

The Construction of Learning Identity in Students with Intellectual Disabilities in Elementary Schools Providing Inclusive Education

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Abstract: Suboptimal social support in inclusive education hinders the formation of a learning identity for students with intellectual disabilities. This study aims to identify the characteristics of learning needs, analyze the forms of social support received, and explain their contribution to the construction of a learning identity for students with intellectual disabilities. The study used a qualitative approach with an interpretive phenomenological design. Participants comprised four students with mild and moderate intellectual disabilities, three classroom teachers, two principals, and two parents/guardians, selected through purposive sampling from three inclusive elementary schools in Banyumas Regency. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observation, and documentation, then analyzed using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach. The results of the study indicate that students' learning needs are concrete, repetitive, gradual, and personalized through the use of concrete media, varied repetition, task-based learning, and interest-based motivation. The social support students receive includes emotional, instrumental, and reward support from teachers, peers, and the principal. There is a gap in policy and practice regarding the availability of Special Assistant Teachers (GPK) which is not evenly distributed. Consistent social support contributes to identity formation through increased self-efficacy, the development of autonomy, and social engagement. These findings confirm that the learning identity of students with intellectual disabilities is formed dynamically, relationally, and across contexts. This study recommends strengthening inclusive services through adaptive learning, Individual Learning Programs, equal distribution of GPK, and collaboration between schools and families so that students develop as capable, independent, confident, and socially accepted learners in a sustainable manner.

Keywords: Intellectual Disability; Social Support; Learning Identity; Inclusive Education.

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is a strategic step to address the challenges of educational equality in the global era. This policy aligns with the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda, which emphasizes the principle of “*No One Left Behind*” (Mishra et al., 2023; Tan, 2021). Indonesia's commitment to inclusive education began with the 2004 Bandung Declaration (Putri et al., 2022). Minister of National Education Regulation Number 70 of 2009 affirms that students with disabilities have the right to learn alongside their peers in regular schools (Achmad, 2023). Regulatory support is strengthened through regional policies in Banyumas Regency, such as Regent Regulation Number 31 of 2016, which requires all schools to provide inclusive education. Thus, Indonesia has a strong foundation, although its implementation at the school level still faces various challenges. The need for inclusive services is not yet in line with the level of available educational access. The Indonesian Health Survey shows that intellectual disability is one of the types of disability that requires serious attention in educational services, with the highest prevalence of 1% compared to other types of disabilities (Indonesian Health Survey, 2023). The Central Statistics Agency (2024) report shows that disability issues are closely related to socio-demographic indicators, including education, so that access to learning for children with disabilities needs to be continuously strengthened. Approximately 40% of the 1.6 million children with intellectual disabilities can access educational services. The issue of inclusive education is not only related to learning strategies, but also concerns the affordability and equity of services (Husna et al., 2025; Rani et al., 2025). Research studies show that the dimensions of the inclusion index have generally been running well; however, structured

and consistent implementation is still uneven and shows variation between elementary schools, especially in urban areas (Marja et al., 2025; Sinaga et al., 2025). Research studies show that elementary schools implementing inclusion still face obstacles in providing inclusion services, such as a lack of inclusion training, a lack of GPK (Special Assistance Teachers), and insufficient resources for students with disabilities (Safitri, 2025). The success of inclusive education is determined not only by policy but also by an understanding of how inclusion services meet the learning needs of students with intellectual disabilities (Susanti & Ramadhani, 2024; Woodcock & Anderson, 2025). Intellectual disability is defined as a condition of limited cognitive and adaptive functioning with an IQ score below 70 that appears before the age of 18, and is divided into mild to very severe levels (Achmad, 2023; Cubero-Pérez et al., 2024; Mishra et al., 2023; Primadani & Widyasari, 2024). Cognitive limitations in students with intellectual disabilities cause difficulties in processing abstract information, so that the learning needs of students with intellectual disabilities can be realized through the use of concrete media, repetition of learning materials, and division of tasks into simpler units (Campos-Jara et al., 2024; Lubis et al., 2023; Matos et al., 2015; Rani et al., 2025). The need for inclusive services raises the question of the extent to which the education system can accommodate them equitably. This underscores the importance of social support in inclusive education.

Inclusion services are realized through social support in the form of emotional, appreciation, and instrumental support as resources for students to develop their potential and adapt in the learning process (Cubero-Pérez et al., 2024; Foera-Era Lase, 2024; Sone et al., 2025). Social support for intellectual disabilities comes from the entire school ecosystem, peer interactions, and family motivation (Rosalina & Apsari, 2020). Effective social support not only helps students with intellectual disabilities in the learning process but also contributes to the formation of a learning identity, while inadequate social support impacts mental health problems, decreased achievement, low self-confidence, and difficulties in social interaction (Orío-Aparicio, López-Escribano, & Bel-Fenellós, 2026; Wiesel et al., 2024). This theoretical description aligns with empirical conditions in the field. Initial observations at elementary schools implementing inclusion in Banyumas Regency showed that social support for students with intellectual disabilities was not optimal. This was evident from students' difficulties in reading, arithmetic, and following complex instructions. During the learning process, students experienced anxiety, continuous dependence on teachers, and a tendency to withdraw from peers. A lack of social support, characterized by a lack of personal mentoring, an immature learning approach, and teachers' unequal understanding of individual student needs, poses challenges for inclusive schools. These conditions indicate that learning experiences that provide a safe, valued learning environment and foster a sense of competence in developing a learning identity need to be strengthened.

Learning identity is a psychosocial construct that reflects how individuals interpret their abilities and roles in academic contexts (Cubero-Pérez et al., 2024). This identity is formed through the interaction of internal and external factors, including learning experiences and the social support students receive. Learning identity is not formed instantly but through a complex and ongoing process. Learning identity encompasses three main dimensions: self-efficacy, autonomy, and the social dimension. Self-efficacy relates to an individual's belief in their ability to complete tasks (Nurrindar & Wahjudi, 2021). Autonomy reflects an individual's ability to control decisions and develop independence (Carey, 2021). The social dimension emphasizes that learner identity is formed through interactions with the environment that are continuously reconstructed (Popova & Wiese, 2022). These three

dimensions interact to shape learning identity. This understanding serves as the foundation for analyzing the process of learning identity formation in students with intellectual disabilities.

Based on the literature review, several research gaps can be identified. First, there is still a gap between inclusion policies and service practices in elementary schools. Although inclusive education has been supported by global policies and agendas (Mishra et al., 2023; Tan, 2021), its implementation has not been optimal, especially in serving the learning needs of students with intellectual disabilities (Rani et al., 2025; Susanti & Ramadhani, 2024; Woodcock & Anderson, 2025). Second, studies on social support within the school ecosystem, among peers, and across families as a whole remain limited (Cubero-Pérez et al., 2024; Foera-era Lase, 2024; Sone et al., 2025). Third, previous research has predominantly focused on quantitative results or the implementation of inclusion in general (Marja et al., 2025; Sinaga et al., 2025), while research on the subjective experiences of students with intellectual disabilities regarding the meaning of social support and its relationship to the formation of learning identities is still limited (Carey & Carey, 2021; Nurrindar & Wahjudi, 2021; Popova & Wiese, 2022). Several significant research gaps exist, including the suboptimal implementation of inclusive education at the elementary school level, the limited comprehensive study of social support as an ecosystem, and the paucity of research exploring the subjective experiences of students with intellectual disabilities in forming learning identities.

