



Capacity Building for Inclusive Schools: Empowering Teachers and Parents in Child-Friendly Education

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DOI: <http://doi.org/10.61987/communautaire.v5i1.2117>

Article History:

Received: 02 April 2026

Revised: 12 May 2026

Accepted: 10 June 2026

Keywords:

Inclusive Education,

Community Empowerment,

Early Childhood Education

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Abstract:

This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of community empowerment initiatives in strengthening inclusive, child-friendly, and disability-responsive early childhood education environments. The research focuses on how structured teacher and parent training can improve pedagogical competence, increase awareness of children with diverse learning needs, and strengthen collaboration between school and home. A mixed-methods approach was used, combining quantitative assessments of participants' knowledge and attitudes with qualitative data from observations, reflections, and stakeholder feedback. The results indicate that targeted empowerment programs contributed to positive changes in teachers' ability to adapt learning strategies, parents' understanding of inclusive support at home, and the development of a more collaborative school culture. Participants showed improved awareness that inclusion is not limited to physical access but also requires emotional, instructional, and social support. This study implies that sustainable inclusive education requires continuous training, active parental participation, and institutional commitment to create responsive learning ecosystems where every child can participate meaningfully.

INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental human right, yet achieving equitable access remains a global challenge, particularly for children with disabilities and special educational needs. Inclusive education is essential not only to fulfil legal and moral obligations but also to promote social justice, reduce discrimination, and enhance community well-being. Globally, many children are excluded from quality learning experiences due to barriers such as insufficiently trained teachers, inadequate infrastructure, and societal misconceptions about inclusion (Arnaiz-Sánchez et al., 2023; Sarker & Unzum, 2023). In Indonesia, while regulatory frameworks such as Permendikbud No. 70 of 2009 and Law No. 8 of 2016 provide clear mandates for inclusive education, disparities persist in practical implementation. Studies indicate that children with disabilities often face developmental and social barriers when school systems are unable to provide tailored support (Anaby et al., 2019; Bani Odeh & Lach, 2024). This issue has wide societal implications, as a lack of inclusion can perpetuate inequality, limit human capital development, and reduce overall social cohesion. Therefore, addressing these systemic gaps is critical for creating equitable and just educational ecosystems.

Despite regulatory mandates and growing awareness of inclusive education, many communities continue to face challenges in creating child-friendly and disability-responsive learning environments. Teachers frequently report feeling ill-prepared to adapt curricula for heterogeneous classrooms, while parents often lack sufficient understanding of how to support children with special educational needs at home (Cheng & Lai, 2023; Greenway & Eaton, 2020). This gap between policy and practice contributes to the under-realization of children's rights to quality education. In addition, limited access to adequate facilities and learning resources exacerbates inequality, particularly in early childhood education institutions. In Indonesia, low levels of inclusive literacy among parents, insufficient training opportunities for teachers, and weak collaboration among schools, communities, and government agencies hinder the creation of inclusive ecosystems (Ackah-Jnr, 2026; Yoon & Copeland, 2020). Consequently, children with disabilities are at risk of developmental delays, reduced academic achievement, and social marginalization. The persistence of these challenges underscores the importance of interventions that empower both educators and parents as central actors in inclusive education.

At the local level, early childhood institutions such as TK Al-Wahdah in Bandung City exemplify the challenges of implementing inclusive education in practice. The school serves learners from diverse backgrounds, including children with disabilities, yet teachers report difficulty delivering instruction aligned with inclusive principles. Simultaneously, parents often lack adequate knowledge to support learning activities at home, resulting in a disconnect between school and family practices. Observations indicate that without targeted capacity-building initiatives, inclusive education remains theoretical rather than operational. This phenomenon demonstrates the urgent need for structured interventions that bridge knowledge and practice gaps. By focusing on teacher and parent empowerment, interventions can foster collaborative learning ecosystems where both school and home environments support children's development (Keizer et al., 2024; Khair, 2025). Addressing these gaps has direct social implications, as inclusive education enhances equity, reduces social exclusion, and strengthens community cohesion, particularly in neighbourhoods where resources and awareness remain limited.

