
TEACHER MANAGEMENT IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: STRATEGIC HUMAN RESOURCE PRACTICES IN AN ISLAMIC EARLY CHILDHOOD SCHOOL

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Abstract

Teacher management remains one of the greatest challenges in implementing inclusive early childhood education, particularly in private institutions operating with limited institutional support. This study explores how a pioneering inclusive Raudatul Athfal in South Kalimantan, Indonesia, strategically manages teacher empowerment and professional development to sustain inclusive educational practice. Employing a qualitative single-case study, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 28 participants, classroom observations, and document analysis. Guided by Strategic Human Resource Management and Professional Capital Theory, the findings reveal a sequential management process comprising values-based recruitment, leadership-driven professional learning, developmental supervision, and knowledge regeneration to sustain professional capacity despite teacher turnover. These strategic practices were subsequently enacted through three forms of professional practice: teachers exercised professional judgment in individualized pedagogy, extended inclusive practice through multidisciplinary collaboration, and transformed parental and community perceptions of disability through sustained engagement. The study extends Strategic Human Resource Management by demonstrating that, in resource-constrained inclusive schools, teacher management functions as a process of creating and sustaining professional capital. The findings provide practical insights for strengthening teacher management policies in inclusive early childhood education, particularly in low-resource educational settings.

Keywords: Teacher Management; Inclusive Early Childhood Education; Professional Development; Raudatul Athfal

Abstrak

Manajemen guru tetap menjadi salah satu tantangan terbesar dalam implementasi pendidikan anak usia dini inklusif, khususnya di lembaga swasta yang beroperasi dengan dukungan institusional terbatas. Studi ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana Raudatul Athfal, sebuah sekolah inklusif perintis di Kalimantan Selatan, Indonesia, secara strategis mengelola pemberdayaan guru dan pengembangan profesional untuk mempertahankan praktik pendidikan inklusif. Dengan menggunakan studi kasus tunggal kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan 28 partisipan, observasi kelas, dan analisis dokumen. Dipandu oleh Manajemen Sumber Daya Manusia Strategis dan Teori Modal Profesional, temuan menunjukkan proses manajemen berurutan yang terdiri dari rekrutmen berbasis nilai, pembelajaran profesional yang didorong oleh kepemimpinan, supervisi pengembangan, dan regenerasi pengetahuan untuk mempertahankan kapasitas profesional meskipun terjadi pergantian guru. Praktik strategis ini kemudian diwujudkan melalui tiga bentuk praktik profesional: guru menerapkan penilaian profesional dalam pedagogi individual, memperluas praktik inklusif melalui kolaborasi multidisiplin, dan mengubah persepsi orang tua dan masyarakat tentang disabilitas melalui keterlibatan yang berkelanjutan. Studi ini memperluas Manajemen Sumber Daya Manusia Strategis dengan menunjukkan bahwa, di sekolah inklusif yang terbatas sumber daya, manajemen guru berfungsi sebagai proses menciptakan dan mempertahankan modal profesional. Temuan ini memberikan wawasan praktis untuk memperkuat kebijakan manajemen guru dalam pendidikan anak usia dini inklusif, khususnya di lingkungan pendidikan dengan sumber daya terbatas.

Kata Kunci: Manajemen Guru; Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini Inklusif; Pengembangan Profesional; Raudatul Athfal

INTRODUCTION

The global expansion of inclusive early childhood education has shifted policy attention from increasing school enrolment toward ensuring the availability of teachers capable of implementing inclusive pedagogy. Across diverse educational systems, teachers remain the most influential school-level factor determining the quality of inclusion because they translate policy aspirations into individualized assessment, curriculum adaptation, classroom participation, and collaboration with families (Ackah-Jnr, 2022a). Consequently, recent international scholarship has increasingly emphasized teacher professional learning, instructional leadership, and organizational capacity building as prerequisites for sustainable inclusive education (Ackah-Jnr & Fluckiger, 2023; Billingsley, 2012; Buli-Holmberg & Jeyaprabahan, 2016).

Despite this growing emphasis, the literature largely assumes the existence of supportive institutional ecosystems. Most studies investigate inclusive teacher development in contexts where professional learning is facilitated through government-funded training, established special education services, university partnerships, or stable institutional support. Consequently, teacher professional development is commonly conceptualized as a systemic responsibility supported by coherent educational policies (Ahmed dkk., 2022). This assumption overlooks many educational settings in the Global South where schools are expected to implement inclusive education despite fragmented policy implementation, limited financial support, and scarce professional resources (Mulholland & O'Connor, 2016).

This institutional contradiction is particularly visible in Indonesian Raudatul Athfal (RA), Islamic early childhood institutions administered by the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Pratiwi, 2024). Although RA formally belongs to the national education system, virtually all institutions operate under private foundations, making their organizational sustainability highly dependent on local leadership, foundation capacity, and community support. Teacher recruitment, professional development, specialist consultation, and inclusive learning resources therefore become organizational responsibilities. As a result, implementing inclusive education in RA requires school leaders not only to manage teachers but also to continuously construct professional capacity within severe institutional constraints (Pratiwi, Yarliani, dkk., 2024).

These organizational challenges are further intensified by socio-cultural barriers surrounding children with disabilities. Field evidence from South Kalimantan demonstrates that many families initially refuse to enrol children with disabilities in early childhood institutions because disability is interpreted through competing cultural narratives. Some parents remain in denial regarding developmental conditions, others regard disability as a sacred destiny that should not be medically or educationally intervened, while some perceive disability as a source of family shame requiring concealment from public view. Limited knowledge of disability, inadequate parenting competence, and concerns about social stigma collectively reduce families' willingness to seek early educational intervention. Before the promotion of Banjarbaru as an Inclusive City, community outreach regarding inclusive education remained highly limited, requiring schools themselves to conduct door-to-door advocacy, community campaigns, and extensive parental engagement simply to ensure children could access educational services (Pratiwi, Riwanda, dkk., 2024).

