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EXPLORING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN A COMMUNITY EDUCATION STUDY PROGRAM

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Abstract

While inclusive education and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) are promoted in higher education policy, little is known about how these two agendas are understood and enacted within a study program. To address this gap, this study explores the implementation of the two agendas at the study program level in a Community Education Study Program using a qualitative case study approach. Data were collected purposively from two sources: semi-structured interviews with two program leaders and two lecturers at the study program, and document analysis of the 2022 and 2025 curriculum documents. Both data sets were coded using thematic analysis. The findings show that while participants are aware of inclusive education and ESD, their conceptual understanding remains fragmented and tends to focus on access and community engagement. Document analysis revealed that aspects of inclusion and sustainability are present in curriculum documents, but they are mostly implicit. However, teaching practices show more dynamic implementation, as lecturers applied community-based learning that aligned with ESD, despite not being systematically documented. The study also found that the implementation seems to be initiated by individual lecturers rather than explicitly regulated. By understanding the implementation of the agendas within one institutional case, this study contributes to the literature on policy enactment in higher education, highlighting where the policy-practice gap emerges.

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) have emerged as two main agendas in higher education reform. These agendas work on different yet interconnected areas. Inclusive education aims to offer meaningful participation for all learners, regardless of their socio-economic background, to promote social justice (Ainscow, 2020; UNESCO, 2019, 2020), while ESD promotes sustainability awareness by integrating environmental, social, and economic dimensions of sustainability into educational processes (UNESCO, 2017). Even though these agendas are increasingly embedded in national policy frameworks, there seem to be many challenges in translating the policy into effective practices at the institutional level (Ainscow & Viola, 2024). The findings of previous research suggest that the implementation gap may be reflected in how higher education institutions enact policy commitments at the study program level.

At the operational level, study programs are the sites where policy is translated into pedagogical practice. This task is particularly consequential for Community Education Study Programs, whose graduates are expected to lead community-based social transformation. However, the presence of inclusive and sustainability-oriented language in curriculum documents does not necessarily guarantee its realization in teaching and learning (Castrellón, 2022; Payne, 2022; Sharma et al., 2022). This distinction matters because it exposes a blind spot in how implementation is typically studied: inclusive education extends beyond access to encompass systemic pedagogical change (Ainscow, 2020), while ESD is a pedagogical orientation aimed at developing critical thinking and engagement with real-

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world problems (Sterling, 2024; UNESCO, 2017); examining curriculum documents or teaching practice alone cannot establish whether either agenda is a lived commitment or merely a symbolic one.

Existing studies on inclusive education and ESD in higher education fall into two clusters, each with a distinct limitation. The first examines macro-level policy—national curricula, accreditation systems, and cross-country comparisons(Eseadi, 2023; Kyrychenko, 2018; Leal Filho et al., 2019; Thaariq & Rosyidah, 2023; UNESCO, 2020)—and typically reports clear policy articulation, but its reliance on document analysis alone cannot verify whether these commitments are enacted in classrooms. The second examines classroom-level practice and typically finds weak connections to curriculum and heavy dependence on individual educators (Hinduja et al., 2023; Kieu et al., 2016; Moriña, 2017), but without corroborating documentary evidence, it cannot establish whether this dependence originates in curriculum design or in lecturer discretion. Read together, these two clusters leave an unanswered question: at what point between policy document and classroom practice does the disconnect occur, and which actors are positioned to close it?

This question takes on concrete significance in the regional context of this study, located on the island of Sumatra, Indonesia. Sumatra holds close to half of Indonesia's total peatland area, most of which is now degraded (Fahly et al., 2024), making the environmental dimension of ESD a locally urgent concern rather than an abstract one. The case for inclusion is similarly concrete: nationally, close to one in three children with disabilities in Indonesia still lack access to education (World Bank, 2024), and only 1.48% of Indonesian higher education institutions maintain a dedicated disability service unit, compared with 60% in Singapore (Amnesti et al., 2023). As graduates trained to facilitate learning in underserved and often rural communities, Community Education students are likely to encounter both challenges directly, making the study program's approach to these two agendas a matter of immediate regional importance.

In Indonesia, the research seems to be conducted in isolation. They often focus on the practices (Aquan et al., 2025; Japar et al., 2025; Rokhmah et al., 2025), are limited to certain subjects (Ermawati et al., 2025; Japar et al., 2025; Roestamy et al., 2025), or certain aspects of inclusion and sustainability (Rahajeng et al., 2025; Suardi, 2025). There is limited research examining how these policy agendas are operationalized at the study program level, particularly in terms of the alignment between curriculum documents and actual teaching practices. A recent systematic review confirms that integrative perspective research remains underdeveloped (Filippou et al., 2025), a gap that the present study tries to address.