Previous studies emphasize the central role of teachers and parents in fostering inclusive learning environments. Research shows that teacher readiness, positive attitudes, and inclusive pedagogical competencies are essential for effectively managing diverse classrooms (Garrote et al., 2020; Marin et al., 2025). Likewise, parental involvement supports children's academic, social, and emotional development, particularly by reinforcing inclusive practices at home (Kumar & Singh, 2026; McWayne et al., 2022). Training programs targeting both teachers and parents have been identified as effective strategies to improve knowledge of children's rights, child-friendly teaching methods, and safe, inclusive classroom management. Moreover, participatory approaches to training enhance social capital, promoting collaboration among stakeholders and ensuring sustainability of inclusive practices at the community level (Nalikan & Rozikin, 2025; Saputra et al., 2025). These findings highlight the potential of community-based empowerment to translate inclusive policies into actionable practices that benefit both educators and families.

However, gaps remain in current research regarding direct collaboration between teachers and parents within structured training programs. While prior studies demonstrate improvements in teacher competence and parental involvement

separately, there is limited evidence on integrated training that simultaneously builds collective capacity. For example, documented positive impacts of workshops and community activities on teacher attitudes and parental engagement, yet did not focus on combined training forums. (Smith, 2019; Smith & Sheridan, 2019). Similarly, examined the concepts of inclusive education and child-friendly schools conceptually, emphasizing policy, facilities, and teacher capacity, but without practical collaboration mechanisms. The lack of empirical studies evaluating joint teacher-parent interventions underscores a critical research gap. Addressing this gap is important, as the sustainability of inclusive education depends on coordinated actions from both educators and families. The novelty of this study lies in designing a training framework that empowers both groups simultaneously, ensuring more effective and sustainable implementation of inclusive and child-friendly learning environments.

The specific problem addressed in this study is the limited capacity of teachers and parents to implement inclusive education effectively at TK Al-Wahdah. Teachers report inadequate competencies to adapt curricula and manage diverse classrooms, while parents often lack awareness and practical skills to reinforce inclusive practices at home (Holidi, 2025; Manshur, 2026; Shoha, 2026). This deficiency creates a risk of developmental barriers for children with disabilities and impedes the school's ability to function as a fully child-friendly and inclusive institution. The gap between existing policy frameworks and classroom practices underscores the urgency of interventions that address educators and families alike. Without such interventions, children with special needs are likely to experience inequitable access to education, limiting their academic progress and social participation. Therefore, addressing teacher and parent capacity through structured empowerment programs is essential to bridge these gaps and enhance the overall quality and equity of early childhood education.

This study aims to strengthen the capacity of teachers and parents at TK Al-Wahdah to create child-friendly and disability-inclusive educational environments. The objectives include improving teachers' pedagogical competencies, enhancing parental understanding of inclusive learning strategies, and fostering collaboration between schools and families. The program's scope includes needs-based training modules tailored to children's characteristics, participatory workshops, and mentoring strategies that combine conceptual knowledge with practical application. By integrating teacher and parent empowerment into a single program, the initiative seeks to create sustainable, socially just educational practices. Long-term, the study intends to contribute to broader community development by promoting inclusive school cultures, supporting optimal learner development, and reducing disparities in access to quality education. These efforts align with national regulations and international standards, emphasizing the right of all children to equitable and non-discriminatory learning opportunities.

