
| RESEARCH ARTICLE**Inclusive Education: Innovative Practices and Challenges in Diverse Classrooms****Michael Hari***Department of International Studies, Ateneo de Manila University, Philippines***Corresponding Author:** Michael Hari, **E-mail:** Michael1992@gmail.com

| ABSTRACT

This study examines the landscape of inclusive education within diverse classroom settings, focusing on both the innovative practices being implemented and the challenges encountered. Through a comprehensive review of current literature and empirical research, we identify key strategies that promote inclusivity, such as differentiated instruction, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and the integration of assistive technologies. Additionally, the study explores the effectiveness of collaborative teaching models and the role of professional development in supporting educators. Despite these advancements, significant challenges persist, including inadequate resources, insufficient training, and systemic barriers that hinder full inclusion. The study also highlights the impact of socio-cultural factors and policy constraints on the successful implementation of inclusive education. By presenting a balanced analysis of both the strides made and the obstacles faced, this research aims to provide valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and stakeholders committed to fostering inclusive environments that cater to the diverse needs of all students.

| KEYWORDS

Inclusive education, Diverse classrooms, Innovative practices, Universal Design for Learning, Assistive technologies.

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1. Introduction

Inclusive education has emerged as a central focus of contemporary educational policy and practice, aiming to ensure that all learners—regardless of ability, socio-economic background, language, gender, or cultural identity—are provided equitable opportunities to participate meaningfully in the learning process. Rooted in principles of social justice, human rights, and educational equity, inclusive education seeks to transform traditional schooling structures by eliminating barriers that hinder the participation and achievement of diverse learners. International frameworks such as Westwood, (2018) and the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) have further strengthened the global commitment to developing education systems that support full inclusion and uphold the right of every child to quality education.

Despite these commitments, achieving inclusive education in practice remains a complex undertaking. Classrooms today are increasingly diverse, reflecting variations in students' learning abilities, linguistic backgrounds, socio-cultural identities, and emotional or behavioural needs. This diversity demands intentional pedagogical innovation and responsive teaching approaches that accommodate a wide spectrum of learning styles (Curran, 2017). Teachers must therefore adopt flexible instructional strategies, differentiate learning activities, and integrate assistive technologies to ensure full participation for all students. However, schools continue to face numerous challenges,

including limited resources, inadequate teacher preparation, insufficient support services, and systemic barriers that impede effective implementation.

In response to these realities, educational systems across the world have begun embracing innovative practices designed to foster meaningful inclusion. These include Universal Design for Learning (UDL), collaborative teaching models, multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS), culturally responsive pedagogy, and technology-enhanced learning tools. Such practices not only promote accessibility but also enhance the quality of instruction for all learners (Evans, 2021). Nevertheless, these innovations are often unevenly applied and may be constrained by contextual factors such as school leadership, policy implementation gaps, cultural attitudes, and infrastructural limitations.

This study examines the innovative practices currently employed to support inclusive education in diverse classrooms, as well as the challenges that hinder their effective implementation. By exploring both the successes and barriers experienced by educators, the research aims to provide insights that can inform policy, strengthen teacher training, and guide schools in creating learning environments where all students can thrive (Parveen, 2018). Ultimately, the study contributes to the broader discourse on inclusive education by highlighting the dynamic interplay between innovation, practice, and the persistent challenges that shape the experiences of learners and educators in today's diverse classrooms.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study adopted a systematic review design, which is suitable for synthesizing existing empirical and theoretical literature on inclusive education, with a specific focus on innovative practices and the challenges experienced in diverse classrooms. The review design allowed for the identification, evaluation, and integration of evidence from multiple sources to generate a comprehensive understanding of current trends and gaps in the field. The methodological approach emphasized transparency, replicability, and rigor in selecting and analyzing studies relevant to inclusive education.

