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Understanding Teachers' Attitudes Toward Inclusive Education Through Sentiment Analysis: A Case Study in Malang, Indonesia

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ABSTRAK

Meskipun peran guru dalam pendidikan inklusif sangat krusial, penelitian yang menggunakan analisis sentimen untuk memahami pengalaman mereka masih jarang dilakukan. Penelitian ini meneliti sikap dan praktik guru dalam mengelola kelas inklusif di SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Malang. Studi kasus kualitatif dilakukan dengan menggunakan data sekunder yang berasal dari hasil wawancara semi-terstruktur dalam penelitian sebelumnya, sehingga memberikan konteks tambahan tanpa perlu pengumpulan data baru. Analisis tematik digunakan untuk mengidentifikasi pola praktik inklusif, yang kemudian dilengkapi dengan analisis sentimen otomatis berbasis model *zero-shot* BART-MNLI untuk menelaah nada evaluatif guru. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa guru umumnya memiliki sikap positif terhadap pendidikan inklusif, mencerminkan empati, fleksibilitas, dan komitmen, meskipun terdapat pula sentimen negatif yang terkait dengan keterbatasan sistemik. Penelitian ini memberikan implikasi praktis bagi guru dan pembuat kebijakan, serta kontribusi metodologis melalui integrasi analisis tematik dan analisis sentimen.

ABSTRACT

While teachers' roles in inclusive education are critical, research employing sentiment analysis to understand their experiences remains underexplored. This study investigates teachers' attitudes and practices in managing inclusive classrooms at SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Malang. A qualitative case study was conducted using secondary data derived from previous semi-structured interview research, providing contextual insight without additional data collection. Thematic analysis was applied to identify recurring patterns of inclusive practices, complemented by automated sentiment analysis using a *zero-shot* BART-MNLI model to capture teachers' evaluative tone. The findings reveal generally positive attitudes toward inclusion, reflecting empathy, flexibility, and commitment, though negative sentiments were also expressed in relation to systemic limitations. The study offers practical implications for teachers and policymakers, while also contributing methodologically through the integration of thematic and sentiment analysis.



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Introduction

Inclusive education has increasingly been recognized as a global priority, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic, which underscored the urgent need for an education system

that can accommodate all learners (Ydo, 2020). Teachers, as direct actors in classroom practice, play a pivotal role in this process. When teachers hold positive attitudes, they are more likely to adapt their instructional strategies and create inclusive classroom environments. Conversely, negative or indifferent attitudes can hinder inclusion and perpetuate inequities (Singh et al., 2025). One essential aspect to prepare is the attitudes of prospective teachers toward teaching in inclusive classrooms. With proper preparation, these attitudes can develop positively, according to Majoko, 2016, as cited in (Putranto, 2024). Furthermore, the implementation of inclusive education in several regions has been supported by efforts to improve the quality of teachers and educational staff through Inclusive Teacher Working Groups (KKG) (Hafizh & Widyastono, 2020, as cited in Astuti 2023).

In Indonesia, inclusive education has been formally mandated through Permendiknas No. 7 of 2009, which requires schools to provide equitable opportunities for students with disabilities or social needs. However, research shows that the implementation of this policy varies across regions and still faces considerable challenges. For instance, in Padang, while inclusive education has been running for more than eight years, schools continue to experience shortages of special education teachers (GPK) and inadequate facilities, even though some basic infrastructure is already in place. Moreover, the fulfillment of rights for students with special needs has not been evenly distributed across schools (Warminda et al., 2022). Similarly, in Pekanbaru, certain schools have yet to conduct proper assessments for students with special needs or to provide sufficient resources, mainly due to financial constraints and incomplete medical or psychology documentation required for enrollment (Sakinah & Andry, 2024). In Surabaya, although schools attempt to adapt through collaboration and teacher creativity, major obstacles remain, including limited facilities, weak parental involvement, and negative societal perceptions toward children with disabilities (Pramudiana, 2017). These regional variations reflect differing capacities in implementing Permendiknas No. 7/2009, suggesting that while the policy provides a national framework, its realization remains uneven depending on local resources, school readiness, and community support. These challenges highlight the crucial role of teachers' competencies and attitudes in shaping inclusive practices.