The urgency of this community service program stems from the immediate need to address gaps in teacher and parental capacity. Early childhood learners with disabilities face heightened vulnerability if inclusive practices are not implemented effectively. Delayed interventions risk widening inequities and impeding holistic development. By providing structured, joint training for teachers and parents, the program addresses both pedagogical and home-based support deficiencies, ensuring a cohesive approach to inclusion. The initiative contributes to the creation of a responsive, sustainable school ecosystem that meets children's cognitive, social, and emotional needs. It also

strengthens community engagement by empowering key stakeholders as active participants in educational transformation (Santoso et al., 2023; Gustaman et al., 2025). Ultimately, this program exemplifies a practical, socially relevant strategy for translating policy into action, directly supporting children's rights to inclusive, safe, and equitable early learning.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a Participatory Mixed-Methods Approach to examine a community empowerment program that promotes inclusive schools through teacher and parent training in child-friendly, disability-inclusive education (Takona, 2024; Zhou et al., 2024). This design was selected because the program sought not only to measure changes in participants' knowledge, but also to understand changes in attitudes, awareness, engagement, and commitment toward inclusive educational practices. The participatory approach was reflected in the active involvement of teachers and parents through training sessions, interactive lectures, group discussions, reflection, and exchange of experiences. This approach allowed participants to construct understanding collectively and connect the training materials with real challenges encountered in school and home contexts. Participatory training models have been shown to strengthen early childhood educators' practical skills in managing inclusive classrooms and to enhance their critical awareness of children's needs. Meanwhile, the mixed-methods design enabled the integration of numerical data from pretests, posttests, and questionnaires with narrative data from observations, interviews, and participant reflections. Michael Quinn Patton emphasizes that "mixed methods provide a more comprehensive understanding of program outcomes by integrating numeric and narrative data.

The study was conducted at TK Al-Wahdah, Bandung, an early childhood education institution that has begun implementing inclusive education principles and serves learners from diverse backgrounds. This location was selected because it represents a relevant educational setting where collaboration between teachers and parents is essential to fostering child-friendly, disability-inclusive learning. Teachers at TK Al-Wahdah have a central role in adapting learning strategies to children's diverse needs. At the same time, parents or guardians are expected to provide consistent support in the home environment. The selection of this site was also based on the need to strengthen school-family cooperation in inclusive education practices. A national study conducted in West Java concluded that simultaneous involvement of teachers and parents leads to greater consistency in the implementation of inclusive practices both at school and at home. Therefore, TK Al-Wahdah was considered an appropriate and strategic site for implementing a community-based capacity-building program in inclusive education.

Data were collected using pretests, posttests, structured questionnaires, participant observation sheets, and semi-structured interview guides. The pretest was used to assess participants' initial understanding of inclusive education and disability issues before the training, while the posttest was administered after the training to measure knowledge improvement. Questionnaires were used to capture participants' perceptions of the program benefits, their attitudes toward inclusive education, and their commitment to applying inclusive principles in school and home settings. Observation sheets were used to record participant engagement during the activity, including participation in discussions, responses to case examples, and willingness to share experiences. Semi-structured interviews were used to obtain deeper information about

participants' understanding, challenges, and reflections after the training. The activity was carried out through four sequential stages: pretest, delivery of training materials, interactive discussion, and posttest. An evaluation of training programs in Tuban found that this combination of instruments is effective at simultaneously capturing cognitive and social changes among participants.

The data were analyzed using quantitative and qualitative descriptive techniques. Quantitative data from the pretest and posttest were analyzed by calculating mean scores and score improvements to identify changes in participants' knowledge after the training (Nurfajriani et al., 2024; Wutich et al., 2024). Questionnaire data were summarized descriptively to describe participants' responses and perceptions of the training's usefulness. Qualitative data obtained from observations, interviews, and open-ended questionnaire responses were analyzed thematically to identify patterns related to awareness, participation, attitude change, and commitment to inclusive practices. The indicators of success included three aspects: an increase in average pretest-posttest scores, active participation in discussions, and participants' commitment to applying inclusive principles in both school and home environments. To ensure data validity, the instruments were reviewed by experts in inclusive education and piloted on a small group before full implementation. Reliability was examined through internal consistency measures, while triangulation of questionnaire, observation, and interview data strengthened the credibility of the findings. Although purposive sampling and the relatively short implementation period limit generalizability, the method remains appropriate for evaluating community empowerment in inclusive early childhood education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Pretest and Posttest Outcomes