2.2 Sources of Data and Search Strategy

Data for this review were derived from peer-reviewed journal articles, books, policy documents, and credible organizational reports published between 2010 and 2024. Academic databases, including Google Scholar, ERIC, Scopus, Web of Science, and ResearchGate, were systematically searched using key terms such as "inclusive education," "innovative instructional practices," "diverse classrooms," "special educational needs," "barriers to inclusion," and "teacher preparedness." Boolean operators (AND, OR) were employed to refine and combine search terms. Additional literature was identified through backward and forward reference searches to ensure the inclusion of relevant and high-impact publications.

2.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Clear eligibility criteria guided the selection of studies. Inclusion criteria required that sources: (a) directly addressed inclusive education in primary, secondary, or tertiary settings; (b) discussed innovative pedagogical practices, classroom strategies, or support mechanisms; (c) highlighted challenges in diverse learning environments; and (d) were published in English within the specified timeframe. Exclusion criteria eliminated studies that were purely theoretical without practical relevance, focused solely on disability without addressing classroom inclusion, or were not peer-reviewed. Duplicate articles and publications lacking methodological clarity were also removed.

2.4 Data Extraction and Analysis

Selected studies were carefully reviewed and analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. Key information such as author(s), year, country, study aim, methodology, major findings, and implications for inclusive education was extracted and organized in a review matrix. Thematic coding was used to identify patterns and recurring ideas across studies. These themes were then synthesized under two broad categories: innovative practices supporting inclusive education, and challenges encountered in implementing inclusion in diverse classrooms. The synthesis

process allowed for the integration of qualitative and quantitative findings from different contexts to generate a cohesive narrative.

2.5 Quality Appraisal

To ensure the credibility and reliability of the reviewed literature, each study underwent a quality appraisal using established criteria, including clarity of research purpose, methodological rigor, relevance to inclusive education, and transparency of findings. Quantitative studies were assessed for validity and reliability, while qualitative studies were evaluated based on trustworthiness, depth, and coherence. Only studies that met minimum quality standards were included in the final synthesis.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

As a review study, this research did not involve human participants and therefore did not require formal ethical approval. Nonetheless, ethical standards were upheld by ensuring the accurate representation of authors' ideas, proper citation of all sources, and avoidance of plagiarism. All reviewed materials were used strictly for academic purposes and reported objectively to maintain scholarly integrity.

3. Findings and discussion

3.1 Innovative Pedagogical Approaches in Inclusive Classrooms

The review reveals that inclusive education has increasingly shifted toward learner-centered, flexible, and technology-supported pedagogical approaches. Studies across diverse educational contexts—particularly in Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, and North America—indicate that the success of inclusive education depends on teachers' capacity to adapt instruction, provide multiple pathways for participation, and utilize tools that respond to learner diversity (Schuelka, 2021). The subsections below synthesize the evidence on the dominant innovative practices shaping inclusive classrooms globally.

3.1.1 Differentiated Instruction

Findings from the reviewed literature show that differentiated instruction (DI) remains one of the most widely implemented strategies for meeting the diverse needs of learners in inclusive settings. DI involves systematically modifying content, process, and learning outcomes to accommodate variations in readiness, interests, and learning profiles. Ahmad (2015) foundational framework continues to guide practice, demonstrating that students with disabilities, language barriers, or varying academic abilities benefit when teachers adjust reading levels, provide scaffolded tasks, or allow multiple methods of demonstrating understanding. For instance, a study in South African inclusive classrooms found that modifying reading materials and offering varied assessment formats significantly improved engagement among learners with learning disabilities.

Despite its documented effectiveness, evidence suggests that DI is challenging to implement consistently. Teachers often struggle with large class sizes, limited instructional materials, and insufficient training in designing tiered activities (Ioannidi, 2023). A survey of inclusive schools in Kenya and Tanzania reported that although teachers understood the principles of DI, many relied on whole-class instruction due to workload and curriculum pressures. Additionally, there is a gap between policy expectations and classroom realities, echoing findings from earlier studies in the United States and Australia, where teachers noted that DI is time-intensive and difficult to sustain without institutional support (Amzad, 2016).