This research offers contributions in three aspects of novelty: (1) Contextual novelty, namely expanding the context by filling the gap in studies on the learning identity of intellectual disabilities in inclusive elementary schools in Banyumas Regency which is relatively limited; (2) Methodological novelty, this research uses an interpretive phenomenological approach placing subjective experiences as the center of analysis, not just the teacher's perspective or school policy; and (3) Theoretical novelty, the research dialectically integrates humanistic theory (Abraham Maslow) and social constructivism (Vygotsky) to explain how a sense of security, respect, social interaction, and structured learning support play a role in the formation of learning identity (Novrizal et al., 2023).

Based on the description, the formulation of the research problem is: (1) What are the characteristics of the learning needs of students with intellectual disabilities in inclusive spaces?; (2) What forms of social support do they receive?; and (3) How does this social support contribute to building their learning identity? This research is expected to contribute to the development of appropriate social support strategies, serve as material for evaluating inclusive education policies, and help parents and educators better understand the psychological needs of students with intellectual disabilities.

METHOD

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative phenomenological design approach. Qualitative methods are used to understand social phenomena from participants' perspectives in naturalistic educational contexts (Nasir et al., 2023; Smith, 2015). This study specifically adopts the interpretive phenomenological tradition of IPA (*Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis*). This study reveals participants' subjective life experiences, not the researcher's hypothesis. The choice of IPA is based on its suitability for the research objective exploring the subjective experiences of students with intellectual disabilities in the dynamics of social support as they construct learning identities in inclusive spaces. Researchers actively seek to enter participants' world and interpret their experiences (the double hermeneutic) (Darley et al., 2025).

Research Subjects

This research was conducted from October 2025 to May 2026. The research locations were three elementary schools (SD) in Banyumas Regency that provide inclusive education: SD Negeri 1 Karang Pucung, SD Negeri 5 Arcawinangun, and SD Negeri 2 Kradenan. The selection of these three schools was based on several strategic considerations. First, these locations ensured the availability of research subjects among students with intellectual disabilities who met the core participant criteria. Second, all three schools demonstrated a commitment to implementing inclusive service programs within their curricula. Third, the schools collaborated with health agencies for assessment, creating an ideal, data-rich environment. The selection of phenomenological research subjects was carried out using a purposive sampling technique on a small, homogeneous sample group (Singh & Kumar, 2025). Participants were not determined by location constraints, but by the subjects' direct experience with the phenomenon being studied and their capacity to articulate those experiences reflectively and in-depth (Moerer-urdahl & Creswell, 2004).

The subjects consisted of four students with mild and moderate intellectual disabilities (codes C1-C4). This study not only relied on the number of participants but also strengthened the intensity of subject involvement to ensure depth. Each student was interviewed at least twice at different time intervals, each lasting 30-60 minutes. The researcher conducted two non-participant observations per student (regular class, special room, and extracurricular activities). Depth was also strengthened by the involvement of secondary informants, which allowed the researcher to verify and enrich the understanding of students' subjective experiences from various perspectives. The secondary informants included three class teachers (codes D1-D3) who were involved because they interacted directly with students at school, observed changes in learning behavior, and understood the support students received. Two principals, who were responsible for and implemented inclusion programs (codes E1-E2), and two parents/guardians (codes F1-F2), who were aware of changes in their children's learning identities after receiving support from the school. The composition of the subjects with codes enabled a more systematic and comprehensive organization of data on the characteristics of learning needs, forms of social support, and contributions to the construction of the learning identities of students with intellectual disabilities in inclusive settings. The following table shows research informants to clarify the research subjects.

Table 1. Research Informants

No	Code Initials	Age (Year)	Gender	Participant	Things to be explored according to the indicators
1.	C1	11	Female	Mild mental retardation	Subjects' direct experiences regarding the characteristics of learning needs, the meaning of social support received, and the contribution of support in constructing their learning identity.
2.	C2	11	Male	Slow learner	
3.	C3	13	Male	Moderate mental retardation	
4.	C4	8	Male	Moderate mental retardation	
5.	D1	52	Female	Classroom teacher	Characteristics of learning needs, forms of social support, and perspectives of social support on the development of students' learning identities.
6.	D2	29	Female	Classroom teacher	
7.	D3	46	Female	Classroom teacher	
8.	E1	49	Female	Headmaster	Social support in schools (policies, provision of accompanying teachers, friendly facilities, curriculum adaptation) in the context of students' learning experiences in inclusive spaces.
9.	E2	42	Female	Headmaster	

No	Code Initials	Age (Year)	Gender	Participant	Things to be explored according to the indicators
10.	F1	60	Female	Student guardian (C1)	Changes in learning identity (efficacy, autonomy and social dimensions) in the dynamics of social support in the school environment.
11.	F2	35	Female	Parents (C3)	

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection techniques in phenomenological research include non-participant observation, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and documentation analysis (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell 2004). Data collection aims to map the construction of learning identity, using indicators of learning needs, characteristics, and social support. Observations use observation sheets to record findings. In-depth semi-structured interviews use interview guides based on 10 indicators aligned with the problem formulation, presented as interrelated questions. Document analysis includes school documents such as individual learning programs (IEPs), educational unit curricula, diagnostic assessment results, liaison books, and student learning progress reports, to strengthen the findings from observations and interviews and obtain a comprehensive and accountable picture.

Data Analysis

The data analysis in this study refers to the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach, which is inductive, flexible, and oriented towards depth of meaning. The following *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis* (IPA) was conducted in five main stages (Miller et al., 2016).

1. Reading and familiarizing oneself with the data (*reading and immersion*).

The researcher repeatedly read the interview transcripts (four students C1–C4, three teachers D1–D3, two principals E1–E2, two parents F1–F2), observation notes, and supporting documents (PPI, KSP, liaison book, diagnostic assessment), then recorded descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual beginnings that focused on three main issues of learning needs characteristics, social support, and learning identity.

2. Taking initial notes.

The researcher explored each transcript through descriptive notes (the content of the participant's statement), linguistic notes (how they spoke), and conceptual notes (the meaning behind the statement, in the form of understandings born from physical actions).

3. Developing initial themes and condensing data (*developing emergent themes & data condensation*).

Initial notes were grouped into temporary themes through data condensation, which included coding (assigning codes to units of meaning), grouping (unifying relevant codes), and summarizing (summarizing without losing the essence). This process resulted in 10 initial codes grouped into three major themes: the theme of learning needs characteristics, including concrete media, intensive repetition, task solving, and personal motivation; the theme of social support received, including emotional, instrumental, and reward support; and the theme of learning identity, including self-efficacy, autonomy, and social dimensions.

4. *Connections* across themes.

Themes were grouped into clusters based on meaning, and researchers synthesized the condensed data into a thematic narrative presentation illustrating the relationships among the three themes.

5. Compiling a theme table and writing an essential narrative (*moving to the next case, tabulating themes, & writing a narrative*).

The researcher analyzed each participant individually (C1–C4) before looking for cross-case patterns, then compiled a thematic table (such as Table 1) and wrote an interpretive narrative with direct quotations. Conclusions were drawn inductively by interpreting the condensed and synthesized data, then linking them to theories in a gradual, iterative manner until accurate and representative findings were obtained. The entire analysis process followed an interactive flow that included data condensation, data presentation, and repeated conclusion drawing until saturation was reached (Figure 1).