Previous studies on inclusive education in Indonesia have mostly relied on literature reviews or survey-based approaches, indicating mixed teacher attitudes and structural challenges (Faujiyyah et al., 2025; Rini et al., 2024). International research has examined factors such as training, gender, and teaching context, as seen in India and Kosovo, where teacher background significantly influenced attitudes (Singh et al., 2025; Uka, 2025). However, within the Indonesian context, studies have rarely moved beyond descriptive surveys or policy reviews. As a result, teachers' lived experiences and the emotional valence of their attitudes remain largely unexplored. Addressing this gap, the present study introduces sentiment analysis as an underutilized yet powerful method in Indonesian educational research alongside thematic analysis.

Unlike surveys or interviews alone, sentiment analysis systematically captures the evaluative tone of teachers' perspectives, offering a deeper understanding of their affective orientations toward inclusion. It identifies polarity (positive, negative, or neutral) in

opinions (Aqlan et al., 2019) and has been increasingly applied in education to analyze student feedback and enhance teaching practices, supported by advances in AI-based sentiment annotation (Shaik et al., 2023). To address existing gaps in Indonesian research, this study re-analyses secondary data in the form of previously collected interview transcripts from Indonesian teachers, applying both thematic and sentiment analysis to examine their views on inclusive education. By combining qualitative and computational approaches, this study not only identifies key themes in teachers' accounts but also uncovers the evaluative stance underlying their perceptions.

The objectives of this study are: (1) to explore the main themes emerging from teacher interviews regarding inclusive education, and (2) to examine how positive, negative, and neutral sentiments are reflected in teachers' perspectives. This dual focus is expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of teachers' attitudes toward inclusion, offering both practical insights for policymakers and training programs, as well as methodological contributions to research on inclusive education. This is the first study in the Indonesian context that integrates thematic and sentiment analysis in examining teachers' perspectives.

Method

This study used a qualitative case study design to explore how teachers manage inclusive classroom practices at SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Malang. The case study method was selected because it provides a detailed and contextual understanding of real classroom experiences and the meanings teachers attach to them. The focus is on interpretive depth rather than representativeness or generalization, which aligns with the exploratory nature of this research.

The sample consisted of two teaching staff directly involved in the school's inclusive provision: one Social Studies (IPS) teacher and one Special Needs Assistant (GPK). They were selected purposively due to their continuous interaction with students with special needs in inclusive settings. The interviews were originally conducted in November 2023, each lasting around 30–40 minutes. Because the data were obtained from a previous project, this research functions as a secondary analysis. The limited number of participants does not aim to produce statistical generalization but to provide rich, contextual insights that reflect authentic classroom realities.

This study used secondary data derived from an earlier research project for which participant consent had been secured. All identifying information was removed prior to analysis and the data were handled anonymously. No direct contact was made with participants for the current study. Ethical review and data handling followed the institutional guidelines of the authors' affiliated universities.

This study reanalyzed secondary data consisting of semi-structured interview transcripts collected from the earlier mini project conducted in November 2023. All interviews were conducted in Indonesian and recorded with prior consent from participants. Each recording was transcribed verbatim and checked for accuracy. The interview protocol included questions on assessment, seating arrangements, student motivation, and support

strategies for students with special needs. Field notes and observation sheets from the earlier project were also reviewed to triangulate interpretations and strengthen data credibility.

After data preparation, analysis was conducted in two main stages: thematic analysis and sentiment analysis. The first stage of analysis was conducted manually via thematic coding. Thematic analysis followed the six-phase procedure: (1) familiarization with the data (reading and re-reading transcripts), (2) generation of initial codes, (3) searching for candidate themes, (4) reviewing and refining themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Coding was conducted iteratively and inductively: initial codes were created from the data, then grouped into broader themes that represented recurrent patterns of practice and perception. All coding decisions and theme definitions were documented in a codebook and an audit trail to enhance transparency.

This stage produced several main themes describing inclusive teaching practices and teachers' attitudes in classroom settings. The results of this thematic analysis formed the foundation for the next stage of analysis.

To complement the thematic findings, a sentiment analysis was performed using a zero-shot natural language inference (NLI) model, BART-MNLI. Each excerpt from the interview data was automatically classified into positive, neutral, or negative categories. Several alternative models were initially compared, but BART-MNLI was selected because it generated the most balanced and contextually consistent results for small qualitative datasets. The automated sentiment classification served to identify the emotional tone underlying teachers' reflections. Model outputs were reviewed and cross-checked qualitatively to ensure alignment with the thematic interpretations. This integration of thematic and sentiment analyses allowed both structural and affective dimensions of teachers' inclusive practices to be examined in one framework.

