 1 and advanced PPI documents were needed as data sources. In addition, the documents required to support this research were interviews and observation sheets. Data analysis was carried out through member checking of students with special needs based on their academic abilities, while the data results were obtained through reduction, data display, and verification. Data reduction was carried out to select and determine key points and eliminate data that was not related to the research. Data display is the process of presenting research data deemed important and relevant to the core concepts of the study, ensuring the data is organized, structured in interconnected patterns, and easily understood. In this process, data can be presented in the form of tables, graphs, or narrative text. Verification is the process of drawing conclusions from new findings, including interactive causal relationships, hypotheses, or theories. In qualitative research, initial conclusions are still provisional and may change if strong evidence supporting them is not found in subsequent data collection stages. However, if conclusions are supported by valid and consistent evidence, the conclusions presented are credible (Miles, et al., 2014).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Individual Learning Program (PPI) is a systematic educational plan designed to meet the specific needs of students with special needs. One of the main aspects in developing the PPI is the academic aspect, which includes students' abilities in reading, writing, arithmetic, as well as critical thinking and problem-solving skills related to formal learning outcomes at school. The Individualized Education Program (IEP) is designed by a specialized team of teachers supporting students with special needs from the PUSKURBUK KEMDIKBUD 2021 program. The academic aspect of the PPI serves to (1) identify individual academic strengths and needs, (2) determine short-term and long-term academic learning goals, (3) design learning strategies tailored to students' needs,

potential, and learning styles, and (4) measure students' academic progress through regular evaluations..

In the context of PPI, early academic identification is a crucial stage. Teachers and support teams need to conduct a comprehensive assessment of students' actual abilities, not only based on general class standards, but also based on individual development potential. This assessment covers (1) basic literacy skills (reading, recognizing letters, understanding simple texts), (2) numeracy skills (counting, understanding number concepts and basic arithmetic operations), and (3) simple logical thinking skills (recognizing patterns, cause-and-effect relationships). One important principle is that academic achievement in PPI is not only measured based on the ability to follow the regular curriculum but based on individual development in mastering functional academic skills appropriate to the student's needs. For example, in the following cases: (a) for students with reading difficulties, academic achievement may focus on recognizing letters and reading simple words, rather than simply pursuing the goal of reading books at the regular grade level; and (b) for students with mathematical difficulties, academic goals may focus on simple numeracy skills applicable in daily life, such as counting objects or recognizing money.

Thus, through individual learning programs, it is ensured that each student receives a meaningful and relevant academic learning experience that supports their independence. Therefore, the Individual Learning Program (PPI) is a program designed based on the conditions, needs, and potential of individual students with special needs, covering assessments of reading, mathematics, psychomotor skills, behavioral adaptation, and learning styles. The following are the results of a study conducted at five elementary schools implementing inclusive education regarding the dominant issues faced by students with special needs.

Table 1. Identification of Academic Problems

No	School	Student	Reading	Mathematics	Psychomotor	Behavioral Adaptation	Learning Styles
1	SDN Sindang I	Laki-laki	Difficulty recognizing letters and combining syllables	Difficulties with basic concepts and mathematical operations	Difficulty coordinating movements	Difficulties in socializing, passive	Visual
2	SDN Kadipate n VII	Laki-laki	Slow reading despite knowing the letters	Difficulties with multiplication and division operations	Slow to write without guidance	Tends to withdraw, lacks self-confidence	Visual with assistance

No	School	Student	Reading	Mathematics	Psychomotor	Behavioral Adaptation	Learning Styles
3	SDN Sukaraja wetan II	Women	Difficulty recognizing similar letters, slow reading	Limited to simple operations	Sensitive in new environments, difficult to control emotions		Audio-visual
4	SDN Sangiang II	Laki-laki	Difficulty reading words despite recognizing letters	Difficulties without the help of fingers	Slow in writing sentences, but able to follow sports	Sometimes emotional	Visual Dan Kinestetik
5	SDN Rajagaluh I	Woman	Unable to read, less responsive	Not familiar with numbers and mathematical symbols	Passion for drawing but difficulty following coordination instructions	Kesulitan adaptasi, pasif, dan sulit komunikasi	Visuals (via images)

The table above shows that all students face challenges in reading, mathematics, psychomotor skills, and behavioral adaptation, although the level and form of difficulty varies. The main findings of this study, based on the table above, are the academic issues identified: some students have difficulties in reading activities (recognizing letters), mathematics (not yet familiar with numbers), psychomotor skills (slow in writing sentences), behavioral adaptation (difficulty socializing), and learning style (visual with guidance)..

1. Reading Ability

Most students showed significant difficulties in reading, both in recognizing letters, combining syllables, and distinguishing letters with similar shapes or sounds. Students at SDN Sindang I, for example, had difficulty combining syllables, while students at SDN Sukarajawetan II had difficulty distinguishing letters such as “F” and “P.” These findings align with Reid's (2003) assertion that students with special needs often experience mild to severe dyslexia, which hinders early literacy development. Interventions based on phonetic and multisensory methods that integrate audio, visual, and kinesthetic elements are needed to strengthen letter and word mastery.