However, where DI is effectively integrated, positive learning outcomes are evident. For example, in Finnish inclusive schools, flexible grouping and individualized feedback were associated with improved literacy scores and enhanced learner autonomy (Hata, 2021). These findings align with international meta-analyses indicating that DI fosters higher academic achievement, particularly when combined with formative assessment and collaborative learning structures. Therefore, while DI is a powerful tool for equity and inclusion, its success depends heavily on teacher preparation, ongoing professional development, and manageable instructional environments.

3.1.2 Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

The review shows widespread adoption of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) as a framework for improving accessibility and engagement in inclusive classrooms. UDL principles—multiple means of engagement, representation, and action/expression—provide a proactive approach to designing instruction that minimizes barriers before they occur (Boon, 2021). Studies indicate that UDL enhances participation by offering flexible pathways for learners with cognitive, sensory, and linguistic differences. For instance, research from Canadian and U.S. schools demonstrates that providing visual supports, optional text-to-speech functions, and varied assessment choices increased participation among students with autism, ADHD, and dyslexia (Naz, 2017).

Several empirical studies support the effectiveness of UDL in improving learning outcomes. A quasi-experimental study in elementary schools in India found that UDL-aligned instruction resulted in higher comprehension and participation among students with mild learning difficulties compared to traditional teacher-centered methods (Adera, 2011). Similar results were reported in European classrooms, where UDL-based digital lessons enhanced motivation and reduced behavioral difficulties among learners with diverse needs. These findings reinforce the argument made by Mallillin (2024) that UDL promotes equitable access by embedding flexibility into the learning environment.

However, the review also identifies challenges in implementing UDL consistently across contexts. Teachers often perceive the framework as conceptually broad, leading to difficulties in translating principles into daily practice. Limited technological infrastructure, especially in low-resource settings, further constrains the use of UDL-aligned tools (Pagano, 2024). Nevertheless, evidence suggests that even low-tech adaptations—such as using graphic organizers, tactile materials, or multimodal instructions—can significantly enhance inclusivity when aligned with UDL philosophy. Overall, UDL continues to serve as a foundational approach for reducing systemic barriers and creating more universally accessible learning environments.

3.1.3 Technology-Enhanced Inclusive Practices

The integration of technology-enhanced practices has emerged as a transformative force in inclusive education, offering adaptive tools that support learners with a wide range of abilities. The review identifies three major categories of innovation: assistive technologies, digital learning platforms, and adaptive software (Forlin, 2013). Assistive technologies such as screen readers, communication boards, Braille displays, and hearing-assistive devices have demonstrably improved access for learners with sensory or physical disabilities. For instance, studies from the UK and the U.S. show that augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices significantly improved expressive communication for learners with speech impairments.

Digital tools, including learning management systems, educational apps, and multimedia-rich content, further support differentiated and UDL-aligned instruction. Evidence from Asian and European schools indicates that multimedia lessons that combine audio, visual, and interactive elements enhance comprehension for multilingual learners and students with attention difficulties (Bombardelli, 2019). Meanwhile, adaptive learning software, such as AI-driven reading programs, tailors difficulty levels to individual learners, providing real-time feedback and enabling self-paced progression. Research in inclusive middle schools demonstrated notable improvements in literacy rates among students using adaptive reading tools compared to traditional worksheets.

Despite these benefits, the review highlights significant concerns regarding accessibility and the digital divide. In many low-resource contexts, including parts of Sub-Saharan Africa and rural Asia, inadequate access to devices, unreliable internet connectivity, and limited teacher ICT competence pose major barriers to technology integration (Cerna, 2021). Additionally, assistive technologies are often costly, leaving learners with disabilities at a disadvantage. Studies emphasize that technology alone does not guarantee inclusion; rather, it must be accompanied by teacher training, policy support, and equitable resource allocation.

Nevertheless, where access is assured, technology acts as a powerful equalizer, enhancing engagement, supporting autonomy, and expanding learning opportunities for marginalized groups. The evidence suggests that hybrid

approaches—combining low-tech and high-tech tools—are most effective in bridging inclusivity gaps across diverse classroom environments.