The pretest was conducted to assess participants' initial understanding of inclusive and child-friendly education before the training program was implemented. The results showed that participants had varied baseline knowledge. Among the 38 participants, the highest pretest score was 80, while the lowest score was 45. The average score was 61.39, with a median score of 63. This result indicates that participants already had some basic awareness of inclusive education, but their understanding remained uneven and incomplete. Some participants appeared to understand general concepts such as equal access to education and the importance of respecting children's differences. However, many still had difficulty understanding practical aspects, such as how to adapt learning strategies, respond to children with special needs, and create a learning environment that is both child-friendly and disability-inclusive. Therefore, the pretest results confirmed the need for structured training.

After the training program was implemented, the posttest results showed a substantial improvement in participants' understanding. The highest posttest score was 100, while the lowest was 88. The average score rose from 61.39 in the pretest to 93.18 in the posttest, and the median score increased from 63 to 94. This improvement shows that the training program had a strong positive effect on participants' cognitive understanding of inclusive education. The increase in the lowest score is particularly significant because it indicates that participants who initially had limited understanding also experienced significant progress. The narrowing of the score range from 46–80 in

the pretest to 85–100 in the posttest also shows that knowledge gaps among participants became smaller after the program. In other words, the training not only improved the overall average score but also created a more balanced level of understanding among teachers and parents.

Table 1. Pretest and Posttest Results

Aspect	Pretest	Posttest
Highest Score	80	100
Lowest Score	45	88
Average	61.39	93.18
Median	63	94
Range	46–80	85–100
Number of Participants	38	38

The comparison between pretest and posttest results demonstrates that the training program successfully improved participants' understanding of inclusive and child-friendly education. The increase in the average score by 31.79 points reflects a meaningful learning gain. The rise in the median score also confirms that the improvement was not limited to only a few participants but occurred across the majority of the group. This result suggests that the material, delivery method, and participatory learning activities were effective in helping participants understand the principles of inclusive education. The data also indicate that the program was relevant to participants' needs, especially because teachers and parents were able to connect the training materials with real situations in school and home environments. Overall, the pretest and posttest outcomes provide clear evidence that the program strengthened participants' knowledge as an initial foundation for building inclusive school practices.

Participant Engagement and Responses

Participants responded positively throughout the implementation of the community service program. Both teachers and parents attended the activity with enthusiasm and actively participated from start to finish. This was reflected in their punctuality, attention during material presentation, and willingness to engage in discussion sessions. Several participants took notes on important points, especially those related to practical strategies for supporting children with diverse needs. The level of engagement showed that inclusive and child-friendly education was perceived as a relevant and urgent topic by the participants. They did not view the program merely as a formal activity, but as a learning opportunity that could help them respond to real challenges in educating and guiding children. The active participation also indicated that teachers and parents were open to new perspectives, especially regarding how inclusion should be practiced in daily school and family contexts.

Teachers' responses were particularly constructive because they directly connected the training materials with classroom practices. Many teachers reported that the program helped them better understand inclusive education, especially in relation to adaptive teaching methods, flexible learning media, and classroom management for children with different abilities. Before the program, some teachers tended to view inclusive education as the inclusion of children with special needs in regular classrooms. After the training, they began to understand that inclusion requires active adjustment in teaching strategies, communication styles, and learning activities. Teachers also

reported that the program increased their confidence in managing classroom diversity. They became more aware that children's differences should not be treated as obstacles but as part of the learning reality, requiring professional sensitivity and pedagogical creativity. This response indicates that the program improved teachers' readiness to implement inclusive learning.