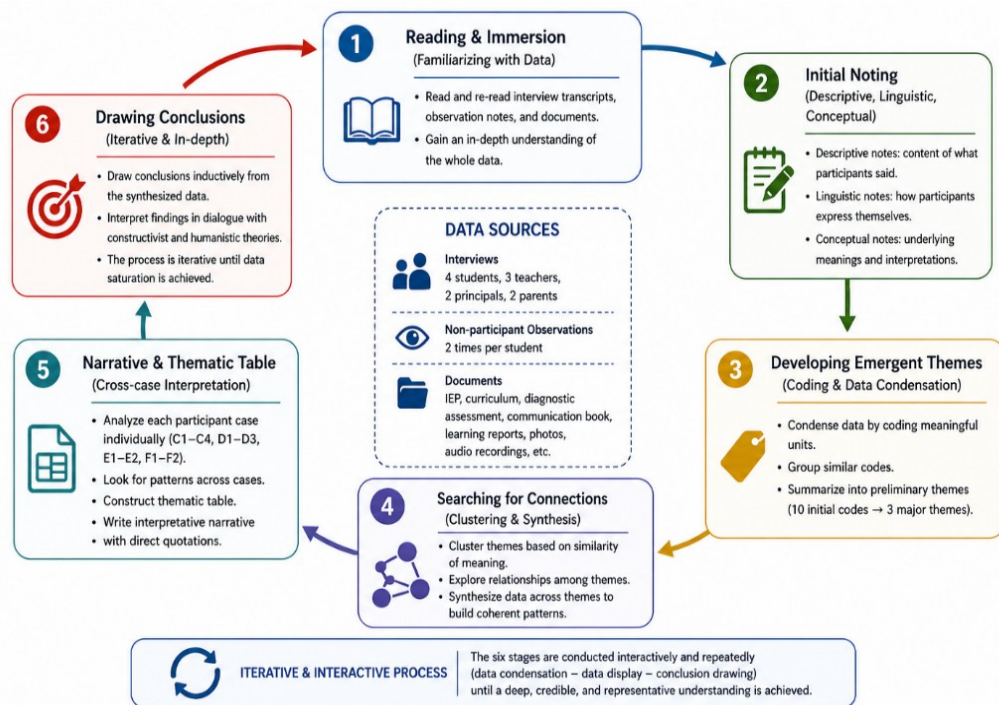


Figure 1. Data Analysis Process Base Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

Source: Adapted from Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell (2004); Miller & Minton (2016); Smith (2015)

Data Validity

Data validity was ensured through source triangulation, technical triangulation, and member checking. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information from students, teachers, principals, and parents. Technical triangulation was implemented by combining three data collection methods, namely interviews, observations, and document analysis. The characteristics of learning needs and social support were traced by comparing interviews with students and then verified through direct observation of learning process interactions, and then confirmed by teachers and principals, as well as analysis of diagnostic assessment documents and individual learning programs (IPCs). Student statements about the contribution of social support to the formation of learning identities (self-efficacy, autonomy, and social dimensions) were traced through teacher interviews and verified through observation of student activities both inside and outside the classroom, then confirmed with the principal and parents, and analysis of learning outcome reports, student progress notes, and parent liaison books.

Member checking is done by returning the researcher's interpretation results to participants to ensure there are no errors in interpretation. Researchers used reflective journals to record pre-understandings, assumptions, and changes in perspective throughout the study. Reflective journals served as a buffer against irrelevant or biased assumptions. This strengthened the researcher's position as a key instrument in the construction of meaning. Findings related to learning needs, social support, and learning identity were confirmed directly with teachers, principals, and parents. Through this procedure, students' construction of learning identity was accurately analyzed using success narratives, ensuring accountability for all findings.

Research Ethics

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the study, as it involved student participants. Written consent was obtained from the principal, teachers, parents or guardians, and students prior to participation. Participants' identities were anonymized using initials. All research data was securely stored and accessible only to the researcher. These procedures were implemented to protect children's rights, privacy, and well-being, in accordance with established ethical guidelines.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Finding(s)

The findings of this study are presented based on coding of data obtained through interviews and observations. Coding was carried out inductively to identify the main themes that emerged from the subjective experiences of four students with intellectual disabilities (C1, C2, C3, C4) in three elementary schools that implement inclusion in Banyumas Regency: (1) Characteristics of learning needs include concrete media, intensive repetition, task solving, and personal motivation; (2) Social support includes emotional support, instrumental support, and appreciation; and (3) The contribution of social support to learning identity includes self-efficacy, autonomy, and social dimensions.

Table 2. Summary of Research Findings

Theme	Indicator	C1	C2	C3	C4
1. Characteristics of Learning Needs	Concrete media	Real objects like pebbles and puzzles are easier to understand. When used, students appear calm, focused, and rarely make mistakes.	Students enjoy math when they use toys as they move forward. Students appear enthusiastic, and their error rate drops dramatically.	Understanding fractions is easier with cookie pieces. Students follow the teacher's movements, smile, and nod when they succeed.	Learning to count using marbles under the guidance of a teacher. Students are not anxious and appear to be engaged without rushing.
	Intensive repetition	Requires up to five repetitions. The teacher guides patiently, and students begin responding correctly by the fourth repetition.	Reading and writing should be repeated several times. Students review during breaks, and teachers provide word cards for homework.	It requires four repetitions plus time to think. The teacher pauses for 10–15 seconds, and students answer correctly on the fourth attempt.	It requires three repetitions interspersed with songs or games. Students sing along, point to numbers, laugh, and stay focused.
	Task breakdown	It's easier if assignments are given one at a time, starting with the easiest ones.	They panic and become silent when given multiple problems at once. Once the	Requires working examples one by one on the board. Students copy each step and	They enjoy working on one task at a time, from easy to difficult. An easy

Theme	Indicator	C1	C2	C3	C4
2. Social Support Received		Students complete them without asking questions, and the teacher gradually assigns questions.	task is broken down into single problems, students begin to pick up their pencils and work on them.	check each section before moving on.	problem is solved in two minutes, and then students are eager to move on to the next one.
	Personal motivation	They enjoy learning while drawing food. During fractions class, students chose to draw a pizza and seemed more engaged.	The teacher plays videos and music, making them more enthusiastic. Students clap and sing along, even coming to the front without being asked.	More interested in crafts. Students focused on cutting and pasting, then proudly displayed their work.	They don't like studying in class all the time. While learning to play ball and count, the students laugh out loud and refuse to stop.
	Emotional support	The teacher said, <i>"Take it slow, you'll understand soon enough,"</i> in a gentle voice. The students felt relieved and continued writing.	Hearing affirmations of <i>"You can do it"</i> and peer applause. The entire class applauded when the student succeeded, and he smiled.	Every morning, the teacher asks about students' difficulties. The teacher provides support without making them wait.	The teacher said, <i>"Cheer up, you can do it."</i> The student clenched his fist, said, <i>"I can do it, ma'am,"</i> and then immediately opened his book.
3. Impact on Learning Identity	Instrumental support	Students receive picture books, learn using fruit, puzzles, and beads. Teachers provide special containers for students to study in an organized manner.	Students are provided with special books, front seats, and thick-handled pencils. Students sit in the front row and don't need to borrow writing utensils.	Students receive interactive storybooks, special pencils, and guidance in the self-development room. Students work with picture flashcards and appear relaxed.	They're often given educational toys like letter cards, marbles, and toy cars. Teachers join in on the floor play so students don't feel like they're learning.
	Award support	Always praised and applauded every time they come forward, students return to their seats with their heads held high.	The class clapped, "WOW," and the teacher gave a star sticker. The students stuck the stickers on their books.	The teacher and classmates applauded after the student finished reading. The student lowered his head in shame, but then he raised his hand more often to read.	I really like hearing the word "great" from my teacher. During recess, I ask, <i>"Mom, I was great, wasn't I?"</i> The teacher gives me a thumbs-up.
	Self-efficacy	The teacher didn't get angry when the student misread the text. After five tries, the student was able and brave enough to try again.	Before the test, the teacher whispered, <i>"You can do it."</i> The students worked on the questions one by one, breathing steadily and without panic.	Every Tuesday and Thursday, students go to the self-help room to read. They feel comfortable with the familiarity, even choosing their own books without being escorted.	Initially, she was afraid of being asked to read. After trying and receiving applause, she felt happy and stepped forward confidently.
	Autonomy	I used to ask for help immediately, but now I try things myself and then ask if I'm really confused.	He used to be sad because of low reading scores. The teacher reassured him that grades weren't	He used to be lazy and just ask for answers. Now he says, <i>"Don't tell me yet, Mom,"</i> as	He held the teacher's hand to keep her from leaving, but continued to try to do the work