The contribution of this study lies in its simultaneous analysis of three data sources: program leaders' and lecturers' understanding, two cycles of policy documents (2022 and 2025), and reported teaching practices. This study traces how the different sources of data align and diverge in one institutional context. This is expected to allow researchers to identify where the gap occurs between policy and practice, instead of only confirming the gap's existence.

Lecturers play a central role in conveying inclusion and sustainability values to students through their teaching, and their practices may or may not align with institutional policy. Clarifying this relationship is necessary to assess whether implementation is substantive or reflected only in formal documentation. To address this question, this study analyzes the implementation of inclusive education and ESD in a Community Education Study Program,

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focusing on (1) lecturers' and program managers' understanding of inclusive education and ESD; (2) the representation of these principles in curriculum documents and teaching; and (3) the challenges and opportunities in the implementation.

Beyond its practical relevance, this study contributes theoretically to the literature on policy implementation in higher education. By examining how these two theoretically distinct but practically overlapping agendas are enacted, or fail to be enacted, by the same group of actors within the same curriculum, the study extends theories of policy enactment and street-level bureaucracy (Lipsky, 2010) to the study-program level, a unit of analysis that has received comparatively little theoretical attention relative to national policy or individual classroom studies.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore the implementation of inclusive education and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) at the study program level. A single case design was considered appropriate for three reasons. First, the object of study is bounded within a single institutional unit, making the study program the natural unit of analysis(Yin, 2018). Second, case study design allows in-depth examination of a single policy document, actors' perspectives, and practices. Last but not least, the implementation is highly context-dependent, which requires contextual richness to understand how agendas interact in one study program. That is why case study design is considered a relevant method to answer the research objectives.

RESEARCH SETTING

The study was conducted in a Community Education Study Program at a public university on the island of Sumatra, Indonesia. The exact institution, city, and province are withheld in accordance with the confidentiality terms of the ethical approval and the informed consent agreement signed by participants. This is a deliberate methodological choice rather than an omission: because Community Education Study Programs of this kind are offered at only a small number of universities nationally, naming the specific province in combination with the study program's field would itself function as a unique identifier, independent of naming the institution or any individual. This is a recognized risk in qualitative research, sometimes described as compound or "jigsaw" identification, in which two individually non-identifying details become identifying when combined (Kaiser, 2009; Saunders et al., 2015). Reporting the setting at the island level preserves contextual specificity for readers to judge transferability while avoiding this compounding effect; the head of department and head of study program in particular, whose positions are few and formally titled, would be vulnerable to re-identification if a smaller administrative unit such as the province were named.

Community Education is a study program oriented toward preparing practitioners and facilitators of non-formal and community-based education; its curriculum accordingly emphasizes community engagement, social facilitation, and applied fieldwork alongside conventional pedagogical coursework. This context makes the program a relevant site for examining the implementation of inclusive education and ESD, because its graduates are expected to work directly with diverse and often underserved community groups, which requires both inclusive competencies and sustainability literacy.

PARTICIPANTS

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, based on their direct involvement in curriculum development and teaching. The participants consisted of the head of the department, the head of the study program, and two lecturers teaching subjects related to inclusive education and the environment, coded A1–A4 to ensure anonymity. Four participants were considered sufficient for two reasons. First, this group represents the complete set of formal roles directly responsible for translating

policy into curriculum and teaching within the study program at the time of data collection: all individuals holding curriculum-development authority (the two leaders) and all lecturers whose courses most directly relate to inclusive education and ESD content were included. The sample therefore reflects purposive coverage of the relevant institutional roles, rather than statistical saturation of a larger, more diffuse population. Second, the case study design prioritizes depth over breadth. Each interview was analyzed alongside two cycles of curriculum documents, which allowed the analysis to cross-validate a small number of information-rich accounts against documentary evidence rather than relying on interview data alone.

Table 1. Participant Characteristics

Code	Role	Gender	Teaching/administrative experience
A1	Head of Study Program	Male	16 Years
A2	Lecturer	Female	9 Years
A3	Lecturer	Female	4 Years
A4	Head of Department	Male	15 Years

Note: Roles, experience ranges, and subject areas are reported at a level of generality that preserves anonymity while clarifying participants' relevant background. Gender is included only if it does not narrow identification given the department's staff composition.