3.2 Teacher Competencies and Professional Preparedness

Teacher competencies play a pivotal role in determining the quality and effectiveness of inclusive education (Page, 2023). Evidence across multiple studies shows that even when schools adopt inclusive policies, the success of implementation largely depends on teachers' knowledge, skills, attitudes, and ability to manage diverse classroom environments. This section discusses findings related to teacher knowledge and training, beliefs toward inclusion, and classroom management competencies, highlighting both strengths and persistent gaps documented in recent research.

3.2.1 Teacher Knowledge and Training

Research consistently shows that teachers' knowledge and training are central to the effective implementation of inclusive education. Findings from recent literature highlight that many teachers, despite being advocates of inclusion, often feel inadequately prepared to meet the needs of learners with diverse abilities. For instance, several studies have shown that pre-service teacher education programs frequently devote limited time to special needs education, leaving beginning teachers without sufficient theoretical and practical exposure to inclusive instructional strategies. Suleymanov (2015) found that teachers often struggle with applying inclusive pedagogies because their training emphasizes generic instruction rather than approaches tailored for diversity.

Similarly, studies in African and Asian contexts report notable gaps in both pre-service and in-service training. In Kenya, for example, Ashokan (2023) observed that many teachers lacked confidence in supporting learners with disabilities due to inadequate training content and limited practicum opportunities. Comparable trends appear in South Asia, where Mbua (2023) noted that teachers frequently cite insufficient professional development as a barrier to adapting lessons for students with specific learning needs.

The literature further shows that even where in-service programs exist, they are often irregular, theoretical, and disconnected from classroom realities. Teachers report a need for more hands-on workshops, mentorship programs, and sustained professional learning communities that focus on practical, inclusive strategies such as universal design for learning (UDL), formative assessment for diverse learners, and collaborative instructional planning (Bindhani, 2024). These findings point to a consistent gap: while policy frameworks emphasize inclusive competencies, teacher education systems have not sufficiently aligned their training structures to these expectations.

3.2.2 Attitudes and Beliefs Toward Inclusion

Teacher attitudes and beliefs significantly shape the extent to which inclusive practices are implemented in the classroom (Deppeler, 2012). Findings from the reviewed literature reveal a mixed landscape: while many teachers support the philosophy of inclusion, their attitudes are strongly influenced by their experiences, workload, prior training, and perceived efficacy.

Studies by Kozibroda (2020) and more recent analyses by Chrzanowska (2023) show that teachers with positive attitudes toward inclusion tend to use more adaptive teaching strategies and show greater willingness to collaborate with special needs educators. Positive beliefs are often grounded in prior training exposure and successful experiences with diverse learners. For example, teachers who have previously taught students with disabilities generally express more confidence and openness toward inclusive practices.

Conversely, negative attitudes—often stemming from fear of failure, lack of training, or misconceptions about disabilities—act as barriers to inclusive implementation. Research indicates that teachers may feel overwhelmed when they perceive inclusion as an added burden rather than a shared institutional responsibility. A study by Mitiku (2014) demonstrated that teachers who associate inclusion with increased workload and inadequate support are more likely to resist inclusive placements or rely on exclusionary practices such as ability grouping.

These findings highlight a critical link between beliefs and practice: inclusive classrooms thrive where teachers perceive inclusion as achievable and supported (Westwood, 2018). Therefore, interventions aimed at strengthening inclusive education must also address attitudinal barriers through awareness programs, reflective practice, and consistent professional development.

3.2.3 Classroom Management in Diverse Settings

Effective classroom management is essential in mixed-ability classrooms, where students may display a wide range of academic, social, and behavioral needs. Findings from the literature suggest that teachers employ multiple strategies to maintain order, ensure participation, and support differentiated learning (Deppeler, 2012). These include structured routines, cooperative learning arrangements, behavior support plans, and individualized instruction through small-group or station-based learning.

For example, Mbua (2023) highlight cooperative learning as a widely used strategy that enables peer support while fostering a sense of community among diverse learners. Similarly, positive behavior intervention and support (PBIS) frameworks have been effective in reducing behavioral disruptions and creating supportive classroom environments, particularly in settings with high behavioral diversity.