Analyses were performed using Python (version 3.12), pandas (version 2.2.0), and the HuggingFace Transformers library (version 4.41.0) in a Google Colab environment.

This study assumes that the secondary interview data reflect the participants' genuine experiences and attitudes at the time of data collection. Given the limited number of participants in a single school, the findings are not intended to be generalizable, but rather to provide rich, context-specific insights into teachers' practices and attitudes in inclusive classrooms.

Results and Discussions

The interviews were conducted with two staff members from the inclusive classroom: one Social Studies teacher as the Interviewee 1 and one Special Needs Assistant (GPK) as the Interviewee 2. Their perspectives provide complementary insights into how inclusive practices are implemented in the classroom. The data were analyzed thematically to explore support practices, assessment mechanisms, and social interactions of students with special needs. Five main themes emerged from the analysis: assessment mechanisms and differentiated tasks, seating arrangements and classroom environment, limits on the number of students with disabilities, support strategies and motivation, and monitoring of academic and social development. Each theme is presented with representative quotes from the interviews, followed by a discussion of the staff's sentiments and an interpretation of the

findings in relation to existing literature. The interviews were conducted with two staff members from the inclusive classroom: one Social Studies teacher as Interviewee 1 and one Special Needs Assistant (GPK) as Interviewee 2. Their perspectives provide complementary and, at times, contrasting insights into how inclusive practices are implemented in the classroom. The data were analyzed thematically to explore support practices, assessment mechanisms, and social interactions of students with special needs. Five main themes emerged from the analysis: assessment mechanisms and differentiated tasks, seating arrangements and classroom environment, limits on the number of students with disabilities, support strategies and motivation, and monitoring of academic and social development. Each theme is presented with representative quotes from both interviews, highlighting similarities and differences in the views of the two staff members. Sentiment analysis in this study is not presented as separate results, but directly integrated into each theme to reveal the evaluative stance behind practices and to illustrate how role responsibilities shape these perspectives. Sentiment analysis in this study is not presented as separate results, but directly integrated into each theme to reveal the evaluative stance behind practices.

Assessment Mechanisms and Differentiated Tasks

The findings reveal that assessment plays a central role in supporting students with special needs. Both interviewees highlighted the existence of differentiated tasks, with Interviewee 1 explaining that students are given either regular or adapted exam questions depending on their abilities. This aligns with (Tomlinson, 2014), who emphasizes that differentiation in assessment promotes active engagement and motivation. The quote, *“If the children can handle the regular tasks, they do them. If not, there are simpler tasks according to their abilities.”* (SDY), reflects a positive sentiment that underscores teachers’ commitment to accommodating diverse learning needs.

Meanwhile, Interviewee 2 pointed to the initial and ongoing assessment processes, including psychological tests, as the basis for determining whether a student could be enrolled and what kind of support was required. This quote, *“Before being accepted here, students undergo an initial assessment. This includes reading, writing, arithmetic, and emotional skills. There is also a psychological test to further assess the child's needs. Based on the results, a decision is made as to whether the student can enroll here or needs to be directed to another school that is more suitable. After enrollment, there are further tests to determine the appropriate class and support.”* (IRG), represents a neutral sentiment because it describes procedures rather than emotional or evaluative judgments.

The combination of sentiments here (positive from the teacher, neutral from assistant) illustrates how sentiment analysis adds depth. It shows that while the Social Studies teacher highlights a caring, adaptive stance toward student learning, the Special Needs Assistant approaches assessment more procedurally. This contrast enhances the thematic finding by revealing not just what assessment are done, but how educators feel about their role in them.

Seating Arrangements and Classroom Environment

The findings show that seating arrangements in inclusive classrooms are flexible and adjusted to each student's needs. Interviewee 1 explained that while inclusive students often sit at the back, some prefer sitting at the front depending on their condition. The statement, *"Usually, inclusive students sit at the back. But some are more comfortable sitting at the front, depending on their condition"* (SDY), shows a neutral sentiment because it describes a classroom practice rather than an opinion.