DATA COLLECTION

Data were collected between February and April 2026 through two methods: semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face at participants' workplaces to explore their understanding and experiences related to inclusive education and ESD. The interviews (Appendix A) focused on five aspects: conceptual understanding, teaching strategies, challenges in implementation, perceived good practices, and recommendations. Each interview lasted approximately 15–34 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' consent. Recordings were transcribed verbatim by the first author within one week of each interview, and transcripts were checked against the original recordings for accuracy before coding began.

Document analysis was also conducted to examine the extent to which inclusive education and ESD were represented in academic documents. The documents selected for analysis were the study program's 2022 curriculum and its 2025 revision, chosen because they represent the most recent curriculum review cycle, allowing the analysis to trace whether representation changed following revision. Both documents were read in full and analyzed section by section (vision and mission, learning outcomes, and course structure) using a directed content analysis protocol: inclusivity indicators (e.g., references to access, accommodation, and diverse learner needs) and ESD indicators (e.g., references to the environmental, social, and economic dimensions of sustainability, following UNESCO, 2017) were identified deductively from the literature and supplemented inductively with terms that emerged from close reading of the documents. Each identified indicator was coded to the corresponding theme, and its frequency and location within the document were recorded to enable comparison across the two curriculum cycles.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis used a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which involved four steps: (1) transcribing interview data, (2) conducting initial coding, (3) grouping codes into themes, and (4) interpreting patterns across data sources. The analysis process was conducted using Atlas.ti 26 edition to assist the researcher in managing codes and

themes. Both interview transcripts and document analysis were carried out using this approach to illuminate patterns or themes that emerge from them. This could also offer opportunities for triangulation by comparing findings from both data sources. The findings are expected to provide answers to the research questions as to whether the policy intentions are highlighted in the document and whether they are translated into teaching practices. The flow of data collection and analysis can be illustrated as in Chart 1.

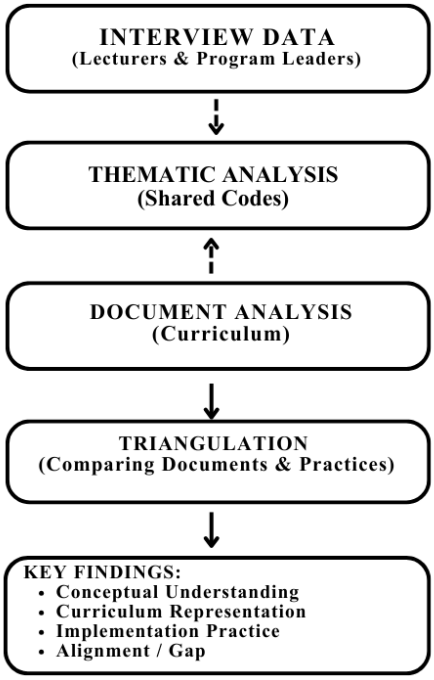

Chart 1. Data Triangulation Process

In the results table, two Atlas.ti indicators are reported for each theme: Groundedness (Gr), the total number of quotations coded to that theme across all transcripts, and Grounded Sources (GS), the number of distinct participant transcripts in which the theme appeared. These two indicators show how widely it was shared across participants. A theme with high Gr but low GS might reflect an issue emphasized strongly by few participants, while a theme with high Gr and high GS shows shared emphasis across the participants.

To ensure trustworthiness, several procedures were implemented during the analysis. Coding was conducted independently by two members of the research team, with discrepancies discussed and resolved to reach consensus before finalizing the coding scheme. Member checking was conducted by sharing interview summaries with participants to confirm their accuracy. An audit trail was also maintained in Atlas.ti to document the progression from initial coding to final themes. Finally, the first author engaged in ongoing reflexivity throughout the analysis, given her position as a lecturer within the same institutional context. This positionality allowed the researcher to have contextual familiarity with the program, while also being acknowledged as a factor that may have shaped interpretation.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

To ensure that this study adhered to ethical guidelines, informed consent was obtained from all participants before collecting the data, in written form and signed by the participants. Their identities were anonymized using codes, and all data were used solely for academic purposes. Document analysis was conducted with respect for institutional confidentiality.

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RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

The findings of the study were based on the analysis of interview data and curriculum documents. In this study, the curriculum documents used were those used in 2022 and its 2025 revision. Findings from the interview and the curriculum documents are reported separately before being compared, so that the two data sources remain analytically distinct for triangulation. The findings are structured in three research questions: (1) conceptual understanding of inclusive education and ESD; (2) representation of these principles in curriculum documents; and (3) the challenges, opportunities, and recommendations identified by participants. The summary of the thematic analysis of the interviews is presented in the following table.

