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Full Length Research Paper

Evaluating Inclusive Education Policies: A Human Rights Perspective on Supporting Students with Disabilities

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Inclusive education has emerged as a fundamental principle in modern educational systems, ensuring equal learning opportunities for all students, regardless of their abilities or disabilities. However, the effectiveness of current inclusive education policies remains a topic of ongoing debate. This study aims to evaluate the impact of existing inclusive education frameworks on students with disabilities and identify areas for improvement to enhance educational equity. This research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques. In-depth interviews with educators and policymakers provide insights into implementation challenges, while surveys and statistical analysis assess the academic and social outcomes of students with disabilities. Additionally, content analysis of policy documents offers a comparative perspective on best practices and areas requiring reform. Findings reveal that while inclusive education policies have led to increased access to mainstream education, disparities in resource allocation, teacher training, and curriculum adaptability hinder their effectiveness. The results highlight the need for policy refinements, such as targeted teacher support, improved assistive technologies, and adaptive learning strategies. This study contributes to the discourse on inclusive education by offering evidence-based recommendations for policymakers, educators, and administrators. By addressing identified gaps, this research supports the development of more effective and equitable educational policies that foster the full inclusion of students with disabilities, ultimately promoting a more inclusive society.

Keywords: Inclusive education, disabilities, equal opportunities, DEI policy, equity, human rights

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Inclusive Education and the Human Rights Framework

Inclusive education has emerged as a fundamental principle in global efforts to ensure that all learners, regardless of their abilities or disabilities, have access to equitable opportunities in educational settings. Rooted in the tenets of human rights and social justice, inclusive education aims to integrate students with diverse needs into mainstream educational contexts. This philosophy fosters a sense of belonging and engagement for all while advocating for the transition from segregated special education models to those that promote inclusivity and support.

Through instruments such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and the execution of the Sustainable Development Goals, inclusive education has become a focal point in educational and social justice policies aimed at enhancing equality among all learners (Pradhan and Naik, 2024). Despite global advancements, many educational systems encounter significant challenges in effectively implementing truly inclusive practices. Barriers, including inadequate training, limited resources, and deeply entrenched societal norms, hinder progress toward establishing universally equitable learning environments.

To overcome these obstacles, collaboration among stakeholders—including educators, policymakers, families, and communities—must be fostered to promote awareness and understanding of inclusive education and advocate for resources that can dismantle systemic barriers. This collaboration will ensure that the vision of inclusive practices in our educational systems remains achievable and sustainable. Enriching educational experiences is not only a moral and ethical obligation but also a fundamental right of learners to experience a more just and inclusive society.

This study, using a mixed-methods approach, seeks to provide an in-depth analysis of inclusive education practices, their efficacy, and potential areas for improvement. Both qualitative and quantitative analyses examine various stakeholder perspectives on the effectiveness of existing policies and practices, identify critical areas for reform, and provide recommendations for the continuous improvement of inclusive education practices. The following assessment evaluates the effectiveness of current inclusive education policies in supporting students with disabilities, aiming to drive quality and advance strategies that address systemic gaps.

Integration vs. Inclusion

Distinguishing between the concepts of inclusion and integration is essential for grasping the transformation of inclusive goals into educational practice. While both

approaches aim to accommodate diverse learners, they reflect different philosophies and methodologies that have significantly impacted educational settings throughout history. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, followed by increased attention to human rights in the 1970s, urged socio-political changes aimed at eliminating exclusion and increasing opportunities regardless of gender, ethnicity, or disability (Kirschner, 2015).

Molina Roldán et al. (2021) highlight a significant evolution in educational philosophy regarding inclusion. They emphasize that while the inclusive approach seeks to create quality learning environments that benefit all students, it emerged from a historical context that often focused on a specific group of learners—those with special educational needs. This distinction is crucial for understanding how contemporary educational practices have transformed and continue to evolve.

Historically, the ideology surrounding special education has often centered on the medical model of disability, as noted by Kurth et al. (2018). This model views disability primarily as a deficit or problem within the individual, categorizing students based on their perceived differences. Such a perspective has led to practices that aim to segregate rather than integrate these students into mainstream educational environments. The implications of this segregation are profound, as it not only limits the educational opportunities available to students with disabilities but also reinforces societal views of these individuals as "other" or less capable.

The Education for Handicapped Children Act, enacted in 1975, was the first federal initiative to mandate children with disabilities the right to an appropriate education (Kirschner, 2015; Zettel and Ballard, 1979). This legislation led to an increased provision of educational services for children with disabilities, often via specialized classes or schools. However, these early integrative practices sought to fit students with disabilities into existing educational frameworks rather than tailoring those structures to meet individual needs.

Hausstätter and Jahnukainen (2014) describe integration as a process aimed at restructuring the segregated special education system into local schools, making it a normative part of the general education system. This approach challenges school systems to accommodate the increasing diversity of students with various needs by "re-establishing the student after a segregated process" (Hausstätter and Jahnukainen, 2014, p. 121). Students with special needs are provided the opportunity to engage with their non-disabled peers, allowing them to assimilate learning experiences that closely mirror those of the broader community (Kurth et al., 2018).

The passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1990 expanded on critical areas

of reform, including student service delivery, outcome management, and frameworks for educating students in the least restrictive environment (LRE) possible (West et al., 2023). This legislation prompted a shift from integrative to inclusive models, emphasizing the inherent value of all children and actively creating opportunities for learners of diverse abilities to be accepted and valued as contributors to the learning environment (Tetler and Baltzer, 2011).

The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action, developed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and adopted at the World Conference on Special Needs Education in 1994, marked a pivotal moment in the evolution of inclusive education (Rapp and Corral-Granados, 2021). This landmark document not only recognized inclusive education as a fundamental right but also catalyzed a global movement aimed at transforming educational systems to better serve all learners, particularly those with special educational needs. The fundamental principles of the Salamanca Statement collectively assert that mainstream schools provide the most effective environments for educating children by combating discriminatory ideologies that separate learners with differing educational needs (Ainscow et al., 2019).

The Salamanca Statement served as a catalyst for decades of policy changes, significantly influencing the roles of both political and non-political actors in the implementation of inclusive policy initiatives (Magnússon, 2019). By asserting that inclusion is a fundamental right and calling for responsive action from educational institutions, the Salamanca Statement has established a foundation for a global movement focused on policy development, increased awareness and advocacy, and international frameworks that emphasize inclusive education as a vital component of global development.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and Beyond

The UNCRPD, adopted in 2006, reinforced and expanded upon the principles outlined in the Salamanca Statement by reaffirming that individuals with disabilities are entitled to fully enjoy all human rights and freedoms (Pozón, 2016). Through its 50 separate articles, the CRPD recognizes fundamental principles that are inherent to those with disabilities and encourages states to recognize their capabilities while raising awareness throughout society to combat stereotypes (Series, 2019). Article 24 of the CRPD explicitly affirms the rights of persons with disabilities to education and mandates the creation of inclusive systems at all levels.