This flexibility shows that teachers understand how seating positions can affect students' learning experiences and social interactions. Previous studies found that the seating positions of students with disabilities often differ from their peers, which highlights the need for adjustment (Rahman et al., 2022; Sulistiawati & Prastowo, 2021, as cited in Ramadhan & Maryani, 2024). Seating arrangements can also influence academic performance by increasing on-task behavior and reducing distractions (Wannarka & Ruhl's, 2008, as cited in Berg & Stoltz, 2018).

The neutral sentiment here suggests that teachers see seating flexibility as a normal part of classroom management, not something emotional. However, when compared with research in other contexts, flexible arrangements are part of a more student-centered and inclusive approach, different from traditional setups that may isolate students (Saputra, 2025). By recognizing how seating positions influence learning, teachers can adapt their practices to encourage participation and inclusion.

Comparing perspectives, the Social Studies teacher described seating arrangements neutrally, showing that it feels routine. The Special Needs Assistant did not focus much on seating, showing that this part may not be their main concern. Sentiment analysis helps to show this difference, teachers see seating as part of general management, while assistants focus more on social or emotional support.

Limit on the Number of Students with Disabilities

The findings show that inclusive classrooms have a limit on the number of students with disabilities to keep a balance between student needs and teacher capacity. Interviewee 2 said, *"Usually, a maximum of five students with disabilities are allowed in a regular classroom. This is already a school rule to prevent having too many in one class"* (IRG). This expresses a negative sentiment because it sounds restrictive. In contrast, Interviewee 1 shared a more positive view: *"For example, in one grade, there are usually only one or two students with autism, no more, so they can still be properly managed"* (SDY). This reflects a positive sentiment, showing care and consideration for the students' needs.

Sentiment analysis helps reveal the difference behind these views. The same rule, a limit on students, can feel negative for one teacher but positive for another. Without sentiment analysis, this emotional contrast might not appear.

In Indonesia, some schools apply fixed numbers for students with special needs per class, while in other countries such as the United States, ratios are used instead. The 70/30 rule in the US, for example, keeps a balance between students with and without special needs to ensure individual attention (Journal-Register, 2014). This shows how each system handles inclusion differently.

The two opposite sentiments (one positive, one negative) reflect the tension between inclusion as an ideal and inclusion as a practical reality. Smaller numbers allow more focused attention, which is supported by (Loreman, 2007), who notes the importance of manageable teacher-student ratios. However, strict limits might also restrict access, which goes against the spirit of full inclusion. Article 12(f) of the Indonesian regulation also limits the ratio of teachers to students with special needs to ensure better attention needs (Arriani et al., 2022). These mixed emotions show that teachers must balance empathy with practicality in implementing inclusion.

Support Strategies and Motivation

The findings show that teachers use various strategies to motivate and support students with special needs. Interviewee 1 said, *“If a student feels shy or unwilling, I usually encourage them gently, or I give them simpler questions. Their peers also usually help”* (SDY). This expresses a positive sentiment, showing the teacher’s empathy and effort to build confidence.

Similarly, Interviewee 2 described, *“There are students who initially find it difficult to interact with peers and tend to withdraw, so the teachers will help bring them in, invite them to join the class, and gradually involve them in activities with their classmates”* (IRG). This also reflects a positive sentiment, highlighting teachers’ commitment to social integration and peer-supported participation.

Both interviews show positive emotions but focus on different sides: SDY focuses on academic scaffolding, while IRG focuses on social inclusion. Sentiment analysis highlights these small differences in focus that might be missed in thematic analysis alone.

These strategies match findings from (Carter et al., 2015), who state that social involvement supports emotional development, and (Calandri et al., 2025), who emphasize the role of teachers’ emotional competence in inclusive education. Similarly, (Duka et al., 2024) found that student motivation increases when learning happens through collaboration or project-based work.

This also relates to the concept of normalization, which means helping students with special needs learn in environments that feel as close to typical as possible. Supported by empathy and motivation, this helps students’ overall growth (Miranda et al., 2023). The consistently positive sentiments here show that teachers value inclusion emotionally as well as practically.

Monitoring Academic and Social Development

The findings show that regular monitoring is important for supporting both academic and social growth of students with special needs. Interviewee 2 said, *“There are routine assessments by psychologists to monitor students’ development. The results are also reported to parents so they know the child’s progress. Sometimes the progress is slow... the important thing is consistency and gradual improvement”* (IRG). This expresses a neutral sentiment because it focuses on process rather than emotion.