Table 2. Interview Thematic Analysis Results

	Leaders Gr=57; GS=2	**Lecturers** Gr=58; GS=2	**Totals**
(RQ1) Theme: Concept of Inclusive Education Gr=5; GS=5	2	3	5
(RQ1) Theme: Connection to ESD Gr=5; GS=5	3	2	5
(RQ1) Theme: Student with special needs categories in inclusive lens Gr=2; GS=2	0	2	2
(RQ2) Theme: Implementation in practice Gr=7; GS=6	4	3	7
(RQ2) Theme: Lecturers' strategies in and outside the classroom Gr=67; GS=12	37	30	67
(RQ2) Theme: Policy and Management Gr=17; GS=14	8	9	17
(RQ2) Theme: Subjects related to ESD Gr=5; GS=5	4	1	5
(RQ2) Theme: Teaching approaches used by lecturers Gr=7; GS=7	2	5	7
(RQ3) Theme: Challenges Gr=28; GS=24	13	15	28
(RQ3) Theme: Opportunities Gr=8; GS=7	5	3	8
(RQ3) Theme: Recommendations Gr=19; GS=19	14	5	19
Totals	92	78	170

Note. Gr = Groundedness, the total number of quotations coded to a theme across all transcripts. GS = Grounded Sources, the number of participant transcripts (out of four) in which the theme appeared.

Table 2 summarises the findings of thematic analysis of the interviews. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews with four informants from different roles. Two of them play vital roles as leaders who might get involved in the policymaking process (A1, A4), while the others were lecturers teaching ESD and Inclusive Education-related subjects (A2,

A3). The table shows the distribution of coded themes across different participant groups, including program leaders and lecturers. The distribution of coded segments shows that lecturers' strategies in and outside the classroom (RQ2) and challenges (RQ3) accounted for the largest share of coded material (Gr = 67 and Gr = 28, respectively) and were discussed across the widest range of participants (GS = 12 and GS = 24, respectively), while themes concerning students with special needs (RQ1) and subjects related to ESD (RQ2) accounted for the smallest share (Gr = 2 and Gr = 5, respectively). The findings were then compared with the document analysis presented in Table 2.

Table 3. Document Analysis Summary

Documents	Inclusive terms (*Inklusi, Inklusif, kesetaraan*)	ESD Terms	Found in Vision/Mission	Found in Learning Outcomes (CPL)	Inclusive related subjects	ESD related subjects
2022	13	9	No	No	2	3
2025	58	120	No	No	3	4

The data presented in Table 2 and Table 3 were then compared and analysed to address the formulated research questions. The findings are outlined into three aspects: (1) conceptual understanding of inclusive education and ESD, (2) representation in curriculum documents and its implementation in teaching practices, and (3) the perceived challenges, opportunities, and recommendations.

RQ 1. Conceptual Understanding of Inclusive Education and ESD

Conceptual understanding of inclusive education and ESD is vital to allow effective implementation of both agendas. The participants' conceptual understanding of inclusive education and ESD obtained from the interview data is illustrated in Chart 2.

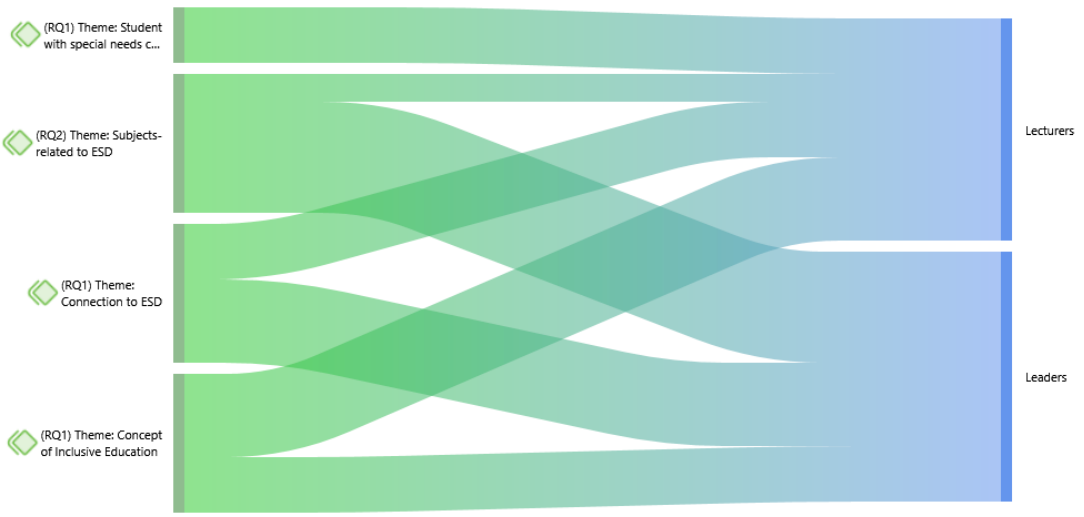

Chart 2. Participants' Conceptual Understanding of Inclusive Education and ESD

Chart 2 illustrates the conceptual understanding of interviewed participants regarding inclusive education and ESD. The findings show that both lecturers and program leaders demonstrate a general awareness of inclusive education and ESD, despite the difference in depth. Based on the data, inclusive education is primarily interpreted as ensuring access and accommodating diversity among students, as one lecturer explained,

"*Inclusive is education for all, so it is not discriminative; everyone has the right to access education regardless of their backgrounds and conditions*" (A3).