The municipal government's subsequent declaration of Banjarbaru as an Inclusive City substantially improved public awareness and strengthened policy discourse surrounding educational inclusion. However, increased policy commitment did not automatically resolve the organizational realities experienced by private RA institutions. While community acceptance gradually improved, schools continued to confront shortages of qualified inclusive teachers, limited access to specialized professional development, inadequate funding for continuous training, and difficulties sustaining experienced teachers. This illustrates a critical implementation gap: inclusive policy may expand access, yet the organizational capacity required to sustain teacher professionalism remains largely dependent on school-level leadership (Pratiwi dkk., 2025).

Recent international studies consistently identify teacher efficacy, collaborative professionalism, instructional coaching, and leadership support as key determinants of successful

inclusive education (Ackah-Jnr, 2022b; Chiner & Cardona, 2013). Nevertheless, these studies predominantly examine teacher attitudes, competency frameworks, or professional learning communities, while giving limited attention to how school leaders strategically construct teacher capacity under conditions of institutional scarcity, particularly within faith-based early childhood institutions in low-resource settings (Kurniawati, 2021). Even fewer studies examine how professional development simultaneously addresses organizational constraints and socio-cultural resistance from families toward disability.

This study addresses these gaps by investigating how the pioneering inclusive RA in South Kalimantan strategically recruits, empowers, develops, and sustains inclusive teachers within a context characterized by limited governmental support, socio-cultural stigma surrounding disability, and increasing policy expectations for educational inclusion. This study examines:

1. How do school leaders strategically recruit, empower, and develop teachers to build an inclusive professional learning ecosystem in a private Islamic early childhood education setting?
2. How does this professional learning ecosystem shape teachers' capacity to sustain inclusive educational practice amid institutional scarcity and socio-cultural resistance?

By doing so, the study extends current discussions on inclusive teacher development beyond competency acquisition toward a more contextual understanding of how organizational leadership enables inclusive professionalism under persistent institutional constraints.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative single-case study design to investigate how an inclusive Islamic early childhood institution strategically manages teacher empowerment and professional development under conditions of institutional resource constraints. A case study was considered appropriate because the research sought to understand a contemporary organizational phenomenon within its real-life context, where the boundaries between school management, professional learning, and inclusive educational practice were inseparable (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This study focused on the organizational processes through which school leadership recruited, developed, supervised, and sustained inclusive teachers.

RA Ulumul Qur'an Al-Madani in Banjarbaru, South Kalimantan, Indonesia, was purposively selected as the research site because it represents the first Raudatul Athfal officially designated as a pilot inclusive school under the Regional Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of South Kalimantan since 2017. As a private Islamic early childhood institution operating under a foundation, the school provides a unique case for examining how inclusive teacher capacity is developed despite limited institutional support. Its long-standing implementation of inclusive education, established professional networks with psychologists and medical experts, and recognition as a regional reference school make it an information-rich case for investigating strategic teacher management.

Participants

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to capture multiple perspectives involved in teacher management and professional learning. Twenty-eight participants participated in this study, consisting of the principal, inclusive education coordinator, foundation committee chairperson, administrative staff, classroom teachers, special education teachers, psychologists, and parents of children with special needs. This diversity enabled triangulation across managerial, instructional, professional, and family perspectives regarding teacher empowerment and inclusive educational practice.

The principal participated in seven interview sessions, while the inclusive education coordinator participated in eight sessions because they were directly responsible for designing and implementing teacher management policies. Classroom teachers and special education teachers

each participated in approximately four interview sessions, whereas experts and parents participated in two interview sessions. Interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and were conducted between 10 August and 27 September 2024.

Data Collection

Data were collected through three complementary techniques: semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews explored participants' experiences regarding teacher recruitment, professional learning, supervision, collaborative practices, and organizational challenges in sustaining inclusive education. Interviews were conducted repeatedly with key informants to obtain rich descriptions of evolving organizational processes.

Non-participant observations focused on teacher professional development activities, classroom practices, supervisory meetings, collaborative discussions, inclusive instructional practices, and interactions among teachers, school leaders, specialists, and parents. Field notes documented leadership practices, organizational culture, and professional learning processes occurring naturally within the school.

Document analysis complemented interview and observational data by examining teacher recruitment procedures, school policies, supervision records, teacher development programs, training certificates, organizational documents, Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), curriculum documents, meeting minutes, and other documents related to teacher management and inclusive education. These multiple sources strengthened the credibility of findings through methodological triangulation.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. During data condensation, interview transcripts, observation notes, and organizational documents were coded inductively to identify recurring patterns related to teacher recruitment, professional development, supervision, collaborative learning, and workforce sustainability. Initial codes were continuously compared across data sources before being synthesized into broader categories and higher-order themes (Miles dkk., 2018).

The data display stage involved constructing thematic matrices to examine relationships among leadership practices, teacher empowerment strategies, and organizational conditions. Constant comparison across interviews, observations, and documents enabled refinement of emerging themes and identification of convergent and divergent evidence. Finally, conclusions were developed through iterative interpretation of the relationships among themes, leading to a conceptual understanding of how strategic teacher management supported inclusive professional practice under institutional constraints.

Trustworthiness

The study employed several strategies to enhance trustworthiness. Credibility was established through prolonged engagement in the research site, repeated interviews with key participants, triangulation of interviews, observations, and document analysis, and member checking to confirm the accuracy of interview interpretations. Dependability was supported through detailed documentation of research procedures and coding decisions. Confirmability was strengthened by maintaining an audit trail of field notes, analytic memos, and coding development throughout the analysis process. Transferability was facilitated through thick descriptions of the institutional context, participant characteristics, and organizational processes, enabling readers to assess the applicability of findings to similar inclusive education settings.