2. Mathematical Ability

In terms of numeracy, all students showed difficulties in understanding basic mathematical operations. In general, students still relied on concrete strategies such as counting with their fingers and were unable to perform abstract operations without aids. This condition reflects that the development of concrete operational cognition according to Piaget's theory has not been optimally achieved in most of the students with special needs who were studied. Therefore, mathematics instruction should be based on concrete manipulative activities, such as the use of real objects, counting blocks, or interactive visual media, to build foundational concepts of numbers and simple arithmetic operations.

3. Psychomotor Skills

Students' psychomotor skills show delays in fine and gross motor coordination. For example, students at SDN Sindang I and Sukarajawetan II have difficulty following structured movements in physical education classes and difficulty writing sentences. According to Satterfield (2014), these motor coordination issues are often associated with neurological developmental disorders that require occupational therapy or systematic motor training. Motor coordination training through activities such as coloring, drawing, cutting, and simple physical activities is gradually becoming the recommended approach.

4. Behavioral Adaptation

Students in this study also showed various obstacles in terms of behavioral adaptation. Among them were a tendency to withdraw, passivity in social interactions, low self-confidence, and high emotional sensitivity to environmental changes. As noted by Turnbull et al. (2011), students with special needs often require an emotionally supportive learning environment to actively participate. Therefore, instructional strategies must include social-emotional interventions through a gradual approach, the use of positive reinforcement, and small-group support to help students develop adaptive skills.

5. Learning Style

Almost all students in this study had a tendency toward visual learning styles, and some showed additional needs for audio-visual or kinesthetic learning styles. These learning styles are important to consider when designing teaching methods. As stated by Fleming (2001), the effectiveness of learning increases when teaching methods are tailored

to students' learning style preferences. Therefore, the use of visual media (images, videos), audio-visual materials, and kinesthetic activities are effective strategies for enhancing student engagement and learning outcomes for students with special needs.

Based on the above issues, a strategy is needed to minimize delays in student development. This is presented in the table below.

Table 2. Academic Strategies

No	School	Student	Reading	Mathematics	Psychomotor	Behavioral Adaptation
1	SDN Sindang I	Man	Visual learning with videos and images	Concrete visual approach (visual numbers)	Gradual training in simple movements, direct guidance	Intensive guidance by teachers, gradual integration into small groups
2	SDN Kadipaten VII	Man	Repetition of material using visual media in stages	Repeated visuals	intensive mentoring, regular practice with small achievement targets	Gradual social guidance in small groups that are comfortable for him
3	SDN Sukarajwet an II	Women	Audio-visual methods and repetition patterns	Direct assistance and storytelling	Gradual motor coordination exercises, gradual intensive speech therapy	Slow adaptation with emotional support and guidance from special teachers
4	SDN Sangiang II	Man	Visual and kinesthetic methods, hands-on practice	Use of concrete aids, visual methods, and hands-on practice	Kinesthetic learning with visual integration	A warm and personal approach, positive reinforcement, and emotional management
5	SDN Rajagaluh I	Women	Image media, active visual learning with creative images	Simple method of visualizing numbers using images	Utilizing interest in drawing, integrating simple psychomotor skills through art	Intensive mentoring, strengthening adaptation through visual media and drawing

Based on the above identification, it appears that most students experience different academic difficulties but tend to have a visual learning style as their primary learning style. Therefore, it is recommended that the learning provided in the Individual Learning Program (PPI) should place greater emphasis on visual methods such as pictures, videos,

concrete teaching aids, and kinesthetic approaches for some students who have strengths in psychomotor or physical activities. Coller et al. (2020) note that another important strategy is individual or small-group learning tailored to students' learning pace, supported by intensive emotional and social approaches, particularly for students struggling with social and emotional adaptation. The implementation of the PPI program should be supported by regular evaluations to monitor students' progress and adjust the program based on their needs and progress..

1. Reading Strategies

In terms of reading, all students are facilitated through visual and audio-visual media. Students from SDN Sindang I and SDN Kadipaten VII, for example, are more responsive to learning using images, videos, and gradual visual repetition. This is in line with research by Keating, et al (2024), which shows that visual learners process image- and video-based information faster than text alone. Students from SDN Sukarajawetan II receive additional support through audio-visual repetition patterns to help overcome difficulties in distinguishing similar letters. Meanwhile, students at SDN Sangiang II and SDN Rajagaluh I are guided to use a visual-kinesthetic approach through hands-on practice and creative image-based media. This strategy is effective in enhancing basic literacy skills, particularly for students facing challenges in recognizing letters and developing reading skills.