Article 24 of the CRPD calls for the elimination of barriers to learning and emphasizes the necessity of individualized support measures to ensure equitable access to education. This article presents a framework for inclusive

education, advocating for critical policy changes globally (Byrne, 2019). The CRPD has become a cornerstone in shaping both national and international policies regarding inclusive education. By mandating that state parties promote and protect the rights of persons with disabilities, it underscores the importance of education in achieving full societal inclusion (Series, 2019). Consequently, governments and non-governmental organizations worldwide have enacted laws, programs, and initiatives to honor their commitment to inclusive education practices.

Current Inclusive Education Policies and Frameworks

Global Review of Inclusive Education Policies

Inclusive education policies globally exhibit varying levels of commitment, resource availability, and cultural adaptation. For example, the Finnish model seeks to include all students in general classrooms while providing support through specialists, such as specially trained teachers for students with special needs, tailored lesson plans, and available extra copies of learning resources (Honkasilta et al., 2024). Finland highlights teacher preparation and maintains a well-funded system that promotes inclusivity rather than segregation. Similarly, provincial frameworks that emphasize partnerships among schools, families, and communities shape Canada's strategy for inclusive education. An essential aspect of Canada's inclusive education system is ensuring cultural relevance and equal opportunities for Indigenous students and children with disabilities.

On the other hand, low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) encounter several barriers to achieving inclusive education. For example, in South Africa, documents such as the Inclusive Education White Paper 6, while progressive in theory, face significant challenges, such as inadequate funding, overcrowded classrooms, and a shortage of adequately trained teachers (Mpu and Adu, 2021). Similarly, the Right to Education Act in India mandates that all children with disabilities be enrolled in regular schools. However, the lack of proper structures, capacity-building interventions, and, more importantly, social transformation remains a challenge. These examples show that although all countries embrace the idea of education for all (EFA), the practice remains far from perfect and mirrors general social disparities.

One of the significant campaigns in LMICs is the UNESCO EFA drive, which aims to engage universal education. The EFA initiative has contributed to raising equity consciousness in education systems worldwide and has revealed the necessity of more political commitment and resources to overcome disparities in practice. The plan is to promote inclusive education, as demonstrated by the efforts of countries such as Brazil and Rwanda. However, challenges such as inadequate infrastructure

and a shortage of qualified teachers have consistently hampered progress. These cases exemplify the necessity of developing appropriate and effective solutions tailored to specific contexts to achieve real inclusion.

Key Legislation and Guidelines

Legislation and frameworks that are pivotal to inclusive education policies include the following. The IDEA in the United States is widely considered the key legislation that safeguards the rights of students with disabilities to receive an education, as outlined in the principles of Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) and the LRE (Ross, 2022). IDEA also focuses on special education services, which take into consideration every student's individualized education plan (IEPs). This legislation has led to increased enrollment of students with disabilities and has established measures for oversight. For example, through the conduct of IEP meetings, parents, instructors, and school officials are more frequently involved in the educational process.

Globally, the UNCRPD serves as an important framework that emphasizes and guarantees the right to inclusive education. Article 24 of the UNCRPD requires that states remove barriers and use reasonable measures to ensure and promote the educational rights of learners with disabilities. This convention has prompted many nations to develop new policies on inclusive education or revise existing policies in accordance with international standards.

Another constructive document is the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action, which was adopted at the UNESCO World Conference on Special Needs Education in 1994. The statement asserts that mainstream schools provide the optimum learning environment for all children regardless of their varying learning requirements and work to combat discrimination. Consequently, due to the strong emphasis on restructuring schools to recognize and accommodate all learners, global activities have incorporated inclusion into educational frameworks.

In the European Union, the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education has developed broad sets of instructions for inclusion. These frameworks focus on the active participation of all stakeholders, the utilization of learning tools, and the professional development of teachers. However, it is crucial to note that despite having such well-developed norms, some European Union countries continue to encounter difficulties in implementing these principles into practice. This is especially evident in areas where there is either insufficient funding or societal resistance to accepting persons with disabilities.

Policy Implementation and Gap Analysis

Challenges and barriers to the implementation of inclusive education policies can be classified into four main areas: the availability and distribution of resources, professional development for teachers, perceptions of disability, and the tracking system.

Resource Allocation

Policy implementation requires sufficient funding. For instance, both Finland and Canada make significant investments to ensure that students with disabilities have equal opportunities, including access to technology, qualified personnel, and appropriate facilities. In contrast, many LMICs faced longstanding criticism for their insufficient funding, which hindered them from addressing accommodation needs such as ramps, hearing aids, and accessible learning resources (UNESCO, 2020). The unequal distribution of resources creates equity issues for students with disabilities, further reinforcing social exclusion within society.

Teacher Training and Professional Development

Teachers are responsible for implementing inclusive education; however, many lack the qualifications necessary to effectively teach diverse learners. Insufficient pre-service and in-service educational preparation often results in teachers' inability to adopt effective integration approaches (Larios and Zetlin, 2023). For instance, the inclusive education policy framework in Dubai points to teacher preparation as an area of emerging concern. Without adequate training in differentiated instruction, assistive technologies, and cultural diversity, teachers fail to address their students' needs. Ideally, training programs should be conducted regularly, and the practical components of these programs should emphasize the state-of-the-art in the given field of practice, such as inclusive education.

Social and Cultural Barriers

The review affirms that societal perceptions of disability directly impact the effectiveness of inclusive education policies. Negative perceptions, prejudice, and discrimination contribute to the marginalization and exclusion of students with disabilities in mainstream educational facilities. Among the cultural barriers, informal practices often represent disabled children as unable to learn in the formal educational system, thereby resisting