This neutral tone shows that monitoring is seen as part of daily responsibility rather than a special effort. It aligns with (Donnelly & Kefallinou, 2017), who note that consistent

assessment helps teachers plan better support, and (Palmer et al., 2018), who found that most students show steady progress when monitored regularly.

Effective monitoring depends on cooperation among teachers, psychologists, and parents, as suggested by (Rahi et al., 2024). Interestingly, only the Special Needs Assistant mentioned monitoring directly, while the Social Studies teacher did not. This shows a role-based difference, assistants are more involved in documentation and observation, while teachers focus more on instruction. Sentiment analysis helps make this visible by showing which roles express certain attitudes more strongly.

Table 1. Sentiment Distribution by Theme

Theme	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Representative Quotes (per sentiment)
Assessment Mechanisms and Differentiated Tasks	1	1	0	Positive: "If the children can handle the regular tasks, they do them. If not, there are simpler tasks..." (SDY); Neutral: "Before being accepted here, students undergo an initial assessment..." (IRG)
Seating Arrangements and Classroom Environment	0	1	0	Neutral: "Usually, inclusive students sit at the back. But some are more comfortable sitting at the front..." (SDY)
Limit on the Number of Students with Disabilities	1	0	1	Positive: "For example, in one grade, there are usually only one or two students with autism..." (SDY); Negative: "Usually, a maximum of five students with disabilities are allowed in a regular classroom..." (IRG)
Support Strategies and Motivation	2	0	0	Positive: "If a student feels shy or unwilling, I usually encourage them gently..." (SDY); Positive: "There are students who initially find it difficult to interact with peers..." (IRG)
Monitoring Academic and Social Development	0	1	0	Neutral: "There are routine assessments by psychologists to monitor the students' development..." (IRG)
Total (n=8)	4	3	1	

Table 1 summarizes the five main themes identified from the interviews, supported by participant quotations and aligned with relevant theoretical frameworks.

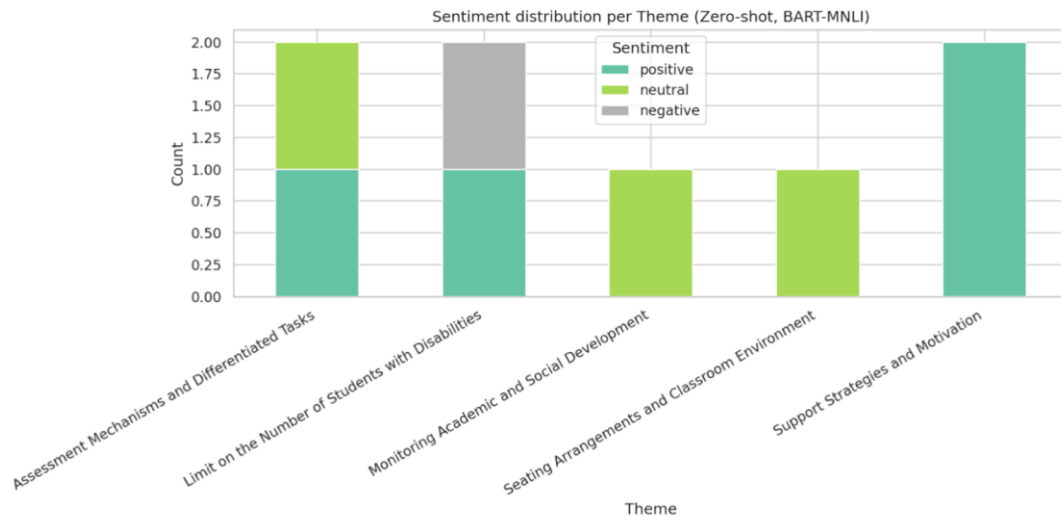


Figure 1. Sentiment Distribution per Theme (Zero-shot, BART-MNLI)

Figure 1 presents the distribution of sentiments across each theme. The findings indicate that most themes were associated with positive or neutral sentiments, while negative sentiments were less frequently expressed, appearing mainly in relation to limitations on the number of students with disabilities.