FINDINGS

BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ECOSYSTEM THROUGH STRATEGIC TEACHER MANAGEMENT

School leaders strategically built an inclusive professional learning ecosystem through a sequential and mutually reinforcing pattern of teacher management. Recruitment, professional development, supervision, and retention were integrated into a coherent organizational strategy that progressively strengthened teachers' professional capacity. The pattern began with values-based recruitment to ensure alignment with the school's inclusive mission, followed by continuous professional learning that expanded teachers' knowledge and expertise through mentoring, expert collaboration, and organizational learning. This capacity was further consolidated through developmental supervision, where reflective dialogue and collaborative problem-solving transformed performance management into a mechanism for continuous professional growth. Finally, professional capacity was sustained through systematic knowledge regeneration, enabling the organization to preserve and reproduce expertise despite teacher turnover and institutional resource constraints.

A cross-cutting pattern emerging across all themes is the institutional paradox surrounding inclusive education governance. While national and local governments have increasingly promoted inclusive education through regulatory frameworks and policy commitments, the findings indicate that the responsibility for building teacher capacity has remained largely devolved to individual schools. In the case of RA Ulumul Qur'an Al-Madani, strategic recruitment, professional learning, expert networking, developmental supervision, and knowledge regeneration were initiated and financed primarily through school-level efforts rather than systematic governmental support. Consequently, the sustainability of inclusive education depended less on institutionalized capacity-building systems than on the personal vision, commitment, and professional networks of the school principal. Although such leadership enabled the school to overcome severe resource constraints, this leadership-dependent model raises important concerns regarding scalability and sustainability. Schools led by principals with weaker commitment, limited professional networks, or fewer organizational resources may struggle to replicate similar practices, suggesting that inclusive education policies remain vulnerable to unequal implementation when teacher professional development is not supported through coherent and sustained institutional investment.

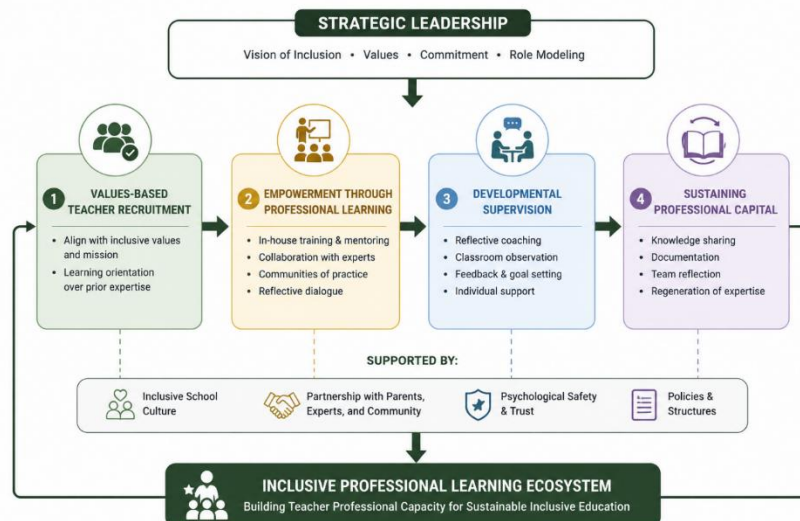


Figure 1.
Strategic Teacher Management for Building an Inclusive Professional Learning Ecosystem

Strategic Recruitment Through Values-Based Selection

RA Ulumul Qur'an Al-Madani strategically selected individuals whose personal values aligned with the school's inclusive mission. Recruitment was therefore designed to identify educators who were willing to continuously learn, collaborate, and embrace children with diverse developmental needs.

The principal consistently emphasized that inclusive teaching begins with teachers' dispositions. "The most important quality of a teacher is the willingness to keep learning and to be open to criticism. Knowledge can always be developed, but the willingness to learn must already exist." (Principal)

However, this philosophy was also echoed by teachers themselves. One classroom teacher explained that joining the school required a significant shift in professional identity because inclusive education demanded continuous learning beyond initial teacher education. "When I first came here, I realized that teaching children with special needs could not rely on what I had learned in college. We have to keep learning from psychologists, therapists, and senior teachers." (Classroom teacher)

Similarly, a special education teacher described recruitment not as the end of the hiring process but as the beginning of an intensive learning journey. "Nobody is considered fully prepared when they first arrive. The school expects us to keep improving because every child is different." (Special education teacher)

The inclusive education coordinator confirmed that willingness to learn was deliberately prioritized over previous experience because professional competence could be systematically developed after recruitment. "We can teach teachers technical skills, but it is much harder to change their attitudes toward children. Therefore, openness and commitment become the first considerations." (Inclusive education coordinator)

Professional experts also reinforced this organizational strategy. A consulting psychologist explained that teachers who demonstrated reflective attitudes adapted more quickly to individualized intervention than those relying solely on prior pedagogical knowledge. "Teachers who are willing to reflect and ask questions usually develop much faster in inclusive classrooms than teachers who believe they already know everything." (Educational psychologist)

These interview accounts were consistent with observational evidence. During recruitment activities, the research team observed that candidates were invited to discuss authentic cases involving children with disabilities. Discussions focused on empathy, problem-solving, collaboration with families, and responses to challenging classroom situations. Administrative documents further confirmed that recruitment combined administrative screening, psychological testing, interviews, and microteaching while intentionally attracting applicants from diverse disciplinary backgrounds, including early childhood education, psychology, primary education, and special education.

These findings indicate that recruitment functioned as a strategic mechanism for achieving person–organization fit, ensuring that newly recruited teachers shared the school's inclusive values before entering subsequent professional development. The organization strategically invested in individuals demonstrating high developmental potential. This recruitment strategy also represents the initial stage of professional capital formation. The school did not assume that professional expertise existed before employment. Instead, it deliberately recruited teachers with strong learning dispositions, enabling the systematic development of human capital, social capital, and decisional capital through later organizational learning processes.

Leadership-Driven Professional Learning as a Strategic Investment in Inclusive Human Resources

The school leadership perceive teacher professional development as a long-term organizational strategy for building an inclusive workforce. Rather than waiting for government

support, the school deliberately mobilized its own financial, professional, and social resources to ensure that teachers continuously expanded their competence in inclusive education.