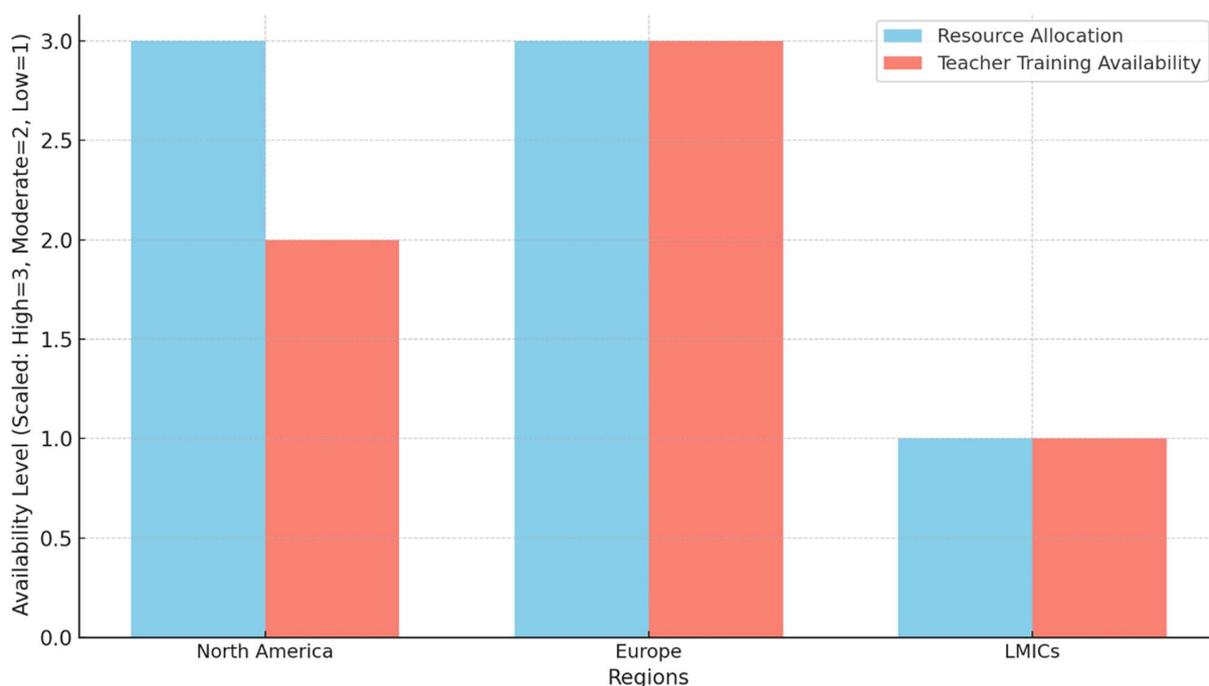


Figure 1. Comparative Analysis of Resource Allocation and Teacher Training Availability (Larios and Zetlin, 2023)

inclusive policies. Overcoming these barriers calls for awareness creation, community involvement, advocacy, and peer education initiatives aimed at eradicating prejudices.

Monitoring and Evaluation

An efficient system for monitoring and evaluation is crucial for assessing the effectiveness of inclusive education policies and identifying existing deficiencies. Certain countries lack the necessary framework to enforce these policies or to evaluate student performance. There are few established objective measures available to policymakers; however, some indicators include the number of students with disabilities enrolled in regular schools and the types of services provided. Feedback plays a vital role in ensuring adherence to set standards as it facilitates the change process.

A Comparative Analysis of Resource Allocation and Teacher Training Availability

In illustrating the disparities in policy implementation, the graph below compares resource allocation and teacher training availability across three regions: North America, Europe, and LMICs.

This visual conveys a strong message about disparities and highlights the necessity for targeted design efforts that specifically address these disparities in LMICs from remote regions.

Strategies for Addressing Implementation Gaps

The aforementioned challenges require collective action to implement policy reforms at various levels, seek enhanced funding, improve teacher training programs, and conduct awareness campaigns.

- **Policy Reform:** National governments must ensure that their policies regarding the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in schools align with international treaties, such as the UNCRPD and the Salamanca Statement. Legislative amendments should also include provisions for funding, accountability, and the time interval within which policies can be revised.
- **Increased Funding:** One effective strategy for addressing these challenges is for governments to allocate adequate funds to support inclusive education. Essential features include the disbursement of aids and appliances, modifications to facilities, and appropriate remuneration for teachers, among others. Additionally, innovative funding sources, such as public-private partnerships, can significantly contribute to securing the required funding.

- **Enhanced Teacher Training:** Teacher preparation and professional development experiences should equip educators with the knowledge and skills necessary to include all students in classroom activities. This involves preparing teachers to deliver differentiated instruction, promote multicultural understanding, and incorporate technological advancements to enhance learning.

- **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Social prejudice can be addressed by increasing the public's understanding of inclusive education and highlighting the positive effects of integrating students with disabilities into mainstream classrooms. School and peer education programs, community meetings, and public advertisements are effective interventions aimed at initially changing attitudes.

Inclusive education policies have been framed more than ever, influenced by international policies such as IDEA, the UNCRPD, and the Salamanca Statement. These reforms have created a basis for mainstreaming learners with disabilities through inclusion for equal education. However, the adoption and implementation of these policies remain a challenge, especially in LMICs, where issues such as inadequate resource allocation, lack of qualified teachers, and unfavorable societal settings persist.

Addressing these gaps requires intervention approaches that extend beyond simplistic solutions. School authorities should prioritize increasing resource allocation to support inclusive education by providing teaching-learning resources and tools, educator training, and infrastructure enhancements. Teachers must undergo recurrent professional development focused on teaching diverse learners, fostering cultural sensitivity, and utilizing assistive tools. Additionally, stigma reduction and overall community acceptance and support are other important factors, making public awareness campaigns crucial.

All policy-related monitoring and review mechanisms require enhancement to effectively measure policy impact, monitor student success, and dismantle ineffective procedures. Through these measures and increased cooperation among policymakers, educators, families, and communities, inclusive education can transition from a philosophical concept into a tangible reality. Comprehensive education is one of the foundational strategies for promoting equity and human rights. Addressing the implementation gaps will enhance the design of student facilities and opportunities, ensuring that every child has an increased chance for success within an integrated educational setting that accommodates students of different ability levels.

Evaluating the Effectiveness of Current Inclusive Education Practices

Methodological Approaches to Evaluation: An Overview of Qualitative and Quantitative Methods for Assessing Inclusive Education Policies

The education and policymaking communities have devoted significant attention to the concept of inclusive education in recent years. In its most basic form, inclusive education is described as providing equitable access and opportunities for all students to learn and succeed in the learning environment (Mitchell, 2017). Effective inclusive education programs require careful consideration of assessment practices, resource allocation, professional development for teachers, and clear policies for implementation. However, challenges related to curriculum development and policies for learners continue to persist (Massouti et al., 2024).

In reviewing the methods used to assess inclusive education policies, a vast body of research provides educational entities with the necessary framework to inform inclusive education development at various levels. Several studies advocate that when inclusive education is successfully implemented, it supports the provision of quality education, improves learner outcomes, and enhances social inclusion, with well-crafted policies serving as a cornerstone (Kefallinou et al., 2020b; Massouti et al., 2024; Petersson-Bloom and Holmqvist, 2022; van Kessel et al., 2021).

van Kessel et al. (2021) conducted a qualitative comparative analysis of education policy data from European Union regions that explores conditions facilitating inclusive education development. While the analysis initially focused on autism, the policies examined were broad enough to be significant in a wider context. The study's findings indicate that effective policy development supports professional teaching staff education and development, enhances individual learning outcomes, promotes integrated classrooms, and encourages parental involvement. These factors are critical for developing programs that produce beneficial designs.

Researchers contend that successful policy implementation requires the understanding and support of those executing the plan. Massouti et al. (2024) conducted a qualitative study investigating educational leaders' implementation and understanding of the Dubai inclusive education policy framework. This framework supports an inclusive education policy aimed at promoting equity and inclusivity in schools. While the findings indicate that

educational learners possess a strong understanding of and support for the framework's elements—such as strategies for creating an inclusive learning environment, belief in the policy's importance, and its enhancement of educational student outcomes—research also identified several obstacles and complexities. These include implementation challenges in private schools, insufficient funding, a lack of training opportunities for teachers, and difficulties in assessing and evaluating students.