Theme	Indicator	C1	C2	C3	C4
		The teacher only guides.	everything. He then made a 10-minute reading schedule every morning without being asked.	he closes the book with his hand.	himself. Once he was finished, he let go of the teacher's hand.
	Social dimension	Their deskmate reads the question quietly while pointing to the word. Students follow their classmate's pointing finger, and there is no teasing from other students.	Panic if you don't finish writing. A friend says, "Don't worry, I'll lend you my notes later." The student smiles a little and continues writing.	His classmates noticed his predicament. While the student was silent, two friends approached and asked, "Need help?" The student nodded, and then they helped without the teacher's prompting.	A friend asks, "Need help?" The student answers "Yes" while pointing to a difficult problem. The friend sits next to him and explains in simple language.

The research findings in Table 2 show that the four students with intellectual disabilities (C1–C4) have unique learning needs, requiring concrete media, intensive repetition of material, solving tasks in small steps, and personal motivation. These needs are met through holistic social support, including emotional, instrumental, and reward support. The fulfillment of this social support contributes to the formation of students' learning identities. This is characterized by the growth of self-efficacy (confidence to try), autonomy (independence in routine tasks), and social dimensions (interaction and acceptance from peers). A detailed description of the findings of the construction of learning identities of students with intellectual disabilities in inclusive spaces will be presented based on three main themes, as follows:

Characteristics of Academic Learning Needs of Students with Intellectual Disabilities

The four students showed four unique learning needs: namely, concrete media, intensive repetition, task solving, and personal motivation, which were based on an initial assessment in the form of a medical diagnosis, followed up by school inclusion service interventions.

1. Learning Needs Through Concrete Media

The experiences of the four students with intellectual disabilities demonstrate the consistent need for concrete media as a tool to make abstract arithmetic concepts that previously caused anxiety more tangible, meaningful, and understandable. Student's statement, "*i find it easier to understand reading and arithmetic lessons using real objects like pebbles, banknotes, and puzzles*" (Interview D1, 26/2/2026). A similar pattern observed in C2, C3, and C4 indicates decreased anxiety and increased understanding through the use of concrete media that can be touched, moved, and grouped. Observations show, Students showed better understanding when learning with concrete media such as pebbles, puzzles, marbles, cake pieces, and educational toys: C1 appeared calmer and more focused when counting with pebbles; C2 appeared more enthusiastic when learning was done with toys; C3 found it easier to understand fractions through cake pieces; and while C4 appeared less anxious when learning to count using marbles with teacher guidance. Individual teacher guidance made them more confident, reduced errors, and made the learning process more enjoyable.

The findings were reinforced by a teacher who stated, “*C1 understands better if he directly holds the media*” (Interview D1, 5/3/2026). Direct experience with concrete media is an important foundation for conceptual understanding in students with intellectual disabilities. D2 and D3 also added that C3 became more enthusiastic and easily understood the material, and that C4 showed increased engagement during the learning process using real objects. The principal (E1-E2) emphasized that the provision of concrete media is part of the school policy stated in the Individual Learning Program (PPI). Thus, concrete media acts as a bridge between physical experience and symbolic understanding, reducing anxiety, increasing engagement, and facilitating conceptual understanding for students with intellectual disabilities in inclusive education.

2. Intensive Repetition with Variation

The four student informants demonstrated relatively similar experiences related to short-term memory limitations and to information not being immediately retained permanently in consciousness. One student stated, “*teachers often teach me, but I don't immediately remember it; I have to repeat it over and over again*” (Interview C2, 26/2/2026). The experiences of C1, C3, and C4 also showed similar patterns: difficulty retaining memory when material is presented only once, a tendency to forget easily after understanding the previous material, and the need for varied, repeated learning. Observations showed that all four students needed gradual repetition of the material. C1 began responding correctly after several repetitions; C2 needed repeated reading and writing practice; C3 needed four repetitions with a pause for thinking before answering; and C4 focused better when the repetition was interspersed with songs or games. The process of internalizing knowledge occurs gradually and requires repeated reinforcement to help structure information in memory more stably.

The findings were reinforced by teachers' statements regarding pedagogical awareness of students' cognitive characteristics. The teachers compared the learning process to “*filling a leaky bucket today, remembering tomorrow, forgetting, and losing the knowledge*” (Interview D1, 5/3/2026), which illustrates the continuity of reinforcement in learning. Teachers (D2 and D3) also explained that consistent repetition of the same material, combined with a variety of methods, helps maintain students' attention and engagement. The principal reinforced the findings, the school ensures that material repetition for students with intellectual disabilities is implemented effectively through classroom supervision, teacher training, integration of repetition strategies in the Individual Learning Program (IPP), and regular reflection through learning communities so that the implementation of repetition can be monitored and improved systematically. Thus, students with intellectual disabilities require consistent repetition of material, with knowledge embedded in short-term memory through a variety of fun activities to increase focus, engagement, and learning success.

3. Task Analysis

All student informants indicated psychological stress when faced with complex tasks given simultaneously. Students found it easier to complete tasks when they were given in stages. C1 and C4 felt more comfortable when tasks were given from easy to difficult. One student stated, “*I often panic and become silent when given several problems at once, not wanting to work on them*” (Interview C2, 26/2/2026). C2 appeared panicked when given many problems at once, but began working on them after the tasks were broken down into individual problems. This panic reflects a “a shutdown response” triggered when cognitive load exceeds processing capacity. C3 required examples of each problem to be displayed on the board before continuing with the task. This finding

confirms that the primary obstacle lies in the task's presentation, not in the complexity of the material. Observations indicated that students were more focused, more active, and better able to complete tasks correctly when tasks were broken down into small steps and presented in stages. The teacher assisted them individually, provided concrete examples, and guided them through each step, reducing confusion and increasing learning success.

Teacher responses demonstrated consistent practice in adapting learning methods to student conditions. A teacher stated that *“long and complex instructions often make C1 and C2 less likely to respond or avoid tasks”* (Interview D1, 5/3/2026). Statements by D2 and D3 also explained that learning is carried out by dividing tasks into smaller, gradual parts, with support tailored to students' needs. The principal emphasized that *“this approach through task-breaking is consistently implemented and recorded in the Individual Learning Program (IPP), which ensures that each student receives support according to their cognitive capacity”* (Interview E1, 8/3/2026). Thus, students with intellectual disabilities are better able to complete tasks when complex material is broken down into small, gradual steps and accompanied by teachers, thereby reducing psychological stress and optimizing learning outcomes.