"*This means that in inclusion, education must have equality, equality for development and sustainable education, more precisely targeting children*" (A2)

This indicates that inclusive education tends to be seen as an action to cater to the needs of those who come from disadvantaged circumstances, rather than as a comprehensive pedagogical approach that includes differentiated assessment. Similarly, ESD also seemed to be mainly associated with social responsibility rather than being framed as a pedagogical framework encompassing environmental, social, and economic dimensions, as illustrated by

"*giving them [students] opportunity to deal with their environment... so they can solve issues based on their experience*" (A4).

"*.....specifically for this study program, what [ESD] is actually prioritized is actual skills [community engagement]*" (A1).

Both leaders and lecturers referred to inclusive education and ESD in their responses, indicating that awareness of both concepts exists across roles. However, the interviews provide limited elaboration on either concept.

RQ 2. Representation of Inclusive Education and ESD in Curriculum Documents and Teaching

Document Analysis Findings

The analysis of curriculum documents shows that elements of inclusive education and ESD are present within the documents, yet their integration seems implicit. In general, curriculum documents consist of the study program's vision, missions, learning outcomes, and course structures. Table 2 shows that inclusive education and ESD were not explicitly stated in the mission and learning outcomes. This might indicate that these issues are not prioritised. Even though the study program highlights global citizenship, local wisdom, entrepreneurship, and local issues in the learning outcomes, inclusion and sustainability did not emerge as explicit terms. It is acceptable to argue that the stated elements align conceptually with the ESD principles, particularly in the social dimension. However, it might reflect a partial conception, as ESD should encompass environmental, social, and economic aspects.

Indicators of inclusive education are also not articulated systematically in the curriculum documents. Even though some general statements imply participatory and community-based learning, these do not translate into clear guidelines for accommodating diverse learner needs, including assessment. This might indicate that inclusion is framed more as a normative value rather than a structured pedagogical commitment. This reflects a common pattern in higher education, where inclusion is acknowledged at the discourse level but not embedded in instructional design.

However, when comparing the curriculum documents in 2022 and 2025, it shows some progressive changes, evident in a marked increase in the frequency of inclusion- and sustainability-related terms. Inclusive-education terms (inclusion, inclusive, equality) appeared 58 times in the 2025 document, more than three times as often as in the 2022 document (13 occurrences). Sustainability-related terms (sustainable, sustainability, sustainable development) increased from 9 to 120 occurrences over the same period. The

number of subjects explicitly addressing inclusion also increased from 2 to 3, and the number of subjects explicitly addressing ESD increased from 3 to 4. The findings from curriculum document analysis broadly aligned with those from the interview, as illustrated by Chart 3.