Petersson-Bloom and Holmqvist (2022) present a systematic review of qualitative research that suggests strategies for supporting inclusive education through effective policy development. The results recommend focusing on strategies that accentuate the positive attitudes of educators as a conduit for inclusive education. Additionally, professional development and skill-building in support of teachers' understanding of inclusive education were identified as actionable levers to transform the learning environment.

When creating an inclusive education policy, the policy would best serve students and educators if educational leadership designed programming and policies that promote equity and inclusivity, support staff development, and focus on individual learning objectives.

Case Studies and Empirical Evidence: Presentation of Case Studies and Empirical Research Findings

Assessing the Outcomes for Students with Disabilities in Inclusive Educational Settings

In academic literature, inclusive education emphasizes mainstream inclusion, equal learning opportunities, and solid policy development. International policy mandates provide a moral and ethical basis for inclusive education policy development and support their implementation from a human rights and equity standpoint (Adjei et al., 2024; Kurowski et al., 2022). However, the evaluation of inclusive education and the evidence of its effects need further exploration. A review of scholarly studies reveals a dearth of proof assessing the academic outcomes of inclusive education and its implementation.

Adjei et al. (2024) reviewed recent literature exploring the academic achievement of children with disabilities in inclusive school environments. The primary investigations included randomized and non-randomized controlled trials, cohort studies, case-control studies, cross-sectional studies, and qualitative research. The study's primary objective was to assess the academic performance of students with disabilities in inclusive educational settings. Children with disabilities' academic performance includes the potential to enhance both learning and social connections, which is crucial for evaluating the advancement of inclusive education. Currently, there is a dearth of research on academic performance, and the

study found no helpful information about how children with disabilities may perform better in inclusive settings. The main findings of this systematic review showed that when compared to their peers without disabilities, children with disabilities exhibited poorer academic performance, most notably in LMICs.

In their systematic review, Dell'Anna et al. (2020) investigated how students with moderate, severe, and complex disabilities (MSCD) perform academically, socially, and psychologically in inclusive environments. The results showed that school participation was modestly beneficial for both academic achievement and adaptive abilities among students with MSCD. Regarding social outcomes, the findings indicated that while students reported feeling excluded during class activities and socially isolated from their peers, inclusive environments provided greater access to instructional time and opportunities for peer interaction. Lastly, inclusive environments seemed to lessen the occurrence of problematic behaviors, positively impacting psychological effects. This research, together with qualitative investigations, provides valuable insights into the context of inclusion from multiple perspectives. However, it does not present data regarding how well inclusion affects the outcomes under consideration.

Barriers to Effective Implementation: Identification of Systemic, Institutional, and Social Barriers Hindering the Effective Implementation of Inclusive Education

Insufficient funding, social stigma, and inadequate teacher preparation are frequently the primary obstacles to implementing inclusive education. These challenges prevent all students—regardless of their origins or skill levels—from fully participating in the educational process.

Sharma et al. (2018) present research on self-identified techniques and obstacles to inclusive education implementation based on their experiences working in various roles throughout the Pacific. The researchers identified factors at three levels: the micro level, which includes classroom and school environments; the meso level, which encompasses village and community contexts; and the macro level, which addresses systemic, national, and regional influences. Several important themes emerged from the data gathered from each researcher across all levels. The three main themes identified as obstacles to inclusion at the micro level were negative attitudes, insufficient resources, and inadequate teaching competency. At the macro level, the challenges included a lack of funding, unclear policies, and insufficient governmental commitment to inclusive education. Concerns about the shortcomings of the policies seem to be a recurring theme among all researchers. Similarly, findings from 27 systematic studies with geolocations in Europe, America, Asia, the Caribbean, Australia, and

Africa provide additional context for identifying barriers to implementing inclusive education in primary schools. The reviewed texts express that teachers and schools often lack the necessary resources, training, and support to successfully implement inclusive education (Kurowski et al., 2022). The issue of inclusion extends beyond schools; it encompasses the social milieu of teachers, students, the community, policy development, and assessment. A strategy to overcome the abovementioned obstacles will call for practical, inclusive measures and new tools for change, regardless of whether inclusion pertains to individuals with disabilities or other social groups.

Stakeholder Perspectives on Inclusion

Inclusive education policies aim to integrate students with disabilities into general education classrooms, promoting equality, a sense of belonging, and academic achievement. These practices are now recognized as essential for promoting equity in educational settings (Beeken et al., 2024). However, the success of these policies hinges on their practical implementation and the real-life experiences of the students they are designed to support. This section explores how students perceive their academic and social experiences in inclusive settings, the barriers they face, and their recommendations for improvement.

Academic Experiences in Inclusive Classrooms

Research has shown that inclusive education can improve academic outcomes for students with disabilities. Kefallinou et al. (2020) found that when schools provide adequate resources and individualized support, students in inclusive settings perform better academically than their peers in segregated environments. Inclusive classrooms foster collaboration, employ diverse instructional strategies, and provide access to the general curriculum, all of which contribute to improved academic performance.

However, gaps in the implementation of inclusive policies continue to hinder academic progress for various students. Haug (2017) highlighted that schools often fail to provide adequate accommodations, leaving students struggling to meet their full potential. For example, students with disabilities may face challenges accessing adaptive materials, personalized learning plans, or support staff, particularly in under-resourced schools. These inconsistencies reveal a significant disparity between the aspirations of inclusive policies and their actual delivery.

Social Integration and Peer Relationships

Besides the academic benefits, inclusive education fosters social interaction and integration among students with and without disabilities. Hordvik et al. (2020) emphasize that

inclusive classrooms create opportunities for increased interaction, helping students with disabilities feel more connected to their peers. Positive relationships can enhance students' sense of belonging and improve their overall school experience.

Despite these benefits, achieving meaningful peer relationships remains challenging in many inclusive settings. Students with disabilities often report feelings of isolation or exclusion due to negative peer attitudes or insufficient peer support programs (Krischler et al., 2019). For instance, stigma and a lack of understanding regarding disabilities can lead to bullying or social marginalization, which undermines the benefits of inclusion. This highlights the necessity of actively educating all students about diversity and inclusion.

Emotional and Psychological Well-Being

Students with disabilities' emotional and psychological well-being closely depends on their inclusive classroom experiences. Effectively implemented inclusive policies can foster a sense of belonging, enhance self-esteem, and build confidence. When students feel valued and included, they are more likely to engage in learning and develop positive peer relationships (Kefallinou et al., 2020). Conversely, failing to meet students' needs can adversely affect their well-being. Inadequate teacher training in addressing diverse learning styles or poorly equipped classrooms may exacerbate anxieties and lead students to feel overlooked. These emotional effects further highlight the importance of aligning policy with practice.