4. Personal Motivation

All students demonstrated a need for learning motivation when the learning material was connected to their personal interests. One student stated, *“Learning is more enjoyable while drawing and coloring food themes”* (Interview C1, 26/2/2026). Similar sentiments were expressed by C2, C3, and C4, who had different learning motivation needs. C2 needed audiovisual media such as music; C3 needed more creative and hands-on activities, such as making crafts; C4 needed kinesthetic learning, for example, while exercising or playing, to reduce boredom and maintain engagement. Classroom observations showed that students were more focused, more enthusiastic, and more actively engaged when activities were tailored to their preferred activities. C1 was more diligent when learning while drawing; C2 was more enthusiastic when the teacher played their favorite videos and music; C3 focused more on arts and crafts activities; and C4 was more enthusiastic when learning was combined with ball games and counting.

The teacher emphasized, *“C1's motivation is highest when the material is related to things they like, such as their favorite food”* (Interview D1, 5/3/2026). D2 and D3 added that even the smallest success accompanied by praise or direct attention encourages student enthusiasm and engagement. For example, C2, who has difficulty counting, becomes enthusiastic after successfully counting his favorite toys. The principals (E1 and E2) emphasized that co-curricular programs are based on interests, talents, and learning approaches that adapt to individual needs, such as sports, singing, arts and culture (drawing, crafts, and music), caring for plants, cooking, and computer technology. Thus, the learning motivation of students with intellectual disabilities is shaped situationally through the connection between learning materials and students' personal interests, as well as positive reinforcement from teachers and the environment.

Social Support Received by Students with Intellectual Disabilities

The social support students receive includes four forms: emotional, instrumental, appreciative, and informational.

1. Emotional Support

All students experienced emotional support through their teacher's patience, verbal affirmations, and a safe environment. Students reported that teacher D1 said, *"Take it slow, you'll understand"* (Interview C1, 26/2/2026). C2, C3, and C4 also experienced social support regarding their engagement in learning. C2 felt supported by the teacher's patience, affirmations of *"you can do it, try it,"* and applause from peers when they succeeded, which encouraged them to try new things. C3 received personal attention through the teacher's questions each morning about assignment difficulties, which made her feel cared for. C4 received encouragement from the teacher's gentle words, which fostered self-confidence. These experiences of social support made students feel valued and better prepared to face learning challenges. Observations showed that the teacher's emotional support helped students feel more secure and confident. C1 felt relieved when the teacher gave directions in a gentle voice; C2 smiled after receiving affirmations and applause from peers; C3 was helped when the teacher asked about her difficulties each morning; and C4 showed enthusiasm after receiving verbal encouragement from the teacher. This approach values students' feelings, helps them manage their emotions, and makes them feel heard, safe, and emotionally valued.

These findings are reinforced by consistent teacher practices. A teacher stated, *"I build a sense of safety by personally greeting students every morning, calling them by name with a smile, and giving them a pat on the shoulder. My tone of voice is always gentle, even when students make mistakes"* (Interview D1, 5/3/2026). This approach makes students feel accepted, safe, and comfortable in the classroom. Statements D2 and D3 also provide emotional support by being patient, non-judgmental listeners, and paying attention to the body language of students who have difficulty expressing their feelings. The principal stated that *"A child-friendly environment policy is the foundation for creating a psychologically safe school climate"* (Interview E2, 9/3/2026). Thus, the experience of consistent emotional support from teachers, built through patience, positive affirmations, personal attention, and a safe environment, serves as a key foundation for the engagement of students with intellectual disabilities in learning and is an important prerequisite for creating meaningful learning experiences in inclusive education.

2. Instrumental Support

Instrumental support for students with intellectual disabilities is provided through facilities, learning media, assistive devices, and individual mentoring services. A student stated, *"I got a drawing book because the teacher knows my hobby. Sometimes they teach using fruit, puzzles, or beads"* (Interview C1, 26/2/2026). Statements from C2, C3, and C4 describe the special facilities and guidance they received: C2 received a special printed book, a front-row seat, intensive mentoring, and a special pencil to help them focus better; C3 received an interactive storybook, a special pencil, and guidance in the self-development room several times a week to support engagement and gradual understanding; C4 received toys for learning to count, teacher mentoring, and letter cards as enrichment to make learning more interesting and practical.

Teachers also adapted by tailoring instruction to individual students' needs. D1 simplified language and instructions, modified worksheets, and provided picture cards and pencil grips to help students become more independent and understand the material. D2 adjusted the number and difficulty of questions, used concrete and manipulable materials, and provided focus aids for students with concentration difficulties. D3 adjusted delivery and evaluation methods through songs, movement, and games, and provided aids such as illustrated schedules, visual timers, ear muffs, and textured carpets. All of these modifications made students more engaged, more comfortable, and better able to follow the learning.

The principals (E1-E2) emphasized that comprehensive instrumental support and learning modifications are implemented to meet the individual needs of students with intellectual disabilities. The schools provide comprehensive facilities and resources, including concrete learning media, self-help rooms, specialized writing aids, and audiovisual technology to facilitate understanding of the material and increase student engagement. They also provide individual mentoring programs (PPI), routine guidance, Special Assistant Teachers (GPK), peer tutors, and services for functional, emotional, and spiritual skill development. Observations indicate that all three schools have provided these facilities and resources. However, the availability of Special Assistant Teachers (GPK) is uneven across classes, so some students still require additional attention. Therefore, the combination of facilities, learning modifications, and individual mentoring makes students feel comfortable, valued, confident, and more capable of participating in learning.

3. Award Support

Social support is demonstrated through consistent and varied rewards, helping students feel valued and cared for. A student stated, *"I always get praise from the teacher and applause from my friends every time I come to the front of the class to do an assignment or answer a question"* (Interview C1, 26/2/2026). Statements from C2, C3, and C4 also indicate that recognition and appreciation from teachers and peers make them more enthusiastic and engaged in learning: C2 feels happy when friends give "WOW" applause and the teacher gives a star sticker; C3 feels happy but a little embarrassed when the teacher and friends applaud her after she finishes reading; and C4 likes teacher praise, such as the word "great," so he wants to repeat the experience the next day. These experiences of social recognition and verbal affirmation give students a sense of being valued, making them more confident and active in the learning process and creating a positive classroom climate.

The findings are reinforced by teachers' practice of systematically applying rewards in various forms. D1 provides personal recognition through direct praise, recognition in front of parents or the principal, and privileges such as leading the line, so students feel valued and confident. D2 emphasizes specific praise and social recognition from peers, helping students understand what behaviors are valued and encouraging repetition of positive behaviors. D3 uses a concrete reward system, such as giving stickers for each achievement and small prizes after collecting 10 stars. This approach allows students to see tangible achievements, feel valued, and actively participate, ensuring that everyone has a fair opportunity.

The principal emphasized that, *"The school provides a special awards program for students with intellectual disabilities that emphasizes individual achievement in PPI, both academic and non-academic"* (Interview E1, 8/3/2026). Awards are also given through certificates of progress, verbal praise, applause, star stickers under the "Bintang Kelas" program, and opportunities to participate in competitions, contests, art

exhibitions, and art performances. All student progress (C1, C2, and C4) is recorded in report cards and liaison books involving parents. Significant achievements can be recognized through collective activities such as educational visits. This program makes students feel valued, proud, and motivated to continue developing. Phenomenologically, consistent appreciation and social recognition from both teachers and peers make students with intellectual disabilities feel valued, proud, and cared for.

The Contribution of Social Support to the Formation of Learning Identity

1. Self-Efficacy

Research findings indicate that social support from classroom teachers, special assistants, and peers gradually contributes to improved self-efficacy among students with intellectual disabilities. Students stated, *“The teacher doesn't get angry if I read something wrong. I can do it, and I dare to try”* (Interview C1, 26/2/2026). Teachers' patience, lack of judgment, clear instructions, and opportunities for repeated attempts help students learn without fear of mistakes, build courage, and increase self-confidence. Statements from C2, C3, and C4 indicate that consistent support makes them feel safe, valued, and confident: C2 feels calmer when facing tests thanks to the teacher's verbal encouragement; C3 feels comfortable with the predictable learning routine; C4, who was initially afraid, becomes brave, happy, and motivated thanks to the teacher's encouragement and the applause of friends.