The principal explained that professional development became an institutional priority because opportunities for formal training in inclusive early childhood education were limited. Consequently, the school independently organized professional learning by inviting nationally recognized experts and financing teachers' participation in various capacity-building activities. "I frequently organize in-house training using our own funds. We invite experts from outside the city, such as Dr. Tri Gunadi, so that our teachers develop knowledge that is above the average in supporting children with special needs. I also collaborate with Professor Andremeza, who works on child brain development." (Principal)

The principal further described that her own professional journey became the foundation for organizational learning. She transformed them into institutional assets that could be accessed by all teachers. "Mrs. Ane Gracia became my mentor in Jakarta. I learned from her through continuous discussions. Today, those networks have become learning resources for our teachers as well." (Principal)

This leadership commitment was consistently confirmed by teachers. Classroom teachers described professional learning as a continuous process embedded in their daily work. One teacher explained that each training session was followed by collaborative reflection and classroom experimentation. "Every training gives us new ideas, but what is most valuable is discussing together how those ideas can actually work with our children in the classroom." (Classroom teacher).

Similarly, a special education teacher emphasized that learning occurred through close interaction with experts, senior colleagues, and multidisciplinary professionals. "We learn directly from psychologists, therapists, and experienced teachers. Each child teaches us something different, so learning never really stops." (Special education teacher).

The inclusive education coordinator also explained that professional development was intentionally designed as a continuous organizational process. "Whenever teachers return from external training, they are expected to share what they have learned with other teachers. In that way, one person's learning becomes the learning of the whole school." (Inclusive Education Coordinator).

Observational evidence reinforced these accounts. During field observations, teachers regularly participated in in-house training, collaborative case discussions, lesson reflections, and multidisciplinary consultations involving psychologists and medical professionals. These activities formed recurring organizational routines that supported continuous professional learning. Documentary evidence further confirmed that teachers were systematically involved in professional development programs organized by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Ministry of Education, local government agencies, NGOs, and internally organized in-house training. Training records also showed the provision of reference books, benchmarking visits, and mentoring activities to strengthen teachers' competence in inclusive education.

These findings demonstrate that professional development functioned as a strategic human resource investment. Instead of depending on externally provided capacity-building programs, the school proactively developed internal learning systems by integrating external expertise, professional networking, and collaborative knowledge sharing into its human resource strategy. This reflects Strategic Human Resource Management's emphasis on aligning employee development with long-term organizational objectives. The professional learning ecosystem primarily strengthened human capital by expanding teachers' pedagogical knowledge and inclusive instructional competence. More importantly, the organizational design transformed individual learning into collective organizational capability. External experts, multidisciplinary collaboration, and internal knowledge-sharing practices also generated social capital, enabling teachers to access professional expertise beyond their individual experience. Consequently, teacher competence evolved through sustained interaction within a professional community.

Developmental Supervision as Reflective Performance Management

Teacher supervision at RA Ulumul Qur'an Al-Madani extended beyond monitoring instructional compliance to function as a continuous mechanism for professional growth. School leaders positioned supervision as a reflective dialogue that enabled teachers to critically examine their instructional practices, discuss challenges, and collaboratively improve inclusive learning.

The principal emphasized that the primary purpose of supervision was not to identify teachers' shortcomings but to facilitate continuous professional transformation. "The main purpose of supervision is to transform teachers' quality so they continue to become better educators." (Principal)

She further explained that supervision was intentionally designed to strengthen teachers' professional judgement. "Teachers are encouraged to identify the difficulties they encounter, discuss them together, and continuously improve their teaching based on suggestions and constructive feedback." (Principal)

Teachers consistently described supervision as an opportunity for learning. One classroom teacher explained that supervisory meetings enabled teachers to openly discuss classroom challenges without fear of being judged. "Supervision here is not about looking for mistakes. It is a space where we can explain the difficulties we face, receive suggestions, and find solutions together." (Classroom teacher)

Another teacher emphasized that reflective discussions after classroom observations often generated practical strategies that could immediately be implemented with children who had diverse learning needs. "Sometimes we think a strategy is effective, but after discussing it together we realize there are better ways to support the child. Those discussions really help us improve." (Classroom teacher)

The inclusive education coordinator similarly described supervision as a collaborative learning forum that connected teachers, school leaders, psychologists, and special education teachers. "When teachers experience difficulties, we discuss the child's progress together. Everyone contributes ideas until we agree on the most appropriate intervention." (Inclusive Education Coordinator)

A special education teacher reinforced this perspective by explaining that supervisory discussions frequently involved multidisciplinary perspectives. "Many solutions come from discussions with psychologists and classroom teachers because every child requires different approaches." (Special Education Teacher)

Observational evidence supported these interview accounts. Classroom observations and supervisory meetings revealed that teachers actively discussed instructional adaptations, assessment results, behavioural interventions, and curriculum modifications. The principal facilitated reflective conversations in which teachers analysed classroom experiences and collaboratively identified possible improvements. Documentary evidence further demonstrated that supervision was conducted regularly and pursued broader developmental objectives, including strengthening teachers' understanding of educational goals, improving diagnostic competence, fostering democratic and cooperative working relationships, encouraging reflective evaluation, and enhancing communication and collegiality among teachers. These findings illustrate a development-oriented performance management system. Performance appraisal was not employed primarily as an accountability mechanism but as a strategic process for strengthening teacher capability through coaching, constructive feedback, and continuous professional support. This developmental orientation aligned teacher performance management with the school's broader objective of sustaining high-quality inclusive education. Developmental supervision strengthened both social capital and decisional capital. Reflective dialogue enabled teachers to access collective expertise distributed across school leaders, colleagues, psychologists, and special education teachers, thereby expanding social capital. Simultaneously, collaborative analysis of assessment data, individualized learning plans, and classroom interventions enhanced teachers'

decisional capital by improving their capacity to make informed pedagogical decisions in increasingly complex inclusive classrooms.