Students with disabilities face several barriers in inclusive classrooms. These barriers highlight the need for policies that prioritize teacher training, resource allocation, and peer support to create more inclusive learning environments. The pursuit of inclusive education is vital for fostering a learning environment where all students, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds, can thrive. However, we must address several barriers to achieve this vision. A significant barrier is the lack of individualized support services. Although policies aim for equitable access, various students do not receive the personalized support they need. The inconsistent implementation of IEPs often leads to unmet academic and social needs.

Insufficient teacher training and professional development further complicate the process of inclusion. Educators frequently feel unprepared to meet the diverse requirements of students with disabilities, as they lack essential training in differentiated instruction and assistive technologies. This gap limits their ability to cultivate inclusive classrooms. Additionally, inadequate classroom resources are pervasive, particularly in underfunded schools. The scarcity of assistive technologies and support staff can restrict students' access to the curriculum and increase the burden on teachers, making it challenging to

achieve effective inclusion.

Negative peer attitudes and bullying create social barriers that undermine an inclusive ethos. Many students with disabilities experience stigma and exclusion, leading to feelings of isolation and negatively impacting their self-esteem. Cultural and linguistic barriers pose additional challenges, particularly for students from diverse backgrounds. Intersectional factors, such as ethnicity and socioeconomic status, can exacerbate these difficulties, necessitating culturally responsive support.

To overcome these barriers, it is essential to foster a commitment to inclusive practices that address disability-related needs and embrace cultural and linguistic diversity. By doing so, we can create educational environments where every student feels valued and empowered to succeed, paving the way for a brighter and more inclusive future.

Recommendations from Students

Students with disabilities offer valuable insights into how schools and policymakers can improve inclusive education practices. Their recommendations emphasize the need for systemic changes that prioritize equity, accessibility, and community engagement. These students have articulated several recommendations to improve their experiences in inclusive settings and have suggested the need for programs that are attuned to their unique needs.

Peer Education Programs

Students frequently advocate for programs that promote understanding and reduce stigma. Collaborative peer mentorship, which includes both students with and without disabilities, builds relationships and inclusivity within schools (Hordvik et al., 2020). Schools should implement educational programs about disabilities to foster understanding, reduce stigma, and encourage supportive relationships that contribute to success.

Ensuring Access to Personalized Learning Support

Personalized accommodations, such as tailored lesson plans, flexible assessment methods, and one-on-one support, are critical for enabling students with disabilities to succeed. Schools must allocate resources to ensure that these supports are readily available and consistently implemented. Providing tools such as speech-to-text software, visual aids, and communication devices can help students engage fully in classroom activities (Fernández-Batanero et al., 2021). These tools not only enhance academic performance but also empower students to participate more actively in classroom activities that they may not have previously engaged in as much.

Regular Feedback Mechanisms

Schools should establish platforms for students to share their needs and experiences with teachers and administrators, ensuring that policies and practices address their concerns. By prioritizing the voices of students with disabilities, schools and policymakers can gain valuable insights into the effectiveness of inclusive education and identify targeted strategies to improve outcomes.

Enhancing Teacher Training

Students emphasize the importance of teachers understanding their specific needs. This includes training in assistive technologies, addressing behavioral challenges, and fostering inclusive classroom environments. Fernández-Batanero et al. (2021) argue that teacher training should be ongoing and aligned with the latest advancements in inclusive practices. Additionally, it is essential to train educators, administrators, and secondary school staff about invisible disabilities—conditions that are not immediately apparent but should not be overlooked.

Enhancing Teacher Training for Students with Invisible Disabilities

Students emphasize the importance of teachers understanding their specific needs, which include training in assistive technologies, addressing behavioral challenges, and fostering inclusive classroom environments. Fernández-Batanero et al. (2021) argue that teacher training should be ongoing and aligned with the latest advancements in inclusive practices. However, a critical gap remains in addressing invisible disabilities—conditions that are not immediately apparent but significantly affect students' learning experiences. Examples of invisible disabilities include autism spectrum disorder (ASD), attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, and mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression.

Creating Safe and Inclusive Social Spaces

To address issues of stigma and bullying, schools should implement structured programs that build empathy and social skills among all students. Before launching these programs, educators must receive training to ensure their effectiveness. These programs may include workshops, collaborative projects, and inclusive extracurricular activities designed to break social barriers. Identifying the optimal combination of strategies for creating safe and inclusive spaces will require continuous communication with both students and teachers.

Establishing Feedback Mechanisms

Students advocate for consistent opportunities to communicate their experiences and needs to educators and administrators. Implementing feedback mechanisms, such as anonymous surveys or student advisory committees, can assist schools in identifying gaps in support and adjusting their policies accordingly. Educators trained in this area should take the lead in implementing these initiatives. Parents and the community should receive the results to understand where support may need improvement.

Addressing Intersectional Challenges

Addressing intersectional challenges is crucial for creating an inclusive educational environment. Students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds have actively advocated for more culturally responsive teaching and support services. Schools must recognize and cater to these students' specific needs and experiences.

Inclusive practices should consider cultural and linguistic differences alongside disability-related needs. By providing appropriate support services, schools can ensure that all students, regardless of their backgrounds, have equal access to education and opportunities for success. Culturally responsive teaching plays a significant role in meeting the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students. This approach involves incorporating students' cultural backgrounds and experiences into the curriculum, teaching methods, and classroom environment. Such practices promote a sense of belonging and validate students' diverse identities, thereby fostering a positive and inclusive learning environment.

Moreover, schools should prioritize the provision of support services that address disability-related needs. This may include accommodations, assistive technologies, and specialized instruction tailored to meet individual students' requirements. By recognizing and addressing these needs, schools can ensure that all students can fully participate and thrive academically.

Learners with learning disabilities often face health and social inequalities. Incorporating inclusive practices involves creating an environment that supports individuals with learning disabilities. Beeken et al. (2024) supported the framework development to enhance learning potential.

There are multiple ways to construct a team of stakeholders focused on researching areas for inclusive awareness of learning disabilities. This includes lobbying government agencies to mandate laws supporting smaller classroom settings, budgeting for teaching aids, and modifying classroom settings. Additionally, flexibility in break times with engaging activities is essential. In our technology-driven world, online classes can also serve as an effective option to include a diverse learning culture.

A few years ago, one of the children was diagnosed with ADHD, presenting a challenge that many parents face. It became evident that educational leaders were lacking in implementing strategies such as creating smaller class sizes, providing one-on-one support, or positioning the child closer to the front of the classroom; these adjustments proved to be difficult to achieve. One barrier observed was that many children from diverse ethnic backgrounds received interventions from psychologists and social workers, while the psychologist primarily recommended medication for my child.

The educator was surprised that challenges posed by incoming students from diverse backgrounds and those with learning disabilities were not anticipated. They lacked the educational leadership necessary to address the issues faced by students with learning experiences of disabilities, which often disrupts the learning of their peers.

Having experience in the healthcare field, the educator is aware of the side effects of medication and strongly advises against its use for addressing learning disabilities. After numerous meetings and discussions, a group of parents supported the stance that children with learning disabilities should sit closer to the front of the classroom and receive a specialized curriculum tailored to their individual needs. Emphasizing frequent breaks, hands-on learning activities, and opportunities for classmate interaction was recommended to foster an inclusive environment that supports diverse learning styles.