Observations showed an increase in positive behavior. Students (C1-C4) who were initially passive became proactive in responding to questions, raising their hands, coming forward, engaging in discussions, maintaining eye contact, and asking for help. Teachers confirmed these changes through systematic practice. Teachers stated that graded assignments according to ability changed students' attitudes from *“I can't”* to *“I'll try”* (Interview D1, 5/3/2026). D2 emphasized that a safe classroom climate and encouragement to ask questions made students more active and courageous. D3 added that rewards for every effort encouraged students to try to complete assignments. Analysis of progress notes and learning outcomes showed improvements in academic ability and behavior over the semester. The principal emphasized that positive support and reinforcement (praise, applause, simple gifts) encouraged active student participation. Parents of C1 and C3 confirmed changes at home, such as their children daring to try before saying *“I can't”* and were proud of their courage in coming to the front of the class and saying, *“Now I'm not embarrassed to answer”* (Interview F1-F2, 10-11/3/2026).



Figure 2. Self-Efficacy of Students with Intellectual Disabilities

Source: Author's personal document

Phenomenologically, increased self-efficacy in students with intellectual disabilities is driven by emotional support and appreciation from classroom teachers, special education teachers, and peers. The experience of acceptance and verbal reinforcement, such as praise, applause, and simple gifts, makes students feel safe, valued, and confident. This support fosters the courage to try tasks, ask questions, and actively participate in class, even if one was previously passive or afraid of making mistakes. Success in small tasks and recognition of effort can foster courage, active engagement, and a readiness for continuous learning and development.

2. Autonomy (Learning Independence)

Research findings indicate that students' learning independence develops through the synergy of consistent classroom routines, gradual individual mentoring, and consistency across school and home contexts. Students stated, *"I used to immediately ask for help when I got a math problem. Now I try it myself first. If I'm really confused, then I ask"* (Interview C1, 26/2/2026). Statements from C2, C3, and C4 also indicate increased initiative, independent thinking, and the courage to make decisions, while still receiving mentoring when needed. Teachers emphasized that *"Independence is reflected in students' ability to actively engage in learning without relying entirely on the teacher,"* as measured by initiative, responsibility, and involvement in the learning process, even if their progress is little (Interview D1, 5/3/2026).

Observations show that teachers (D1-D3) gradually reduced assistance (fading) and provided opportunities to try their own math and reading tasks, along with positive feedback when successful, thereby encouraging the development of independence. Students (C1-C4) who were initially passive, such as being silent or avoiding, became proactive, asking for continuous assistance; namely, students were able to initiate, carry out, and complete independent learning activities, dare to ask questions, raise their hands, engage in discussions, and manage themselves. The Principals (E1 and E2) added that consistent guidance at school and at home is an important factor in ensuring that independent behavior remains internalized. Parents of C2 and C3 confirmed changes at home, for example, doing homework or preparing daily supplies independently. Analysis of progress record documents over six months showed a shift in independence from full guidance to reduced guidance from September 2025 to February 2026.



Figure 3. Students' Independence in Completing Assignments

Source: Author's personal document

The domains of independence development include academic (completing assignments independently, thinking independently), non-academic/life skills (making decisions, preparing tools or equipment independently), and social-emotional (self-confidence, daring to interact and receive feedback). Thus, emotional support creates a sense of security for students, esteem support affirms and recognizes every effort they make, and instrumental support provides the means and opportunities to try independently. The combination of these three supports the development of independence, initiative, courage, and active involvement in the academic, non-academic, and social-emotional domains, while simultaneously fostering the ability to learn and participate in everyday life in a sustainable manner.

3. Social Dimension (Interaction and Participation)

Research findings indicate that students with intellectual disabilities undergo a social transformation, moving from being passive and avoidant to becoming more confident in interacting with and actively participating alongside their peers. Students still experience difficulties with reading and arithmetic, but their peers remain accepting and supportive, preventing social isolation. The experience of being accepted by peers creates a sense of security and inclusion, boosts self-confidence, and encourages active involvement in classroom activities. As one student expressed, *“My classmates know I have difficulty reading and arithmetic, but they don't distance themselves...if you need help, just tell me”* (Interview C1, 26/2/2026). Peer support can help students overcome learning difficulties; C1 found it helpful when a friend read the questions slowly, C2 felt reassured when a friend offered notes, and C4 was able to ask for help directly.

A teacher observing the development of social initiatives in students with intellectual disabilities stated, *“Previously, students only interacted when approached...now they look for their favorite friends, show their books with a smile, and show their writing to their friends”* (Interview D1, 5/3/2026). Although their communication is still limited, these behaviors indicate that students are beginning to feel safe, accepted, and actively participate socially. Statements by D2 and D3 added that C3 now dares to ask for help, responds to greetings, greets friends, participates in discussions with short answers or by pointing to pictures, and that C4 imitates positive behaviors from friends, such as putting away books or waiting in line for food. These interactive experiences foster a sense of belonging, social engagement, and positive behavior in the classroom.



Figure 4. Social Interactions of Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities with Peers

Source: Author's personal document

The principal (E1-E2) emphasized that school inclusion programs, such as peer tutoring, inclusion buddies, and diversity campaigns, can foster social interaction and empathy. Students with disabilities receive learning support and a sense of belonging, while regular students learn patience, caring, and respect for differences. These experiences create a safe, inclusive, and welcoming classroom environment, fostering a sense of belonging, social engagement, and awareness and appreciation of diversity. C1's parent confirmed changes at home, stating, *"My child now wants to sit and chat with his cousins and neighbors"* (Interview F1, 10/3/2026). Findings indicate an increase in the willingness to participate socially. Analysis of student social behavior development documentation showed that the frequency of interaction initiations increased from 0-1 to 3-4 times per week during the observation period. Thus, a supportive social environment enables students to internalize empathy and respect for differences, and to develop sustainable social skills in everyday life.

Discussion

Learning Needs: Concrete, Repetitive, Gradual, and Personal

The research findings indicate that the learning needs of students with intellectual disabilities are specific and cannot be standardized with those of regular students. Based on diagnostic assessments and follow-up through school inclusion services, learning needs in the academic domain include four main aspects: concrete media, varied intensive repetition, task solving, and personal motivation. These findings are relevant to the studies of Campos-Jara et al., (2024); Lubis et al., (2023); Rani et al., (2025) which emphasizes that cognitive limitations in students with intellectual disabilities cause difficulties in processing abstract information, so that the characteristics of the learning needs of students with intellectual disabilities can be realized through the use of concrete media, repetition of learning materials, and division of tasks into simpler units. These four aspects are consistently observed in the experiences of C1–C4, who find it easier to understand academic concepts when the material is presented through real objects, gradual activities, and the context of everyday life.

First, concrete media acts as a bridge between direct experience and symbolic understanding. Second, intensive repetition is also necessary because the process of internalizing information in students with intellectual disabilities is slower and requires continuous reinforcement. Repetition should be varied through games, songs, movements, or visual media to prevent boredom. Third, task-solving is essential for students with intellectual disabilities, considering that complex instructions given all at once can lead to confusion, anxiety, and even resistance to learning. Breaking down instructions into small steps allows students to gradually understand instructions and gain successful experiences. Small successes help reduce psychological stress, build a sense of competence, and encourage students to try again. Fourth, personal motivation can strengthen learning engagement because students are more responsive when material is linked to their interests, such as drawing, music, crafts, games, or movement activities. Therefore, learning for students with intellectual disabilities needs to be designed not only around academic goals but also around students' sense of safety, interests, and readiness to learn.