Sustaining Professional Capital under Institutional Constraints

Although the school invested extensively in recruiting and developing inclusive teachers, maintaining this professional capacity emerged as one of its greatest managerial challenges. School leaders continuously redesigned organizational learning processes to ensure that professional expertise remained embedded within the institution despite the departure of experienced personnel.

The principal acknowledged that the school had repeatedly lost teachers after investing substantial time and resources in their professional development. Many teachers eventually left to pursue more secure employment as government-employed special education teachers. “Eight teachers whom we had prepared and trained from the beginning eventually resigned because they were accepted as civil servant teachers in special schools.” (Principal)

The principal described them as an unavoidable consequence of operating as a private Islamic early childhood institution with limited financial competitiveness. “I understood that every teacher has their own dreams and life goals. If they were forced to stay, they would not be able to perform optimally.” (Principal)

Teachers likewise recognized that working in an inclusive private RA demanded continuous commitment despite limited institutional resources. One classroom teacher explained that professional development at the school often exceeded what was formally required, yet teachers remained motivated because they perceived meaningful opportunities for learning. “We know that working here requires much more learning than in ordinary schools, but we also receive opportunities that we might not find elsewhere.” (Classroom teacher)

The inclusive education coordinator emphasized that organizational sustainability depended not on retaining every individual teacher but on continuously regenerating professional competence across the teaching workforce. “Whenever new teachers join, experienced teachers immediately accompany them. Knowledge should not remain with only one person because the school must continue regardless of who stays or leaves.” (Inclusive Education Coordinator)

The principal also explained that organizational conditions gradually improved after Banjarbaru declared itself an Inclusive City. Increased public awareness of inclusive education and the relocation of the Special Education Department of Lambung Mangkurat University to Banjarbaru substantially expanded the pool of qualified applicants. “Since the Special Education program moved to Banjarbaru, recruitment has become much easier. When we advertised for special education teachers, fifteen applicants immediately applied, even though we only needed seven or eight.” (Principal)

Observational data supported these accounts. New teachers were consistently paired with experienced colleagues, participated in mentoring activities, attended in-house training, and were gradually introduced to individualized assessment, curriculum adaptation, and collaborative intervention planning. Professional learning occurred through continuous participation in everyday organizational practices. Documentary evidence further demonstrated that the school systematically invested in teacher regeneration through ongoing recruitment, professional training, reference materials, benchmarking visits, and collaboration with external experts despite operating under the financial limitations typical of private Raudatul Athfal institutions.

These findings illustrate that workforce sustainability depended less on maximizing employee retention than on developing organizational capability to continuously reproduce professional expertise. The school’s strategic response combined proactive recruitment, systematic induction, mentoring, and continuous professional learning to minimize the organizational impact of staff turnover. This reflects a dynamic approach to human resource sustainability in which organizational resilience is achieved through capability renewal.

Teacher turnover represented the potential loss of accumulated human capital, social capital, and decisional capital. However, The school deliberately institutionalized collaborative learning, mentoring, and shared professional routines so that professional capital became embedded within organizational practices. Consequently, professional knowledge remained a collective organizational resource.

Interview, observational, and documentary evidence consistently demonstrate that sustaining inclusive education required more than retaining experienced teachers. Instead, school leadership strategically transformed professional expertise into an organizational asset through continuous regeneration, collaborative mentoring, and institutionalized learning processes. This enabled the school to maintain inclusive educational quality despite persistent institutional constraints, workforce mobility, and the competitive attraction of public-sector employment.

ENACTING INCLUSIVE PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE THROUGH A STRATEGIC PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ECOSYSTEM

The inclusive professional learning ecosystem developed by the school was translated into a progressive pattern of teachers' professional enactment despite institutional scarcity and persistent socio-cultural resistance. The ecosystem strengthened their capacity to exercise professional judgment in responding to diverse learning needs, extend professional practice through multidisciplinary collaboration, and expand their roles beyond the classroom by transforming parental and community perceptions of disability. These three dimensions formed a sequential and mutually reinforcing pattern in which individualized pedagogical decision-making enabled collaborative professional practice, while sustained collaboration further empowered teachers to promote broader social acceptance of inclusive education. The findings demonstrate that the professional learning ecosystem functioned not only as a mechanism for developing teacher competence but also as a strategic organizational capability that sustained inclusive educational practice under complex institutional and socio-cultural conditions.

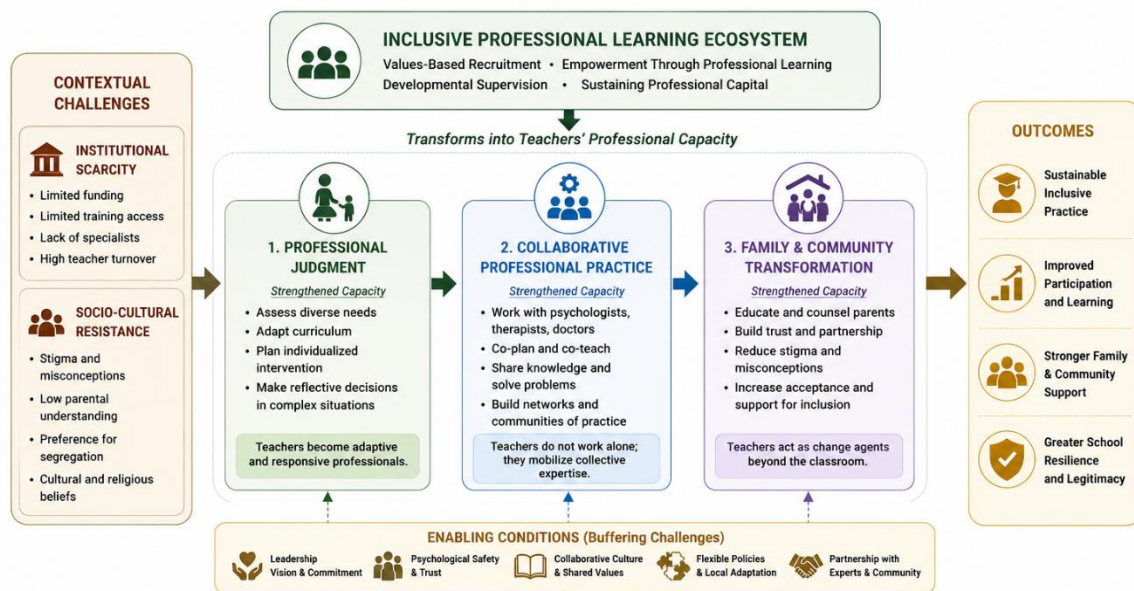


Figure 2.