Interview Findings

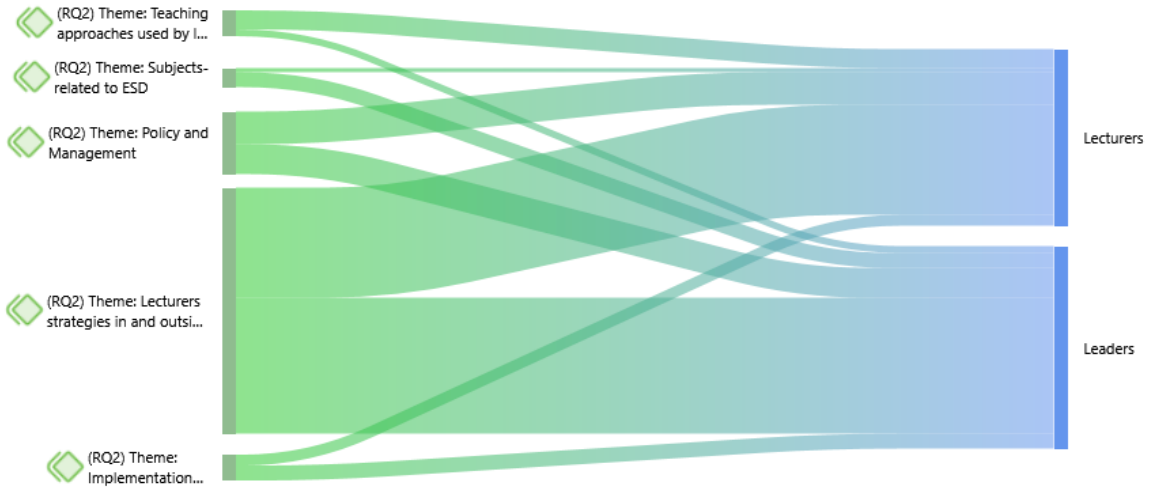

Chart 3. Implementation of Inclusive Education and ESD in Teaching Practices

Chart 3 shows that implementation in teaching practice is concentrated in lecturers' individual strategies (Gr = 67), which was the most frequently and most widely coded theme in the interview data. Lecturers reported using strategies such as group work and community-based projects to support student engagement, as explained by some of the lecturers:

> *"....after they graduate, they can assist the community..."* (A2).

> *"For example, in the community learning strategy, we first look at the community's needs, and the goal is the community's welfare."* (A3).

These practices are relevant to ESD principles, especially in community involvement. However, these practices are often not explicitly framed as inclusive education or ESD. They tend to emerge as part of lecturers' pedagogical preferences. Comparing the interview and document findings for RQ2 shows a pattern of divergence: teaching practices described by lecturers are more varied and more frequently reported than the corresponding indicators found in curriculum documents, indicating that reported practice currently exceeds what is documented in the curriculum.

RQ 3. Challenges, Opportunities, and Recommendations

The data analysis also looks at the challenges, opportunities, and recommendations from the participants' perspectives. The summarised findings can be seen in Chart 4.

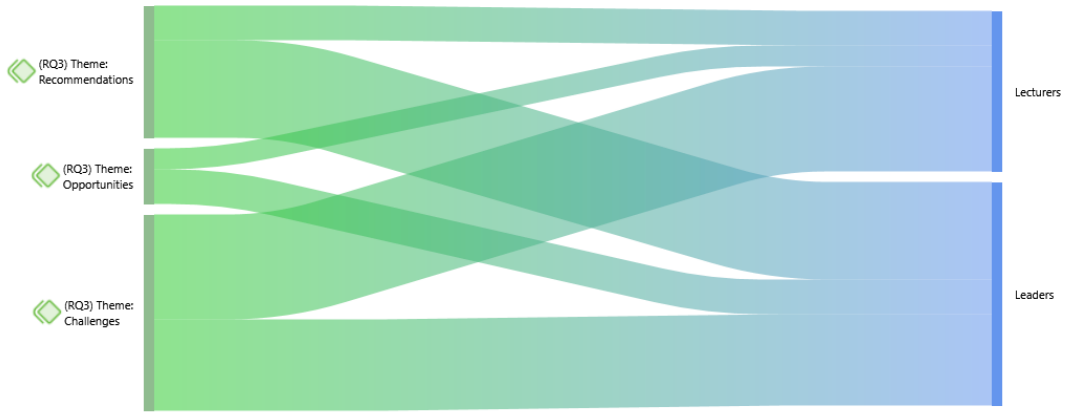

Chart 4. Challenges, Opportunities, and Recommendations for Inclusive Education and ESD

Challenges

Chart 4 shows that lecturers and leaders identified challenges and recommendations differently: lecturers articulated more challenges, while leaders offered more recommendations and positive views of the two concepts. The challenges identified include limited conceptual clarity, a lack of explicit guidelines from higher administrative levels, and reliance on individual lecturer capacity, as described by one respondent:

> *"……the study program only enacts the regulation coming from the faculty…"* (A1).

Leaders (A1, A4) and lecturers (A2, A3) agreed that the implementation of inclusive education and ESD is not currently conducted through formal monitoring and evaluation, but through individual lecturer initiative or informal discussion with the head of the study program.

Opportunities

Despite these challenges, participants reported concrete opportunities. Lecturers demonstrated initiative in applying community-based learning through Outcome-Based Education (OBE), at times combined with self-discovery and constructive learning. They provided informal support to students outside the classroom, including emotional and financial support. Ongoing informal efforts to raise awareness were also reported, as one lecturer explained:

> *"[the study program] has been implementing inclusion and studying inclusion long before inclusion was touted as it is today, so one way is by always socializing it both at student events and at academic meetings in the Study Program"* (A3).

Participants further reported that the university and faculty support inclusive education through improving disability-friendly facilities, providing scholarships, and creating a safe learning environment, indicating institutional movement toward more inclusive and sustainable education.