These findings emphasize that inclusive education is not merely the acceptance of students with intellectual disabilities in regular schools but must be realized through learning services that are adaptive and responsive to students' individual needs (Mishra et al., 2023; Tan, 2021). Inclusion policies have been strengthened through the Bandung Declaration, Minister of National Education Regulation No. 70 of 2009, and Banyumas regional policies; however, their implementation still faces issues in terms of affordability, consistency, and

quality of services (Husna et al., 2025; Marja et al., 2025; Rani et al., 2025; Sinaga et al., 2025). The main issue of inclusion is not only about access but also about the pedagogical quality of teachers in translating policies into concrete, repeated, gradual, and personally meaningful learning practices.

Unlike previous studies that primarily focused on cognitive limitations, access, or institutional barriers to serving individuals with intellectual disabilities (Susanti & Ramadhani, 2024; Woodcock & Anderson, 2025), This study places students' subjective experiences as the basis for understanding learning needs in inclusive spaces. Its contribution lies in affirming that the learning needs of students with intellectual disabilities are adaptive, individual, and relational. Adaptive means that learning must accommodate students' cognitive capacities; individual means that each student has different interests and learning styles; and relational means that learning success is achieved through interactions among media, methods, teacher guidance, school policies, and environmental support. Therefore, inclusive learning for students with intellectual disabilities needs to be understood as a pedagogical process that not only supports academic achievement but also builds students' sense of security, self-confidence, and active engagement as learning subjects.

Social Support: Emotional, Instrumental, and Inclusive Esteem

Research findings indicate that the social support received by students with intellectual disabilities is multidimensional, encompassing emotional, instrumental, and esteem support. These three forms of support come from classroom teachers, support teachers, peers, and the principal within the inclusive education ecosystem. This support not only helps students learn but also creates a sense of security, acceptance, and appreciation in the school environment. These findings align with those of Cubero-Pérez et al. (2024); Foera-Era Lase (2024); Rosalina & Apsari (2020); Sone et al. (2025), who emphasize that social support in inclusive education should be understood as ecological support that involves teachers, peers, families, and school policies.

Emotional support is evident in teachers' patience, verbal affirmations, personalized attention, and the creation of a psychologically safe classroom climate. Teachers' expressions such as *"Take it slow, you'll understand," "You can do it,"* and *"Keep your spirits up"* demonstrate that emotional support helps reduce students' anxiety when facing academic tasks. This support is crucial because students with intellectual disabilities require not only cognitive assistance but also reassurance that learning mistakes will not lead to anger, ridicule, or rejection. Thus, emotional support provides the initial foundation for students' courage to try, ask questions, and engage in learning. These findings reinforce studies (Cubero-Pérez et al., 2024; Sone et al., 2025), that suggest a sense of safety and social acceptance play a crucial role in the adaptation of students with disabilities in inclusive settings.

Instrumental support is provided through learning media, aids, task modifications, strategic seating, individual guidance, and self-development rooms. C1 obtained picture books and media according to his interests, C2 received special books and a front seat, C3 received interactive story books and regular mentoring, while C4 learned using letter cards, marbles, and educational toys. These findings are in line with Campos-Jara et al., (2024); Susanti & Ramadhani, (2024), who show that instrumental support is not just the provision of facilities, but a concrete form of learning adaptation to individual student needs regarding the importance of learning modifications, concrete media, and mentoring in helping students with intellectual disabilities understand the material gradually.

Reward support took the form of praise, applause, star stickers, peer recognition, and appreciation for students' small successes. When teachers and peers offered appreciation, students felt their efforts were recognized and had a reason to try again. C1 felt happy when praised and applauded, C2 was motivated by star stickers, C3 felt embarrassed but happy when friends applauded, and C4 was encouraged to learn again after receiving the praise of "great." These findings align with those of Orío-Aparicio, López-Escribano, & Bel-Fenellós (2026) and Wiesel et al., (2024), who found that social recognition can strengthen the motivation, confidence, and engagement of students with disabilities.

These findings suggest that social support in inclusive education cannot be understood as a temporary aid but as a relational system that underpins students' learning experiences. Emotional support provides a sense of security, instrumental support provides access and tools for learning, while esteem support strengthens motivation and a sense of worth. These three forms are complementary and inseparable. If any one form of support is not functioning optimally, students' experiences of inclusion will also be incomplete. For example, learning facilities will be ineffective without patient and responsive teachers, while praise will be less meaningful if students lack appropriate tools and guidance.

The difference between this study and previous studies lies in its emphasis on students' subjective experiences in receiving social support. Previous studies tended to discuss social support within a general framework, such as the role of teachers, limited facilities, or school policies (Safitri, 2025; Susanti & Ramadhani, 2024; Woodcock & Anderson, 2025). This study shows that social support directly affects students, making them feel safe, less afraid of making mistakes, more willing to try, and more accepted by their peers. Thus, social support functions not only as a factor supporting learning but also as a psychosocial experience that shapes the quality of the presence of students with intellectual disabilities in inclusive spaces.

The novelty of this research lies in the understanding that social support for students with intellectual disabilities is ecological, relational, and pedagogical. It is ecological because it involves various actors within the school environment; relational because it is built through consistent interactions between teachers and peers; and pedagogical because social support directly influences how students access learning. Therefore, meaningful inclusion services require more than just providing policies and facilities; they must also build a social support system that is consistent, responsive, and oriented to students' individual needs.

The Contribution of Social Support to Learning Identity

Research findings indicate that consistent social support from teachers, peers, and principals contributes to the development of learning identities for students with intellectual disabilities across three main dimensions: self-efficacy, autonomy, and social dimension. Learning identities are not formed instantly, but are manifested through repeated learning experiences, supportive relationships, and social recognition within an inclusive environment. Students' changes are evident in shifts from feelings of fear, passivity, and dependence to behaviors that are bolder, more willing to try, take initiative, and engage in social interactions. These findings align with Cubero-Pérez et al. (2024), who assert that learning identities are psychosocial constructs formed through ongoing academic experiences and social interactions.

First, the development of self-efficacy is manifested through emotional support and appreciation from teachers and peers, encouraging students to see themselves as individuals capable of learning. Teachers' patience when students make mistakes, positive affirmations, opportunities to try again, and peer appreciation foster a sense of psychological safety. C1's experience, in which the teacher did not get angry when he misread a sentence, and C4's courage to step forward again after receiving applause from peers, demonstrate that small, recognized successes can strengthen students' self-confidence. These findings support Nurrindar & Wahjudi (2021), who explain that self-efficacy is related to an individual's belief in their ability to complete a task.

Second, the autonomy dimension, in which social support contributes through gradual mentoring, providing opportunities to try, and gradually reducing assistance. The change in C1 from directly asking for help to trying independently, and the change in C3 from asking for answers to asking for opportunities to think, indicate that the independence of students with intellectual disabilities develops through a consistent scaffolding process. Autonomy in this context is not defined as complete independence without assistance, but rather as the student's ability to take initiative, manage tasks, and appropriately ask for assistance. These findings align with Carey (2021), who defines autonomy as an individual's ability to make decisions and gradually develop independence.