This is a thought-provoking issue, and policymakers are working to streamline an inclusive approach while emphasizing the troubling realities faced by educational leaders. Furthermore, transparency in theoretical approaches will help mitigate and resolve educational challenges, paving the way for a brighter future for children.

In conclusion, schools must prioritize inclusive practices that address the intersectional challenges faced by students. This involves implementing culturally responsive teaching strategies and providing support services that cater to students' diverse cultural, linguistic, and disability-related needs. By doing so, schools can create an inclusive educational environment where all students can succeed.

Recommendations for Enhancing Inclusive Educational Opportunities

Inclusive education has emerged as the new paradigm in modern education, allowing students from diverse backgrounds to learn together in the same setting, regardless of their differences. However, several challenges are associated with implementing inclusive education for children with disabilities, including inadequate policies, insufficient resources, and a lack of adequate teacher training. To address these challenges,

Table 1. Inclusive Education Framework (Rapp & Corral-Granados, 2024).

Domain	Key Strategies
Policy Reform	Legislative alignment, funding accountability, and IEPs
Professional Development	Pre-service and in-service training and collaboration
Technology and Resources	Assistive technology, ICT integration, and universal design
Peer Support	Mentorship, extracurricular inclusion, and anti-bullying
Feedback Mechanisms	Student platforms, parental engagement, and evaluation

this chapter offers recommendations for implementation across three key areas: policy reform, educational practices, and resource utilization (particularly technology). This strategy aims to transform the educational setting by embracing the principles of equity, efficiency, and innovation.

Policy Recommendations

Strengthening Legislative Frameworks

Inclusive education policies must transcend rhetoric and focus on practical implementation. National and regional policies should ensure that educational practices align with international human rights standards, such as the UNCRPD. This alignment fundamentally requires enacting laws that mandate the integration of students with disabilities, along with dedicated resources, teacher training, and follow-up assessments to ensure compliance. Legislative reform should also involve reporting mechanisms for schools that meet inclusion requirements, including measures of accessibility, available resources, and levels of inclusiveness. Policymakers must organize structural changes to integrate accountability measures into the law.

Mandating Individualized Education Plans (IEPs)

The implementation of IEPs should be a cornerstone of inclusive education policy. The lack of compliance with IEP recommendations has left students with disabilities underserved in both academic and social contexts (Zagona et al., 2019). This issue must be addressed through standardized monitoring procedures to ensure the timely and effective submission of IEPs. Policymakers must create an environment where schools feel encouraged to innovate and reward IEP interventions that lead to better student outcomes. IEPs should be regularly updated in collaboration with students, parents, and teachers to remain relevant and effective. This process fosters a sense of ownership among stakeholders and ensures that the plans align with the evolving student needs.

Funding Allocation and Accountability

Accessible funding is essential for the success of inclusive education policies. States should allocate special budgets for infrastructure investments, assistive technology, and staffing. For instance, Finland's funding model for inclusive education demonstrates that regular financial support can improve educational outcomes (Haug, 2017). Additionally, financial accountability measures should be implemented to ensure that allocated funds are solely used for inclusive education initiatives. Funding models must prioritize schools in disadvantaged areas, where resource scarcity makes implementing inclusive education particularly challenging. This strategic distribution of resources can help bridge the gap between policy intentions and actual practice, enabling every school to deliver high-quality, inclusive education.

Professional Development for Educators

Comprehensive Pre-Service Training

Teacher preparation programs must prioritize inclusive teaching as a core component. Research by Zagona et al. (2019) emphasizes that pre-service teacher training must adequately address the diverse classroom demands. This includes differentiating instructional methods to accommodate various learning styles and cultural sensitivities. Universities and teacher training programs should collaborate closely with disability advocacy groups to ensure that training modules are both comprehensive and relevant to the lived experiences of students with disabilities. Such partnerships can provide invaluable insights into effective inclusion practices.

Additionally, pre-service training must incorporate substantial practical experience in inclusive settings. By engaging with diverse learners in real-world environments, prospective teachers gain practical experience in applying theoretical concepts and build confidence in their ability to lead inclusive classrooms. These practical experiences provide the transition from theory to practice, equipping new teachers with foundational skills for sustained competence in inclusive education.

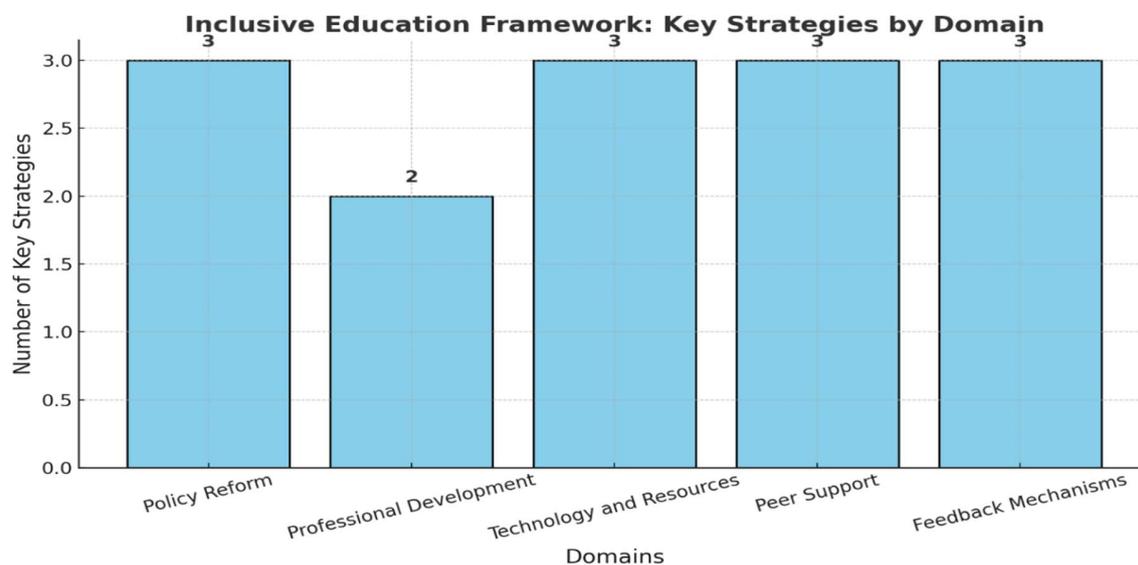


Figure 3. Inclusive Education Framework: key strategy by domain (Ramirez-Montoya et al., 2024).

Ongoing In-Service Training

In-service training programs play a pivotal role in keeping educators informed about the latest tools, strategies, and knowledge in inclusive education. These programs should emphasize appropriate assistive technology, behavior management, and culturally responsive teaching methods. Fernández-Batanero et al. (2021) highlight that well-structured professional development programs can significantly enhance teachers' confidence and effectiveness in inclusive settings. Rather than being one-time workshops, in-service training should be continuous, allowing educators to adapt to evolving educational challenges and innovations. Schools and education departments should develop courses that address both current and future teacher needs, ensuring they are relevant and practical.