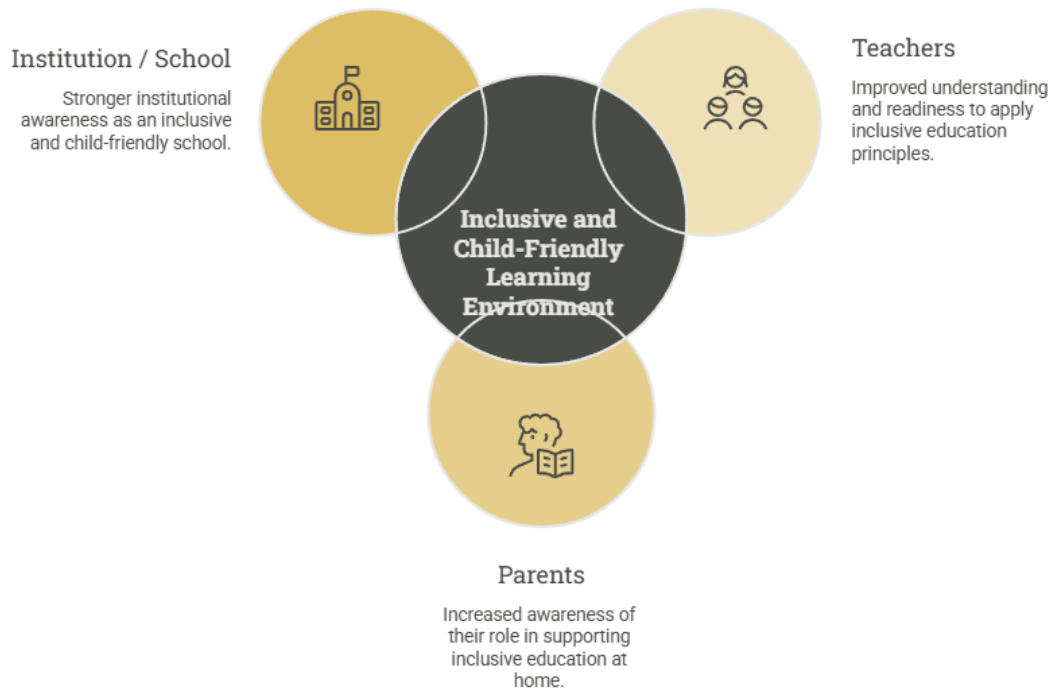


Figure 1. Impact of Inclusive Education Training on Teachers, Parents, and the Institution at TK Al-Wahdah

Figure 1 illustrates that the inclusive education training produced effects at three interconnected levels: teachers, parents, and the institution. At the teacher level, the program strengthened understanding and preparedness to apply inclusive education principles through more adaptive teaching strategies, varied instructional media, flexible learning approaches, and additional support for children with diverse needs. At the parent level, the training increased awareness of the importance of home-based support, child-friendly communication, emotional responsiveness, and collaboration with teachers in supporting children's development. At the institutional level, TK Al-Wahdah began to reflect more critically on its readiness to function as an inclusive and child-friendly school, particularly in terms of teacher capacity, parent-school collaboration, learning media, and policy support. Overall, the figure shows that the program not only improved individual awareness but also helped build a more collaborative and responsive school ecosystem for inclusive early childhood education.

Parents also responded positively to the training program. Many parents stated that the activity helped them understand their role in supporting inclusive education at home. Before the training, some parents viewed inclusive education as mainly the responsibility of teachers and schools. However, after the discussion and reflection sessions, they realized that family involvement is essential in supporting children's social, emotional, and learning development. Parents became more aware that child-friendly education begins with daily communication, patience, empathy, and consistent support

at home. Several parents shared personal experiences of difficulties in guiding their children's learning and behaviour. Through the program, they received practical insights on how to respond more appropriately to children's needs. These responses show that the program successfully bridged the knowledge gap between school and family. The interaction between teachers and parents also fostered a shared understanding that inclusive education requires cooperation rather than isolated efforts by one party.

Multi-Level Effects of Inclusive Education Programs

The program had a tangible impact on improving teachers' capacity to understand and apply inclusive education principles. Teachers became more aware of the importance of designing learning activities that are responsive to children's diverse abilities and developmental needs. The training encouraged them to think beyond uniform teaching methods and begin considering adaptive strategies, such as using varied instructional media, giving flexible learning instructions, and providing additional support for children who need different forms of assistance. Teachers also showed increased confidence in managing classroom diversity. This is important because confidence influences how teachers respond to children's differences in practice. When teachers feel more prepared, they are more likely to create a supportive classroom climate, reduce exclusionary practices, and encourage participation from all learners. The program therefore strengthened not only teachers' knowledge but also their practical readiness to develop inclusive learning environments in early childhood.