The three social dimensions, peer support, and an inclusive classroom climate, encourage students to shift from passive or withdrawn to more interactive behavior. C3's experience of feeling accepted despite having difficulty with reading and arithmetic demonstrates that supportive social relationships can reduce feelings of isolation and strengthen a sense of belonging within the classroom community. Peer support through help reading questions, lending notes, greetings, or applause not only helps students academically but also fosters social experiences of acceptance and appreciation. These findings reinforce Popova & Wiese's (2022), findings that learner identity is formed through ongoing social interactions.

These findings also resonate with previous research (Foera-Era Lase, 2024; Rosalina & Apsari, 2020; Sone et al., 2025), which emphasized the importance of social support from the school ecosystem in strengthening student engagement in inclusive education. Social support not only impacts learning engagement but also shapes how students perceive themselves as learners. Support from teachers, peer tutors, the "Sahabat Inklusi" program, and consistent mentoring between school and home create a relational system that enables students to internalize the experiences of being "capable," "independent," and "accepted."

Unlike previous quantitative studies that tended to measure the implementation index of inclusive education in schools (Marja et al., 2025), This study provides a deeper understanding of the subjective process of student learning identity formation. Research studies (Orío-Aparicio, López-Escribano, & Bel-Fenellós, 2026; Wiesel et al., 2024), emphasized the negative impact of a lack of social support, while this study demonstrates positive experiences when social support is consistently present in students' daily lives. Phenomenologically, repeated and meaningful support not only helps students complete assignments but also results in a change in self-awareness, from feeling incapable to feeling more confident and daring to participate.

The novelty of this research lies in the discovery of cross-context transfer, where the learning identity formed at school is also evident in students' behavior at home and in their social environments. Parents report that their children are starting to do their own homework before asking for help, preparing school supplies independently, and are more confident in interacting with family and neighbors. Analysis of progress notes documents from

September 2025 to February 2026 also shows a shift from passive responses to more proactive behavior. Thus, the success of inclusive education is not solely measured by the presence of students with disabilities in regular schools, but by the extent to which the inclusive environment shapes students as learners who feel capable, independent, and socially accepted.

Dialectical Relationship between Humanistic Theory and Social Constructivism

Research findings indicate that the construction of learning identities for students with intellectual disabilities in inclusive spaces is formed through a dialectical relationship between humanistic and social constructivist perspectives. The humanistic perspective emphasizes the importance of fulfilling psychological needs, such as safety, acceptance, appreciation, and emotional support, as the basis for learning engagement. Social constructivism theory asserts that knowledge and learning identities are formed through social interactions, learning experiences, and structured support from the environment (Novrizal et al., 2023). This research shows that a sense of safety and acceptance makes students more willing to try, less afraid of making mistakes, and more confident in their abilities. Emotional support alone is insufficient without an appropriate learning approach. Learning needs include concrete media, varied repetition, task solving, individual mentoring, and peer tutoring, all forms of pedagogical support that enable students to gradually understand the material. This relationship suggests that emotional readiness needs to be accompanied by structured learning support to help students build competence, independence, and social participation.

The synthesis of these two perspectives is evident in the formation of students' learning identities, which encompass self-efficacy, autonomy, and social dimensions. Self-efficacy develops through successful experiences and social rewards; autonomy grows through gradual mentoring; and the social dimension is formed through peer acceptance and involvement in the classroom community. The findings align with the view that learning identities are formed through academic experiences and ongoing social support (Cubero-Pérez et al., 2024). Thus, the theoretical novelty of this study lies in the understanding that inclusive education for students with intellectual disabilities requires integrating the meeting of psychological needs with structured socio-pedagogical support. The findings of cross-context transfer indicate that the sense of competence, independence, and confidence formed at school also emerges in students' behavior at home and in their social environments. Students' learning identities are dynamically formed through emotional, social, and pedagogical support within an inclusive ecosystem.

Research Limitations and Implications

This study has several limitations: (1) Regarding the characteristics of learning needs, the number of participants was only four students with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities. This study did not include students with severe or profound disabilities, so it cannot yet describe learning needs across a broader spectrum of disabilities; (2) This study attempted to present the voices of students' experiences as the center of analysis, however, the limited verbal articulation ability of students with intellectual disabilities remains a challenge, so that interpretation of students' subjective experiences still carries the risk of researcher bias even though triangulation and repeated observations have been carried out; and (3) The study's duration of only eight months was not sufficient to observe the sustainability of the inclusion program in the long term, so it was not able to capture changes in learning identity, including whether the transformation of self-efficacy, autonomy, and social dimensions that was formed was permanent or only temporary.

The findings of this study provide important implications for strengthening inclusive education for students with intellectual disabilities. Theoretically, learning identity is shaped not only by cognitive abilities but also by repeated emotional, social, and pedagogical experiences. The integration of humanistic and social constructivist perspectives suggests that a sense of security, acceptance, appreciation, and structured learning support play a significant role in shaping students' self-efficacy, autonomy, and social engagement. In practice, teachers need to design adaptive learning based on individual needs through concrete media, varied repetition, gradual task solving, and personal motivation, accompanied by consistent emotional, instrumental, and reward support, including support from families. Policy-wise, the Department of Education needs to strengthen inclusive services through equitable distribution of Special Assistant Teachers (GPK), ongoing teacher training, and the development of a more systematic Individual Learning Program (PPI). Thus, the success of inclusive education is measured not only by access for students with disabilities in schools but also by strengthening policies, the capabilities of the school ecosystem, and family support that shape students who feel capable, independent, and socially accepted.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the construction of the learning identity of students with intellectual disabilities in an inclusive space is formed through the integration of unique learning needs, consistent social support, and repeated learning experiences: (1) The learning needs of students with intellectual disabilities include the use of concrete media, varied intensive repetition, gradual task solving, and personal motivation according to student interests. These four aspects indicate that inclusive learning needs to be adapted to the cognitive, emotional characteristics, and individual learning rhythms of students; (2) The social support received by students includes emotional, instrumental, and reward support sourced from teachers, peers, and the principal. Emotional support is evident in teachers' patience, attention, and positive affirmation; instrumental support is provided through media, aids, task modifications, and individual mentoring; and reward support is given through praise, applause, stickers, and recognition of student efforts. These three forms of support play an important role in creating a safe, adaptive learning space and encouraging student involvement in the learning process, and (3) Consistent social support contributes to the formation of the learning identity of students with intellectual disabilities in the aspects of self-efficacy, autonomy, and social dimensions. Students demonstrated a shift from fear of making mistakes to courage to try, from complete dependence on assistance to independence, and from passivity to greater engagement in supportive social interactions between teachers, peers, family, and the school community. These findings confirm that the success of inclusive education is determined not only by the presence of students with disabilities in regular schools, but also by the quality of support that enables them to feel capable, independent, and accepted as part of the learning community.

This study proposes recommendations to various stakeholders: (1) For teachers, it is necessary to design innovative learning that systematically combines four characteristics of learning needs (concrete media, varied repetition, task analysis, and personal motivation) and ensure the Individual Learning Program (PPI) with regular monitoring and evaluation mechanisms; (2) For schools, the importance of strengthening emotional support (patience, verbal affirmation, safe environment), instrumental support (concrete media and aids), and reward support (specific praise, social recognition) as standards for inclusion services; (3) For policy makers (Education Office), strengthening policies to ensure the availability of

Special Assistant Teachers (GPK) evenly, teacher training based on individual needs, and structured parental involvement so that transfer across contexts is more optimal; (4) For parents, maintaining consistency of support at home, utilizing liaison books, and providing positive reinforcement for each child's progress; and (5) For researchers, conducting longitudinal research to see the stability of learning identity in the long term, developing learning identity measurement instruments specific to intellectual disabilities, and expanding the scope of participants at school levels in different geographic areas.

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