Recommendations

Recommendations were the most consistently raised theme across participants (Gr = 19, GS = 19), centering on making implementation more systematic and less dependent on individual initiative, including clearer institutional guidelines, structured training for lecturers, and regular monitoring of how inclusive education and ESD are reflected in teaching and curriculum documents.

"*Because we are a red-tape institution or organization [referring to a government institution], one of its strengths is the policy, the written policy*" (A1).

Participants believe that the institution should have a written policy. Hence, it gives stronger ground for lecturers and leaders in study programs to integrate inclusion and ESD into the curriculum formally.

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate a pattern of conceptual ambiguity, partial curriculum integration, and individually driven practice, which together suggest that the study program's implementation of inclusive education and ESD is real but not yet institutionalized. This section interprets these findings in relation to theory and prior research, states the study's theoretical and methodological contributions explicitly, and identifies the study's limitations and directions for future research.

Conceptual Understanding: Confirming and Extending Prior Findings

The finding that lecturers and program leaders perceive inclusive education primarily as access, rather than as holistic institutional transformation, confirms prior research reporting that conceptual clarity remains a persistent challenge for inclusive education in higher education (Ainscow & Viola, 2024; Moriña, 2017). The same pattern applies to ESD, which participants associated with community engagement rather than with the full amalgam of environmental, social, and economic dimensions; this is consistent with previous findings that ESD is frequently implemented in a fragmented form across national contexts (Hinduja et al., 2023; Kieu et al., 2016; Rampasso et al., 2019). Rather than simply reproducing these findings, however, this study extends them by showing that the same conceptual narrowing occurs simultaneously for two theoretically distinct agendas within the same small group of actors, suggesting that the narrowing may be a property of how policy language is absorbed at the study-program level, rather than a feature specific to either agenda.

Curriculum Representation: A Structural Rather Than Individual Constraint

In terms of curriculum representation, the finding that inclusive education and ESD are only implicitly referred to in curriculum documents is consistent with prior research showing that sustainability and inclusion are frequently present in policy documents without being embedded into teaching practice (Leal Filho et al., 2019; Wals & Benavot, 2017). This study extends that literature by identifying a structural explanation: the study program's vision and mission are bound to the university's broader framework, and the program therefore has only limited discretion to restate these commitments independently, even where it has greater flexibility in defining learning outcomes. This suggests that the fragmentation observed in curriculum documents is not primarily a failure of individual curriculum designers, but a structural constraint originating above the study-program level—a distinction with direct implications for where reform efforts should be targeted.

Teaching Practice as Street-Level Enactment: A Theoretical Contribution

The gap between curriculum documentation and teaching practice constitutes the central theoretical contribution of this study. Lecturers reported applying community-oriented, collaborative learning strategies relevant to ESD principles, even when these strategies are not explicitly framed as inclusive education or ESD in curriculum documents, and even when such practices remain limited primarily to the social dimension of sustainability (Sterling, 2024). This pattern is consistent with research showing that inclusive

and sustainable education in higher education often relies on individual educators as agents of change (Kohl, 2022; Moriña, 2017), and it extends Lipsky's (2010)concept of street-level bureaucracy to the study-program level: lecturers act as street-level actors who interpret and enact policy language on inclusion and sustainability through their own pedagogical judgment, producing implementation that is real but variable and difficult to sustain institutionally when it depends on individual initiative rather than institutional mandate. This finding also echoes Okwuagwu and Ofondu's (2024) observation that ESD efforts risk becoming isolated activities with limited impact on institution-wide learning outcomes when clear institutional structures do not support them.

Methodological Contribution: The Value of Triangulation

Beyond its substantive findings, this study demonstrates the methodological value of triangulating stakeholder interviews with curriculum document analysis within a single institutional case. Analyzing these two data sources separately before comparing them made it possible to identify precisely where alignment breaks down: understanding and practice are more advanced than curriculum documentation, rather than curriculum, understanding, and practice being uniformly weak or uniformly strong. This distinction would not have been visible from either data source alone, and it illustrates how triangulated case designs can contribute methodologically to implementation research on policy enactment in higher education more broadly, complementing findings from larger but less contextually detailed studies (Bonilla-Jurado et al., 2024).