The program's impact was also evident among parents. Parents became more aware that inclusive education extends beyond the school setting. They began to recognize that home support plays an important role in shaping children's development, especially for children who require additional attention. After the training, parents demonstrated a better understanding of child-friendly communication, emotional support, and the importance of cooperating with teachers. They also showed greater awareness of the importance of observing children's behaviour, listening to children's needs, and avoiding discriminatory attitudes. This change is significant because parents are the closest support system for children outside school. When parents understand inclusive values, they can reinforce the same principles at home. As a result, children receive more consistent support between school and family environments. This consistency is essential for building children's confidence, emotional security, and social participation.

At the institutional level, the program encouraged TK Al-Wahdah to reflect on its readiness as an inclusive and child-friendly school. The activity helped the school identify areas that need improvement, including teacher capacity, parent-school collaboration, learning media, and institutional policy support. The program also strengthened communication between teachers and parents, creating a more collaborative atmosphere in addressing children's learning and developmental needs. Through discussion sessions, both groups shared concerns, clarified expectations, and identified possible follow-up actions. This indicates that the program not only produced individual-level changes but also initiated institutional awareness. TK Al-Wahdah began to see inclusive education as a shared responsibility that requires continuous planning and cooperation. Therefore, the program can be understood as an initial step toward building a more responsive school ecosystem in which teachers, parents, and the institution work together to support all children without discrimination.

Discussion

The findings from this study indicate that the inclusive education training program substantially enhanced teachers' understanding and practical ability to implement child-centred learning strategies. Before the program, teachers showed only a partial grasp of inclusive principles, often equating inclusion merely with the physical presence of children with special needs in regular classrooms. After the intervention, however, teachers demonstrated a deeper understanding of adaptive strategies, including the use of varied instructional media, differentiated instruction, and individualized support for children with diverse developmental needs. The increase in teachers' confidence is significant because it directly affects classroom management and responsiveness to children's unique learning needs. By bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, the training enabled teachers to conceptualize inclusion as an ongoing, dynamic process rather than a static policy or checklist. This outcome underscores that structured, participatory, and contextually relevant training can enhance teacher efficacy and readiness to foster a supportive, inclusive classroom climate (Emam et al., 2026; Leifler, 2020).

At the parental level, the training program also produced meaningful improvements in awareness and engagement. Initially, some parents perceived inclusive education as primarily the responsibility of schools and teachers, thereby limiting their own involvement in their child's learning. Following the program, parents reported a better understanding of their essential role in supporting inclusive practices at home, including applying child-friendly communication, providing emotional support, and cooperating with teachers to reinforce learning objectives. Parents' enhanced comprehension of their role in observing children's behaviour, listening attentively to their needs, and avoiding discriminatory attitudes demonstrates that the program successfully bridged the home-school gap. This aligns with the theoretical understanding that family participation is a critical component of inclusive education, enabling continuity and consistency between school and home environments. Consequently, children received more coherent support across contexts, promoting their confidence, social participation, and emotional security, which are essential for holistic early childhood development (Blewitt et al., 2021; Rafiyya et al., 2024).

From an institutional perspective, TK Al-Wahdah began to reflect critically on its readiness as an inclusive and child-friendly school, identifying areas for improvement in teacher capacity, parent-school collaboration, learning media, and institutional policies. The program facilitated structured discussions that strengthened communication between teachers and parents, fostering a collaborative atmosphere for addressing children's developmental needs. This institutional-level awareness is a key indicator that inclusive education is not only an individual responsibility but also a systemic endeavour requiring planning, policy support, and ongoing collaboration. The findings suggest that the program acted as a catalyst for organizational change by highlighting the interconnectedness of teacher development, parental involvement, and school policies. In practical terms, this implies that schools seeking to implement inclusive practices must adopt a multi-level approach, integrating professional development, stakeholder engagement, and institutional support to create sustainable improvements in the learning environment (Leal Filho et al., 2025; Radinger-Peer et al., 2021).