Moreover, fostering a culture of lifelong learning among educators is crucial. Schools can achieve this by providing resources, facilitating professional learning networks, and prompting reflection on teaching practices. When teachers have access to ongoing professional development, they are better equipped to manage the diverse and ecumenical demands of their students. This, in turn, leads to a more equitable and flexible educational system where all students can thrive.

Promoting Collaborative Teaching Models

Collaboration models—such as co-teaching, peer mentoring, and team teaching—have proven effective in

promoting inclusion in classrooms. These models unite the expertise of general and special education specialists within a single classroom, benefiting all students. Miesera et al. (2022) argue that routine teacher coordination fosters a shared responsibility for student learning and enables teachers to address a wider range of needs. Schools should facilitate co-teaching arrangements, including shared class time and inclusive professional learning communities (PLCs). Such collaborations combine expertise and knowledge to enhance teaching practices and provide holistic student care.

Furthermore, collaboration encourages reciprocal learning among teachers, fostering an environment of respect and professional growth. Establishing open learning spaces enhances inclusivity in the classroom and promotes innovative teaching methods. Schools can develop robust, multicultural teaching teams that ensure every student, including those with disabilities, receives the academic and social support necessary to thrive.

Use of Technology and Resources

Leveraging Assistive Technologies

Assistive technologies play a crucial role in making learning accessible for students with disabilities. These tools include text-to-speech software, screen readers, adapted keyboards, and customized communication devices. Such technologies empower students by providing them with a sense of control as they remove obstacles that hinder access to learning. For example,

screen readers enable visually impaired students to access online resources, while adapted keyboards assist individuals with motor impairments in typing. Fernández-Batanero et al. (2021) emphasize the transformative potential of these technologies in fostering autonomy and enhancing the learning experience.

Policymakers and educators must ensure that all students with disabilities have equal access to assistive technology. Beyond procurement, both students and teachers need training to use these tools effectively. This training should be experiential, enabling users to integrate assistive technologies into their daily learning and teaching activities. Such a comprehensive approach ensures that assistive technology is not only available but also actively utilized to promote educational inclusion and access.

Integrating ICT in Pedagogy

Information and communication technology (ICT) serves as a dynamic resource for inclusive learning, offering customizable and interactive experiences for students of all ages. The use of digital resources, such as interactive whiteboards, educational applications, and online classrooms, has been shown to improve attendance and enhance standardized test performance. Amor et al. (2018) highlight that ICT-based inclusive classrooms can significantly benefit students with disabilities. For example, Virtual Reality [VR] games can create immersive learning experiences, while educational games can provide personalized lessons tailored to different learning levels.

Teacher training programs must integrate ICT competence as a core component to maximize the benefits of technology. Educators need to be equipped to select and deploy ICT tools that align with their instructional goals. Furthermore, ICT can facilitate remote learning for students with disabilities and limited mobility, ensuring continuous education even when they are physically unable to attend school. This embrace of ICT promotes inclusivity while preparing students for a technology-driven future.

Creating Inclusive Learning Environments

Establishing truly inclusive classrooms requires attention to not only the physical space but also the content of lessons, instructional methods, and an inclusive mindset. Teachers should adopt universal design for learning (UDL) principles to design curricula that accommodate multiple learning styles. Textbooks and other resources must be accessible in various formats, including Braille, large print, and digital versions compatible with assistive technologies. Such resources enable visually impaired and other disabled students to engage in the learning process effectively.

Teachers should also learn to organize classroom spaces to facilitate mobility and interaction with the environment by utilizing adjustable desks, ramps, and sensory areas. For example, a sensory corner equipped with calming tools can greatly benefit learners with autism or sensory processing difficulties. Beyond physical structures, teaching practices must be inclusive and accommodate all students. Promoting diversity through group assignments and recognizing cultural differences is essential. Schools can cultivate an educational environment that celebrates diversity and encourages all students to reach their full potential.

Promoting Peer Support and Social Inclusion

Implementing Peer Mentorship Programs

The development of peer mentorship programs is crucial for fostering positive relationships between students with and without disabilities. These programs aim to eliminate prejudice, educate both students and staff, and cultivate tolerance within the school setting. Research indicates that such programs create environments where diversity and individuality are valued, leading to a sense of belonging among students (Hordvik et al., 2020). Schools should establish systematic mentoring programs that pair students with disabilities with empathetic and knowledgeable mentors.

Effective training is essential for successful mentorship programs. Mentors should have access to comprehensive resources, including disability education, communication skills, and problem-solving strategies. Mentorships need to incorporate learning between mentors and mentees, fostering tolerance and friendships rooted in respect and understanding. By investing in these programs, schools can empower all students to achieve success.

Encouraging Participation in Extracurricular Activities

Extracurricular activities play a vital role in the social integration and personal development of students with disabilities. Clubs, sports, arts, and other co-curricular activities provide opportunities for these students to learn, make friends, and become active members of the school community. Schools should strive to ensure that disabled students can participate in these activities, starting with accessible infrastructure and inclusive policies. For example, adaptive sports teams can create inclusive environments where all students can engage and collaborate. Similarly, art classes can empower students with disabilities to express their creativity and build self-esteem. Additionally, trainers and coaches should recognize and celebrate the unique abilities of each student to foster a welcoming atmosphere.

Addressing Bullying and Negative Peer Relationships

Bullying remains one of the most significant barriers to a healthy school experience for at-risk students with disabilities. Schools must take proactive measures to create an environment of kindness and respect, which requires more than just implementing strict anti-bullying policies. Comprehensive prevention campaigns should educate students about the harmful effects of bullying while promoting compassion and inclusion. Additionally, practical conflict-resolution strategies should be included. An anonymous reporting system is another essential component of any anti-bullying initiative, allowing students to report incidents without fear of retaliation. Teachers must be trained to recognize and effectively address bullying, fostering an environment where students with disabilities feel safe and supported.

Establishing Feedback Mechanisms

Student-Led Feedback Platforms

Feedback from students with disabilities is crucial for improving inclusive practices. Establishing student-directed feedback systems allows students to voice their experiences, concerns, and needs. Schools can implement various channels (focus groups, online surveys, inclusive student councils, etc.) tailored to accommodate different communication preferences. These platforms should prioritize anonymity and privacy, enabling students to provide candid feedback in a secure and valued manner.

Integrating this feedback into decision-making processes is essential. Schools should establish clear mechanisms for filtering student input and incorporating it into policy, curriculum changes, and intervention design. This approach empowers students to influence inclusive practices and fosters a sense of ownership and agency among students with disabilities. By actively listening to their perspectives, schools can enhance inclusivity and responsiveness to diverse needs.