2. Numeracy Strategy

In terms of numeracy, the strategy emphasizes the use of concrete aids and simple number visualization. Students from SDN Sindang I and SDN Sangiang II, for example, are trained using concrete visual methods with number aids, while students at SDN Sukarajawetan II are guided directly to understand story problems. This strategy is based on Piaget's theory (Kohnstamm, 2021) of the concrete operational stage, where children understand mathematical concepts better when given real manipulative experiences. Visualization and hands-on practice greatly help students understand number concepts, arithmetic operations, and simple numerical relationships.

3. Psychomotor Strategies

Students' psychomotor skills were improved through gradual motor training and integration of interests. Students from SDN Sindang I and Kadipaten VII were trained with simple movements and small-target writing guidance, while students from SDN

Sukarajawetan II received additional intensive speech therapy. Interestingly, students from SDN Sangiang II and Rajagaluh I are given a more kinesthetic and interest-based approach, such as through drawing activities and art activities. This reinforces Gallahue's (2012) findings that children's psychomotor development can be accelerated by integrating physical activities that are appropriate to their interests and age development.

4. Behavioral Adaptation Strategies

Behavioral adaptation is a key focus of this academic strategy. Students who tend to be withdrawn, passive, or emotionally sensitive are given a personalized and intensive social-emotional approach. For example, students at SDN Sindang I and Kadipaten VII receive gradual guidance in small groups, while students at SDN Sukarajawetan II and Sangiang II are given emotional reinforcement and personalized attention. Students at SDN Rajagaluh I are assisted through visual adaptation using drawing activities as a medium to build self-confidence. This approach aligns with the CASEL (2003) principles regarding the importance of social-emotional learning (SEL) in developing interpersonal skills, self-awareness, and emotional regulation in students with special needs.

Based on the above discussion, the academic strategies developed have several important implications: (1) learning based on visual media, audio-visual media, and hands-on practice is a primary need for students with special needs in developing literacy and numeracy skills; (2) psychomotor approaches must be adapted to students' motor conditions, with gradual exercises and integration of children's interests; (3) Social-emotional support should be implemented through intensive guidance in small groups, focusing on building students' self-confidence and independence. Bonino & Mood (2023); Mackey et al (2025) suggest that the implementation of these adaptive and individualized academic strategies is expected to accelerate the academic development, motor skills, and social integration of students with special needs in inclusive education. The academic strategies designed in this study emphasize the importance of using visual media, audio-visual media, concrete methods, kinesthetic practices, and personalized social-emotional support. Each approach is developed based on the identification of students' specific needs, so it is expected to optimize their learning potential.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study shows that students with special needs (ABK) in inclusive elementary schools in Majalengka Regency face various obstacles in reading, mathematics,

psychomotor skills, and behavioral adaptation. The dominant reading obstacles are difficulty recognizing letters, slow reading, and distinguishing similar letters. In mathematics, most students struggle with understanding basic operations and simple number concepts. Psychomotor challenges include difficulties with fine and gross motor coordination, while behavioral adaptation challenges include tendency to withdraw, emotional sensitivity, and difficulties with socialization.

Academic strategies are developed to address the individual needs of each student. Learning based on visual media, audio-visual materials, the use of concrete aids, direct kinesthetic practice, and a personalized social-emotional approach form the core framework of intervention. The integration of visual learning styles and simple motor activities has proven effective in overcoming academic challenges and supporting students' social-emotional development. Through a structured, gradual, and strength-based approach, students with special needs can achieve optimal academic progress and social adaptation in an inclusive environment.

Meanwhile, based on the research findings and discussions, the following recommendations are suggested: (1) Strengthening the Individualized Learning Program (ILP), where each student with special needs should have an ILP that includes strategies based on visual media, concrete activities, fine motor exercises, and social-emotional support; (2) Use adaptive learning media, where teachers are advised to increase the use of image-based, video, audio-visual, and physical activity-based learning media to enhance students' understanding and engagement; (3) Structured psychomotor exercises, where activities such as writing, drawing, cutting, and simple sports should be made a regular part of the learning process to strengthen students' motor coordination; (4) Intensive social-emotional approach: teachers and educators need to provide gradual and personalized social-emotional guidance to help students adapt to the school environment and build self-confidence; (5) Teacher training in inclusive education: schools need to provide special training for teachers so that they are able to accurately identify students' needs and apply appropriate learning strategies; and (6) Periodic evaluation: evaluations of students' academic, psychomotor, and behavioral adaptation progress must be conducted periodically to adjust learning strategies to individual student development.

This study was only conducted in elementary schools that implement inclusion in Majalengka Regency. The research results may not fully represent the conditions of other regions with different demographic, cultural, and educational policy characteristics. For further research, it is recommended to conduct studies in various regions with different

social conditions and educational policies to ensure more comprehensive and representative findings. Additionally, future research could explore the role of parents and comprehensive school environment support in facilitating the success of inclusive education, while further studies could develop and test technology-based learning models such as educational apps or interactive games to help students with special needs overcome learning barriers.

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