Overall sentiment distribution (Zero-shot, BART-MNLI)

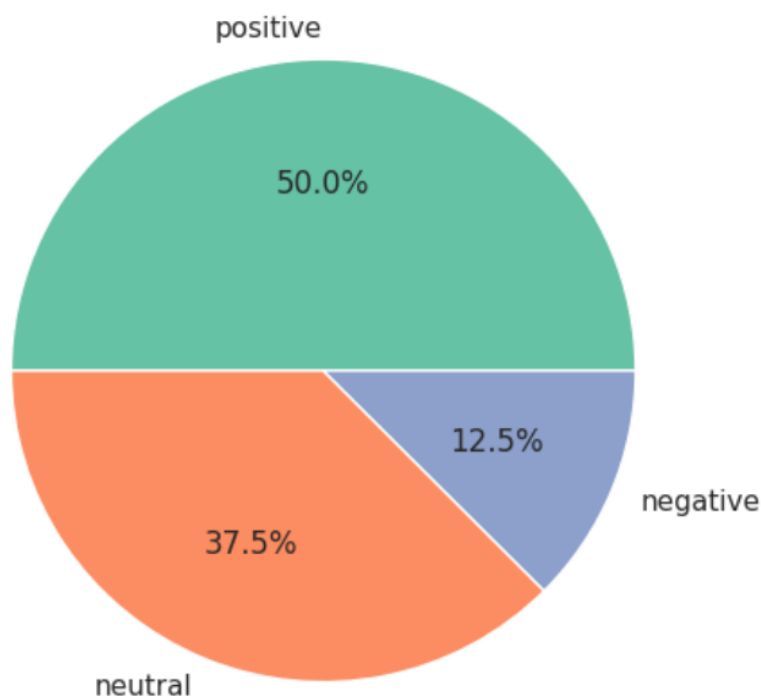


Figure 2. Overall Sentiment Distribution (Zero-shot, BART-MNLI)

Figure 2 illustrates the overall sentiment distribution across all interview data. The majority of responses were positive (50%), followed by neutral (37.5%), while negative responses accounted for only 12.5%.

This combination of thematic analysis and sentiment analysis highlights that inclusive classroom practices are generally perceived positively, particularly in areas of support strategies and motivation. However, concerns remain regarding structural limitations, such as the number of students with disabilities per class, which occasionally elicited negative sentiments.

Overall, eight representative statements were analyzed, yielding the following distribution: positive (4, 50.0%), neutral (3, 37.5%), and negative (1, 12.5%). This indicates that positive sentiments were most prevalent, reflecting teachers' and assistants' generally supportive stance toward inclusive practices, while neutral responses accounted for descriptive or procedural explanations. Negative sentiment was rare and appeared only in relation to restrictive policies on the number of students with disabilities.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the dominant tone of the interviews reflects optimism and commitment to inclusion, tempered by recognition of systemic and structural limitations. While the small sample size ($n=8$) means percentages are indicative rather than definitive, the sentiment analysis provides an additional layer of interpretation that complements the thematic findings.

Conclusion

This study highlights the dual role of teachers and assistants in implementing inclusive practices, revealing how empathy, flexibility, and commitment shape classroom experiences for students with special needs. The integration of thematic and sentiment analysis provided a nuanced understanding of how teachers perceive and emotionally respond to inclusive practices, beyond descriptive themes alone.

At the policy level, these findings suggest several implications. Policymakers should consider revising class-size regulations to reflect both inclusion goals and teacher capacity. Rather than fixed numerical limits, a flexible ratio system supported by adequate teaching assistants could balance inclusivity and practicality. Additionally, consistent training and emotional support programs for teachers—particularly those in general education—are essential to strengthen confidence and competence in inclusive settings. Collaboration between local education offices and universities can also ensure that inclusion policies are adapted to each region's resources and realities.

For future research, this study opens opportunities to extend sentiment analysis beyond teachers to other stakeholders in education, such as students, parents, or school administrators. Examining how each group emotionally perceives inclusion can offer a more holistic view of the ecosystem supporting inclusive education. Moreover, applying sentiment analysis in other educational contexts—such as teacher training, curriculum innovation, or policy evaluation—can further advance mixed-methods research in education.

Overall, this study not only contributes to understanding teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education in Indonesia but also demonstrates the potential of combining qualitative interpretation with computational analysis to capture the affective dimensions of educational experience.

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