Challenges and Opportunities

The challenges identified in this study—limited conceptual clarity, the absence of explicit curriculum guidelines, and reliance on individual lecturers—are consistent with challenges reported in other national contexts undergoing similar reform processes (Maiorescu et al., 2020; Rampasso et al., 2019). At the same time, the findings point to concrete opportunities: community-based collaborative learning provides a foundation for both inclusion and sustainability that is effective when supported by institutional frameworks (Wals & Benavot, 2017), and the presence of disability-friendly facilities, scholarships, and safe learning environments shows that institutional support already exists at the university and faculty level, even where it has not yet been consolidated into study-program-level curriculum guidance. For program administrators, this points to two operational priorities: formally naming inclusion and sustainability indicators in curriculum documents, and building on lecturers' existing community-based practices through structured training rather than treating them as informal, individually sustained efforts.

Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. First, the qualitative case study design, while appropriate for the depth of analysis this study sought, means that findings reflect the perspectives and documents of a single Community Education Study Program and are not intended to be statistically generalizable to other institutions or disciplines. Second, the participant pool, while representing the complete set of relevant institutional roles at the time of data collection, was small (n = 4), which limits the range of individual variation the interview data could capture. Third, the study is contextually specific to a Community Education Study Program within the Indonesian higher education system, and the particular configuration of national accreditation requirements, institutional hierarchy, and disciplinary culture observed here may not transfer

directly to other study programs or national contexts. Readers should therefore treat the findings as analytically, rather than statistically, generalizable.

Directions for Future Research

Building on these limitations, future research could extend this study in three directions. Comparative research across multiple study programs within the same university, or across Community Education programs in different institutions, would help determine whether the structural constraint on curriculum representation identified here is specific to this program or reflects a broader institutional pattern. Multi-institutional research would also help distinguish structural constraints originating at the university level from those originating at the national accreditation level. Finally, longitudinal research that follows a study program through a full curriculum revision cycle, rather than comparing two static curriculum documents, could offer more direct evidence of how and why representation of inclusion and sustainability changes over time.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine (1) lecturers' and program managers' understanding of inclusive education and ESD; (2) the representation of these principles in curriculum documents and teaching; and (3) the challenges and opportunities in their implementation, within a single Community Education Study Program. The findings show partial alignment between curriculum documents and teaching practice: values related to social engagement are represented in curriculum documents and reflected in reported teaching practices. Still, inclusive education and ESD strategies are frequently enacted without explicit documentation, and their implementation currently depends on individual lecturers rather than on institutionalized curriculum guidance.

The scholarly contribution of this study is to show, through a triangulated single-case design, that the gap between inclusion/sustainability policy and classroom practice is not uniform: teaching practice and stakeholder understanding are more advanced than curriculum documentation, which relocates the primary constraint from individual pedagogical will to institutional curriculum design. This finding extends policy enactment and street-level bureaucracy theory (Lipsky, 2010) to the study-program level, a unit of analysis that has received limited theoretical attention in the inclusive education and ESD literatures.

As acknowledged in the Discussion, these conclusions are drawn from a single case study program with a small number of participants and should be read as analytically rather than statistically generalizable; comparative, multi-institutional, and longitudinal research is needed to establish how far this pattern extends beyond the case examined here.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on these findings, this study offers two sets of recommendations. For the study program and its parent institution, curriculum designers should explicitly and systematically embed indicators of inclusion and sustainability into the program's learning outcomes and course structure, rather than relying on implicit statements of social engagement. Doing so would allow the program to monitor and evaluate implementation formally. For lecturer development, the institution should provide structured training opportunities so that lecturers can build on their existing understanding of inclusive education and ESD with more systematic pedagogical and assessment strategies (Bonilla-Jurado et al., 2024; de Souza, 2024; Windsor et al., 2022).

Ultimately, the findings of this study point toward a broader implication for higher education institutions beyond the case examined here: inclusive education and ESD are unlikely to become sustainable institutional commitments if they continue to rely primarily on individual lecturer initiative. Institutionalizing these agendas—through explicit curriculum design, monitoring, and support—rather than treating them as matters of individual pedagogical goodwill, is what will ultimately determine whether inclusive and sustainability-oriented higher education is realized as a lasting institutional practice rather than a set of isolated classroom efforts.

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Declarations

Author Contribution Statement
Muryanti: conceptualization and design, data collection, data analysis/interpretation, and drafting the manuscript; Pahmi: critical revision, and final approval; Gianini Sonnevil: data analysis and critical revision.

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Data collected for this study are restricted due to confidentiality and privacy. Full data access might disclose the location of the research conducted. The participants of this study did not permit access to their data (raw data) as it might reveal their identities. The full codes and themes can be accessed upon request from the corresponding author.

Declaration of Interests Statement
The authors declare no competing interests.

AI Use Statement

[1] During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used **the free version of ChatGPT** solely for **language editing (grammar, clarity, and readability)**. The authors **reviewed, revised, and verified** the final text and **take full responsibility** for the content of the publication.
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