Parental and Community Engagement

Parents and community members play a vital role in fostering inclusive education. Their involvement should encompass school decision-making processes, annual forums, workshops, and parent advisory boards. Such initiatives provide parents with valuable insights into their child's needs and facilitate collaboration with educators to develop effective support strategies. Research conducted by Lyons et al. (2016) underscores the importance of these partnerships in creating environmentally sustainable and inclusive schools.

Public education initiatives should not be limited to schooling; they must also include efforts to raise awareness about disabilities. Disability awareness days, local media coverage, and storytelling initiatives can help build inclusive communities. Schools can engage community members to provide additional support, ensuring that disabled students are integrated into a broader support network. The ultimate goal is to create an inclusive society that promotes higher learning and social acceptance for everyone.

Monitoring and Evaluation Systems

Effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are essential for the continuous improvement of inclusive education. Schools should develop comprehensive models to track key performance indicators, teacher readiness, and funding allocations. This data-driven system allows schools to identify needs and allocate resources effectively to address emerging challenges. Periodic reviews should be conducted to assess the progress of inclusivity efforts.

Qualitative indicators are as important as quantitative measures, including interviews, focus groups, and case studies. These methods draw on the lived experiences of disabled students, providing deeper insights into their challenges and successes. Integrating both data sources offers a comprehensive understanding of attempts to level the educational playing field. Feedback mechanisms should also be embedded within the school system to ensure that evaluation results inform policies and resource distribution. This approach ensures that inclusive practices remain active and are tailored to the specific context throughout their implementation.

Conclusion

The global disparity in educational opportunities, affecting 240 million children worldwide—including 50 million in the U.S.—is a profound human rights and social justice issue (Department of Economic and Social Affairs Sustainable Development, 2024; National Center for Education Statistics, 2024). The increasing number of disabled children highlights a widening education gap (UNICEF for Every Child, 2023). This unmet need for high-quality inclusive education represents an international crisis, perpetuating cycles of social and economic oppression. Our research identifies key barriers to inclusive education: inadequate funding, social stigma, and insufficient teacher training. Despite these challenges, targeted interventions can foster meaningful change. We propose evidence-based recommendations to strengthen inclusive educational policies and practices, aiming to close the academic achievement gap between disabled learners

and their peers. Inclusive education should not be seen merely as equal access but as a continuous pursuit of equity and excellence for all students.

Inclusive Education Policy

Effective inclusive education policies improve outcomes for all students, not just those with special needs (Massouti et al., 2024; van Kessel et al., 2021). Policies must be informed by student experiences and prioritize peer support initiatives, anti-bullying protections, and culturally responsive practices. Policymakers should set clear benchmarks and integrate feedback mechanisms to ensure continuous improvement (Adjei et al., 2024). Transparency through published performance data will enhance accountability and inform resource allocation, teacher training, and program development. Individualized instruction, supported by ISPs and IEPs, is critical to student success. Policies should mandate assistive technologies and ICT to facilitate learning, ensuring that educational environments adapt to diverse needs (Amor et al., 2018; Haug, 2017).

Funding

Funding remains a critical barrier to inclusive education, with evidence linking financial investment to improved academic outcomes (UNICEF for Every Child, 2022). Inclusive education reduces long-term costs by promoting social equity and reducing poverty (Morris and Qargha, 2023). Historically, segregated special education programs have been both costly and ineffective, while inclusive models optimize resources and benefit all students (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2024). We urge policymakers to conduct comprehensive cost-benefit analyses, particularly in developing countries, and to collaborate with international organizations committed to advancing inclusive education (Department of Economic and Social Affairs Sustainable Development, 2024).

Social Stigma

Despite extensive evidence supporting the benefits of inclusive education, social stigma remains a pervasive barrier that undermines its successful implementation. Negative perceptions from both educators and peers can marginalize students with disabilities, limiting their academic and social development (Krischler et al., 2019; Sharma et al., 2018). These biases often stem from misconceptions about the capabilities of students with special needs, reinforcing exclusionary practices within the classroom. To combat this, we recommend integrating emotional intelligence and diversity training into teacher education programs, with mandatory continuing education credits focused on inclusivity. Schools should also

promote awareness campaigns and peer-mentoring programs to foster a culture of acceptance and understanding among students. By addressing stigma at both the institutional and interpersonal levels, educational environments can become more supportive and conducive to the success of all learners.

Teacher Training

The success of inclusive education hinges on the preparedness and attitudes of teachers. However, many educators report feeling ill-equipped to manage diverse classrooms due to insufficient training in inclusive teaching methodologies (Kurowski et al., 2022). Professional development programs must prioritize strategies for differentiated instruction, classroom management, and the effective use of assistive technologies. Peer-assisted training, where experienced educators mentor their colleagues, can foster a collaborative approach to professional growth. We also advocate for the designation of "inclusive education champions"—teachers who lead by example, advocate for inclusive practices, and serve as liaisons between educators, administrators, and policymakers. By investing in comprehensive teacher training, schools can create environments where all students, regardless of ability, are supported and encouraged to thrive.

Strengths

This study stands out for its comprehensive and multifaceted approach to evaluating inclusive education policies. Unlike previous research that often focuses on narrow aspects of special needs education, our work integrates both quantitative and qualitative analyses to provide a holistic assessment. By examining policies from diverse international contexts, we offer a broad perspective that highlights both common challenges and unique solutions across different socioeconomic and cultural landscapes. Our mixed-methods approach strengthens the validity of our findings and provides a nuanced understanding of the distinction between integration and true inclusion. Furthermore, this study identifies critical gaps in current knowledge, offering a foundation for future research and policy development aimed at eliminating educational disparities.

Limitations

While our study provides valuable insights into inclusive education, several limitations must be acknowledged. Our meta-analysis was conducted using a limited selection of scientific databases, which may have excluded relevant studies, particularly unpublished or region-specific research. The diversity of methodologies, settings, and

participant demographics across the included studies introduces potential confounding variables that could affect the generalizability of our findings. Additionally, variations in the timing and implementation of inclusive education policies may have influenced the outcomes reported in the literature. Despite these limitations, our rigorous analytical framework ensures that the conclusions drawn remain robust and informative, though further research is necessary to address these gaps and validate our findings across broader contexts.

Future Directions

The future of inclusive education depends on continued research and the evolution of policies that reflect the diverse needs of students. Although nearly eight million U.S. public-school students received special education services during the 2022–23 school year, this figure likely underrepresents the true demand for inclusive programs, as many students with undiagnosed learning disabilities or those outside the public education system remain underserved (Keshirim, 2024). Future research should focus on identifying and addressing these gaps, particularly the role of inclusive education for students with multiple and complex disabilities (MSCD). Additionally, longitudinal studies examining the long-term academic and social outcomes of inclusive education will provide critical data to inform policy and practice. Collaboration between educators, policymakers, and researchers is essential to develop innovative, evidence-based strategies that ensure all children receive the support they need to succeed. By prioritizing inclusivity, we can create educational systems that not only accommodate diversity but celebrate it, fostering environments where every student can achieve their full potential.

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