Teachers' Professional Capacity Enactment for Sustaining Inclusive Educational Practice

Enacting Professional Judgment Through Individualized Inclusive Pedagogy

The professional learning ecosystem established by the school enabled teachers to move beyond standardized instruction and exercise professional judgment in designing individualized educational responses for children with diverse developmental needs. Teachers continuously

interpreted assessment evidence, negotiated intervention strategies, and adapted curriculum decisions according to each child's developmental profile.

The inclusive education coordinator explained that individualized decision-making began with a comprehensive assessment process. Every child underwent an initial assessment, while children with identified disabilities received additional multidisciplinary assessments involving psychologists or medical professionals before educational planning was developed. "The assessment is conducted in two stages. First, children undergo medical or psychological assessment by specialists. After that, we assess their learning needs to determine the most appropriate educational support." (Inclusive Education Coordinator)

A special education teacher further emphasized that assessment did not conclude with diagnosis but became the foundation for continuous pedagogical decision-making. "If a child already has a previous diagnosis, we conduct another assessment because we need to understand the child's current learning needs. The results are then used to prepare individual intervention programs, collaborate with therapists, conduct home visits, or provide guidance for parents." (Special Education Teacher)

The principal similarly described curriculum adaptation as an ongoing professional decision. "The needs of children, especially those with special needs, become our main consideration when modifying or substituting the curriculum. We adjust the content, teaching methods, assessment, and learning media so that every child receives the most appropriate stimulation." (Principal)

Teachers consistently confirmed that individualized instruction required continuous pedagogical judgement. One classroom teacher explained that lesson plans frequently changed because children's developmental progress differed substantially from initial expectations. "Sometimes what we planned in the morning has to be changed during the lesson because the child responds differently. We have to observe continuously and adjust our teaching immediately." (Classroom Teacher)

Another teacher emphasized that individualized planning required balancing curriculum expectations with children's actual developmental readiness. "We cannot simply follow the curriculum page by page. Every child develops differently, so our responsibility is to decide what learning is most meaningful for each child." (Classroom Teacher)

Observational data strongly supported these interview accounts. Classroom observations showed teachers continuously adapting instructional activities, modifying learning media, simplifying tasks, adjusting assessment procedures, and providing different levels of assistance according to children's developmental characteristics. These adjustments were discussed regularly during monthly curriculum meetings, where teachers collectively reviewed children's progress, evaluated instructional barriers, and proposed further curriculum modifications. Documentary analysis similarly demonstrated that individualized educational planning was systematically embedded within curriculum documents through curriculum modification, substitution, individualized education programs (IEPs), differentiated assessment procedures, and periodic curriculum review meetings.

These findings illustrate the enactment of decisional capital. Teachers exercised increasingly sophisticated professional judgement by integrating diagnostic evidence, classroom observations, multidisciplinary recommendations, and knowledge of children's developmental trajectories into pedagogical decision-making. Professional expertise therefore emerged not from strict adherence to standardized procedures but from teachers' capacity to make context-sensitive educational decisions under conditions of uncertainty. These findings also demonstrate how investments in recruitment, professional learning, and developmental supervision were translated into organizational capability. Human resource development did not terminate with enhanced teacher competence; instead, it enabled teachers to enact discretionary professional judgement that directly supported the school's strategic objective of providing individualized inclusive education. In this sense, professional judgement became the operational manifestation of the school's human resource strategy.

Extending Professional Practice Through Collaborative Networks

Teachers' professional practice extended beyond classroom instruction through sustained collaboration with families, psychologists, therapists, medical professionals, and community organizations. The school positioned collaboration as a core professional practice through which teachers collectively interpreted children's needs, coordinated interventions, and ensured continuity of learning across school and home environments.

The principal emphasized that inclusive education could not be achieved solely through classroom instruction because children's developmental progress depended on consistent intervention across multiple environments. Consequently, teachers were expected to work closely with families and external specialists throughout the educational process. "Early intervention and continuous collaboration with families determine children's future independence. If intervention only happens at school without continuity at home, the possibility of failure becomes very high." (Principal)

The inclusive education coordinator similarly explained that collaboration began immediately after assessment. Assessment findings were not retained as school documents but became the basis for collective planning involving teachers, psychologists, therapists, and parents.

"Assessment results are discussed with parents and become the basis for follow-up programs, including individual counselling, collaboration with external therapy institutions, home visits, and individualized educational planning." (Inclusive Education Coordinator)

Special education teachers described collaboration as an everyday professional responsibility. "When children experience difficulties, we never solve them alone. We discuss them with classroom teachers, psychologists, and parents because every perspective helps us understand the child better." (Special Education Teacher)

A classroom teacher also highlighted that parental involvement fundamentally influenced instructional decisions made at school. "Many of our classroom decisions depend on information from parents. Sometimes children's behaviour at home explains what we observe at school, so communication becomes very important." (Classroom Teacher)

Parents confirmed that this collaborative relationship gradually transformed their understanding of disability. Initially, many struggled to accept their children's conditions and experienced strong social stigma. However, regular consultations and collaborative discussions with teachers changed both their perspectives and parenting practices. "At first it was very difficult for us to accept that our child was different. We often received negative comments from people around us. Through consultations and discussions with teachers and therapists, we gradually realized that our child deserved the same love, opportunities, and education as any other child." (Parent of a Child with Special Needs)

Observational evidence consistently reinforced these interview accounts. Teachers regularly participated in multidisciplinary case discussions, coordinated intervention plans with psychologists, maintained communication with parents through scheduled parenting programs and WhatsApp groups, and conducted home visits when additional support was required. Teachers routinely negotiated instructional adjustments based on information obtained from families and external professionals. Documentary evidence further confirmed formal collaboration with clinical psychologists, educational psychologists, school counsellors, special education coordinators, government agencies, school committees, and parent associations as part of the school's inclusive service system.