The comparison between pretest and posttest results further confirms the program's effectiveness. The average participant score increased from 61.39 to 93.18, while the lowest score improved from 45 to 88, indicating that participants with initially low understanding made significant progress. The reduction in score variability also reflects a more balanced comprehension among teachers and parents, suggesting that the training effectively reduced knowledge gaps and ensured that the majority of participants reached a competent level of understanding. These outcomes illustrate that structured, experiential learning activities can produce equitable learning gains, reinforcing the theoretical proposition that active engagement, contextual relevance, and participatory approaches enhance cognitive assimilation of inclusive principles. The results also highlight the importance of aligning training content with real-life scenarios in classrooms and homes to facilitate practical application and knowledge retention (Lowell & Moore, 2020; Riera et al., 2023).

The practical implications of this study are significant. By demonstrating that improvements in teacher knowledge, parental involvement, and institutional awareness are interdependent, the research underscores the need for integrated training approaches in inclusive education. Teachers benefit from enhanced pedagogical skills and confidence, parents contribute to a supportive home environment, and schools gain insight into systemic requirements for sustaining inclusion. These findings provide actionable guidance for educational planners, policymakers, and administrators seeking to implement inclusive practices at early childhood levels. Programs that involve multiple stakeholders and address cognitive, behavioural, and affective domains can yield more durable and comprehensive outcomes. This holistic approach also contributes to creating school ecosystems in which collaboration and shared responsibility are foundational principles, ultimately leading to more equitable, child-friendly learning environments (Jansson et al., 2022; Ramadhani & Amanina, 2026).

In terms of research contribution, this study extends the existing literature by empirically demonstrating the effects of multi-level inclusive education interventions that encompass teachers, parents, and institutional structures. Unlike studies that focus narrowly on teacher training, this research illustrates how coordinated stakeholder engagement can yield more comprehensive outcomes. The findings offer both theoretical and practical insights: theoretically, they affirm the interconnected nature of knowledge, self-efficacy, family involvement, and organizational readiness in inclusive education; practically, they provide a model for designing and implementing interventions that simultaneously strengthen individual competencies and institutional capacity. By documenting engagement, cognitive gains, and the promotion of collaborative school ecosystems, this research contributes to the broader discourse on inclusive early childhood education. It offers a replicable framework for similar educational contexts (Bartolo et al., 2021; Nelis et al., 2023).

CONCLUSION

The community service program at TK Al-Wahdah demonstrated that inclusive, child-friendly education can meaningfully improve awareness, knowledge, and practical readiness among both teachers and parents, as evidenced by increases in pretest-posttest scores, active participation, and a stronger understanding of shared responsibility in supporting all children. These findings suggest that the program has relevance beyond the school context, as its participatory approach can be applied more

broadly to strengthen inclusive values in other early childhood settings and community-based education initiatives. To sustain and expand its impact, the school is recommended to integrate inclusive education into its annual planning, strengthen collaboration between teachers and parents, continue providing supportive learning facilities, and follow up with mentoring. Relevant stakeholders, including local government and disability-related institutions, should also be involved to ensure wider implementation and long-term sustainability. Future research or community service activities should address the long-term behavioural impact of the program, explore its effectiveness in larger, more diverse school contexts, and examine more specific aspects, such as the role of institutional policy, parental consistency at home, and classroom-based inclusive practices.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors would like to sincerely thank the teachers, parents, and staff of TK Al-Wahdah for their active participation and support throughout the community service program. Gratitude is also extended to the local government, stakeholders, and collaborators who provided guidance and resources, enabling the successful implementation and evaluation of this inclusive education initiative.

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