These findings demonstrate the enactment of social capital. Teachers' expertise did not reside solely in their individual knowledge but was continuously strengthened through reciprocal relationships with colleagues, specialists, and families. Collaborative interactions expanded teachers' access to diverse forms of expertise, enabling more comprehensive educational decisions than could be achieved through individual practice alone. Professional knowledge therefore became a distributed organizational resource.

These collaborative practices illustrate how the school's human resource strategy extended beyond internal workforce management. The professional learning ecosystem established through recruitment, capacity building, and developmental supervision enabled teachers to mobilize external professional networks as strategic organizational resources. Consequently, collaboration functioned not merely as interpersonal cooperation but as an organizational capability that enhanced service quality despite limited institutional resources.

Expanding Professional Responsibility Through Family and Community Transformation

Teachers' professional responsibilities extended well beyond classroom instruction to include transforming parental understanding of disability and promoting broader community acceptance of inclusive education. Teachers became advocates, counsellors, and facilitators who helped families reconstruct their beliefs about disability and actively participate in their children's educational development.

The principal explained that one of the greatest barriers to inclusive education was not the children's disabilities themselves but the social meanings attached to disability within the community. Many parents initially refused to enrol their children because disability was associated with shame, fate, or social embarrassment. "In the past, parents did not want to send their children with special needs to school because they felt ashamed, believed it was simply destiny, or doubted that schools could serve their children. Some neighbourhood leaders were even reluctant to provide data about children with disabilities because they felt embarrassed." (Principal)

Recognizing these barriers, teachers participated in extensive community outreach. According to the principal, teachers collaborated with neighbourhood leaders, early childhood teacher associations, and community organizations to introduce inclusive education through home visits, seminars, and public awareness campaigns. "We visited families from house to house, collaborated with community leaders, organized seminars, and even waived school fees for families who could not afford them. At that time, government support was still very limited." (Principal)

Teachers described parental engagement as an ongoing educational process. One classroom teacher explained that regular parenting sessions frequently addressed parents' emotional acceptance before discussing children's academic development. "Sometimes the first thing we need to do is help parents accept their child's condition. Only after that can we talk about learning and intervention." (Classroom Teacher)

A special education teacher similarly emphasized that teachers often functioned as counsellors who guided parents in understanding children's developmental characteristics and planning appropriate home-based interventions. "Parents often ask whether they have done something wrong. We try to reassure them and explain that what matters now is how we work together to support the child." (Special Education Teacher)

These perspectives were strongly corroborated by parents themselves. One parent described how regular consultations and discussions with teachers fundamentally changed the family's perception of disability. "At first, it was difficult for us to accept that our child was different. We often experienced negative responses from people around us, which led us to reject our child's condition. Through consultations and discussions with teachers and therapists, our perspective gradually changed. We came to realize that our child deserves the same love, care, and educational opportunities as every other child." (Parent of a Child with Special Needs)

Observational evidence further demonstrated that teachers routinely organized parenting programmes every two months, facilitated individual consultations, maintained continuous communication through WhatsApp groups, and monitored the implementation of home-based interventions. These activities functioned as spaces where teachers and parents jointly interpreted children's developmental progress, discussed intervention strategies, and negotiated educational goals. Documentary evidence similarly showed that the school institutionalized parental participation through parenting programmes, parent committees, home visits, and collaborative curriculum discussions, thereby positioning families as active partners in inclusive education.

These findings illustrate an expansion of social capital beyond professional relationships within the school. Teachers mobilized trust, reciprocal communication, and shared responsibility with families and community members, transforming collaboration into a broader social resource that supported children's educational participation. Professional expertise therefore extended beyond pedagogical competence to include the capacity to reshape relationships between schools, families, and communities. These findings demonstrate that investments in teacher recruitment, professional learning, and developmental supervision generated organizational capabilities that reached beyond internal school operations. Teachers became strategic actors who enhanced the school's external legitimacy by increasing community acceptance of inclusive education, strengthening family engagement, and expanding access for children who had previously been excluded from educational services. Thus, the value of strategic human resource management extended beyond improving workforce performance to strengthening the organization's social capacity to sustain inclusive education.

DISCUSSION

This study demonstrates that effective teacher management in inclusive early childhood education extends beyond conventional human resource functions toward the strategic construction of professional capacity under conditions of institutional scarcity. While Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) traditionally emphasizes the alignment of recruitment, development, performance management, and retention with organizational objectives (Bailey dkk., 2018), our findings reveal that these functions require substantial adaptation within private Islamic early childhood institutions operating with limited governmental support. RA Ulumul Qur'an Al-Madani developed an integrated human resource strategy in which values-based recruitment, continuous professional learning, developmental supervision, and knowledge regeneration collectively compensated for structural resource limitations. These findings suggest that SHRM in inclusive education should not be conceptualized merely as the optimization of existing human resources but as the organizational capability to continuously create, mobilize, and sustain professional expertise in resource-constrained settings (Slee, 2018; Soekotjo dkk., 2025).

One of the most significant findings concerns the centrality of values-based recruitment as the foundation of inclusive teacher management. Conventional SHRM literature generally emphasizes the importance of person-organization fit in improving employee performance and organizational commitment (Su dkk., 2018). However, our findings indicate that, within inclusive education, alignment with organizational values precedes technical competence. Teachers were recruited primarily because of their willingness to learn, openness to reflection, and commitment to children with diverse developmental needs, while pedagogical expertise was intentionally developed after recruitment. This finding resonates with recent international studies suggesting that teachers' beliefs, ethical commitment, and learning orientation are stronger predictors of successful inclusive practice than prior technical qualifications alone (Manuel dkk., 2026; Savolainen dkk., 2022). Nevertheless, our findings extend this literature by demonstrating that values-based recruitment functions not simply as a staffing strategy but as the first stage in constructing professional capacity. In contexts where qualified inclusive teachers remain scarce, selecting individuals with high developmental potential becomes a more sustainable organizational strategy than attempting to recruit already fully qualified specialists (Castro, 2022).

The findings further challenge the dominant conceptualization of professional development as participation in discrete training programmes. International literature consistently recognizes professional learning as essential for inclusive education, yet many studies continue to evaluate professional development primarily through the frequency of workshops or teachers' self-reported competency gains (Donath dkk., 2023; Tveitnes dkk., 2026). In contrast, this study demonstrates that sustainable teacher development emerged from an integrated professional learning ecosystem combining mentoring, multidisciplinary collaboration, in-house training, reflective dialogue, external professional networks, and continuous knowledge sharing. Leadership therefore

functioned not simply as an administrative mechanism for allocating training opportunities but as a catalyst for organizational learning (Lundqvist dkk., 2023). This finding aligns with Professional Capital Theory (Hargreaves, 2012), which argues that professional expertise develops through the interaction of human, social, and decisional capital. However, our findings further suggest that school leaders play a pivotal role in transforming external expertise into organizational resources. By institutionalizing mentoring relationships with psychologists, medical professionals, universities, and inclusive education specialists, leadership effectively converted individual professional networks into collective organizational assets, thereby expanding the school's capacity despite limited formal institutional support.

Another important contribution concerns the enactment of professional capital within everyday pedagogical practice. Teachers continuously exercised professional judgment through assessment, curriculum adaptation, individualized educational planning, and collaborative intervention. These findings reinforce growing international discussions emphasizing adaptive expertise and teacher agency in inclusive education (Hendriksen dkk., 2024; Li & Ruppert, 2021). However, our findings indicate that professional judgment is not merely an individual cognitive capability but the cumulative outcome of organizational investments in recruitment, professional learning, and developmental supervision. In other words, decisional capital does not emerge spontaneously through teaching experience; instead, it is strategically cultivated through organizational systems that encourage reflective inquiry, multidisciplinary consultation, and collective problem-solving (Tong & Razniak, 2017). This finding strengthens Professional Capital Theory by demonstrating the organizational conditions under which decisional capital develops and becomes operational within inclusive classrooms.

Perhaps the most distinctive contribution of this study lies in demonstrating that professional capital extends beyond the boundaries of the school itself. Existing formulations of Professional Capital primarily conceptualize social capital as collaboration among educators within schools and professional communities (Chapman dkk., 2016; Nolan & Molla, 2017). Our findings reveal a broader configuration in which teachers mobilized professional expertise to transform parental understanding of disability, reduce community stigma, and strengthen family participation in inclusive education. Teachers therefore functioned not only as instructional professionals but also as brokers connecting educational institutions, families, healthcare professionals, and local communities (Caduff dkk., 2023; Epstein, 2018). This expanded role was particularly important within a sociocultural context where disability was frequently interpreted through denial, shame, or spiritual beliefs, all of which limited children's educational participation. By facilitating parenting programmes, home visits, counselling, and continuous dialogue, teachers contributed to reconstructing community perceptions of disability and increasing public acceptance of inclusive education (López-Azuaga & Suárez Riveiro, 2020). This suggests that professional capital should be understood not only as a resource that improves instructional quality but also as a mechanism through which schools generate broader institutional legitimacy and social trust.

These findings propose an extension of both SHRM and Professional Capital Theory. This study conceptualizes inclusive teacher management as a dynamic organizational process through which strategic recruitment, professional learning, developmental supervision, and knowledge regeneration progressively build professional capital that is subsequently enacted through professional judgment, collaborative practice, and family-community engagement. In resource-constrained inclusive schools, the ultimate outcome of strategic human resource management is therefore not simply improved teacher competence but the creation of an organizational capability capable of sustaining inclusive education despite institutional limitations (Ampofo dkk., 2026; Pazez dkk., 2026). This perspective contributes to contemporary discussions on inclusive educational leadership by demonstrating that sustainable inclusion depends not only on educational policy or financial resources but also on the strategic management of professional capital as an organizational asset.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the success of inclusive education in private Islamic early childhood institutions depends not merely on the availability of qualified teachers but on the strategic management of teacher professional capacity. The findings reveal a coherent developmental pattern in which values-based recruitment establishes the foundation for inclusive professionalism, leadership-driven professional learning systematically strengthens teachers' knowledge and skills, developmental supervision transforms performance management into reflective professional growth, and knowledge regeneration sustains organizational capacity despite workforce turnover. These strategic human resource management practices subsequently translate into three interrelated forms of professional enactment: teachers exercise professional judgment through individualized pedagogical decision-making, extend their expertise through multidisciplinary collaboration, and expand their professional responsibility by transforming parental and community perceptions of disability. Together, these findings illustrate that inclusive teacher management is not a linear sequence of human resource functions but a dynamic organizational process through which strategic leadership continuously converts limited institutional resources into sustainable professional capital.

Theoretically, this study extends Strategic Human Resource Management by demonstrating that, in resource-constrained inclusive schools, human resource strategy should be understood as the organizational capability to create and sustain professional capital. It also expands Professional Capital Theory by showing how human, social, and decisional capital are strategically cultivated through leadership and subsequently enacted beyond the classroom to strengthen family engagement and community acceptance of inclusion. Practically, the findings suggest that policymakers and school leaders should move beyond one-off teacher training and invest in integrated systems of values-based recruitment, continuous professional learning, developmental supervision, and collaborative partnerships with families and external professionals. Nevertheless, this study is limited by its single-case design within one pioneering inclusive Raudatul Athfal, which may restrict the transferability of findings to other educational contexts. Future research could employ comparative multiple-case studies across different regions, institutional types, and educational systems to examine how varying policy environments and organizational conditions shape the strategic management of inclusive teachers.

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