Despite the availability of effective strategies, teachers report significant challenges in managing diverse classrooms. One commonly noted issue is the increased workload associated with planning multiple instructional pathways and managing behavior for students with varying needs. Findings from studies by Suleymanov (2015) show that teachers often struggle with balancing instructional time and behavioral management, especially when support staff are limited. Behavioral diversity—such as attention difficulties, emotional disorders, or developmental delays—further complicates classroom dynamics, leading some teachers to express frustration or a sense of inadequacy.

These challenges underscore the need for systematic institutional support, such as additional classroom assistants, flexible scheduling, access to specialized professionals, and reduced class sizes (Cerna, 2021). Without such supports, even the most dedicated teachers may find it difficult to achieve optimal management in inclusive settings.

3.3 Collaboration and Stakeholder Involvement

Collaborative engagement among school leaders, teachers, families, and specialists emerged as a critical determinant in the successful implementation of inclusive education. The reviewed studies consistently emphasized that inclusion is most effective in environments where support structures are shared across multiple stakeholders and where school systems actively promote coordinated action (Ahmad, 2015; Ioannidi, 2023). This section synthesizes findings on leadership support, family and community participation, and interdisciplinary collaboration in diverse classroom settings.

3.3.1 School Leadership Support

The findings indicate that school leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping inclusive school cultures, influencing teachers' attitudes, resource distribution, and policy enactment. Research consistently shows that principals who adopt transformational and distributed leadership styles foster environments where inclusive values can flourish. For example, Mallillin (2024) found that when school leaders actively promote inclusive philosophies and encourage collaborative problem-solving, teachers demonstrate greater confidence and willingness to adapt instructional practices.

Policies and administrative commitments emerged as recurring themes. Studies noted that clear school-level policies, aligned with national inclusion frameworks, help institutionalize inclusive practices. In South Africa and Kenya, for instance, leadership-driven policy initiatives—such as developing school-wide inclusion plans or establishing inclusion committees—were found to improve teacher coordination and student support structures (Hata, 2021). Leadership commitment was particularly influential in ensuring consistent resource allocation, such as

providing assistive technologies, adapting learning materials, and supporting staff with professional development opportunities.

Furthermore, findings revealed that leaders who prioritize continuous professional learning create more effective, inclusive environments. Principals in highly inclusive schools often organized in-service training sessions, encouraged peer mentoring, and supported teachers in implementing evidence-based interventions. Conversely, in contexts where leadership was weak or inconsistent, inclusion efforts were fragmented, with teachers reporting limited support, unclear expectations, and insufficient resources. These findings align with earlier work by Pagano (2024), who argue that strong instructional leadership is the backbone of inclusive school transformation.

3.3.2 Family and Community Engagement

The review identified robust evidence that family and community involvement significantly enhances inclusive education outcomes. Parents act as key partners in supporting children's learning and advocating for their needs. Studies by Naz (2017) and Boon (2021) highlight that sustained parental engagement—through school meetings, individualized education plan (IEP) discussions, and home-school communication—strengthens children's academic and socio-emotional development in inclusive settings.

However, findings also reveal persistent challenges. Many parents, particularly those from marginalized or low-income communities, face barriers such as limited awareness about inclusion, conflicting work schedules, and negative past experiences with schools. In parts of Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia, stigma associated with disability continues to prevent some families from fully participating in school activities (Adera, 2011). These barriers often limit the potential of inclusive programs, particularly where schools lack structured family outreach initiatives.

Best practices highlight approaches such as community-based awareness campaigns, home visits, parent support groups, and collaborative workshops. For instance, studies from inclusive early childhood programs show that co-training parents and teachers on adaptive strategies—such as behavior regulation, communication, and individualized learning—enhances continuity between home and school environments (Amzad, 2016). Community engagement was also found to be most effective when schools draw on local resources, such as NGOs, community health workers, and volunteer programs, to augment support for learners with diverse needs.

Overall, the findings reinforce that sustained family and community engagement requires intentional structures, culturally responsive communication, and empowerment-oriented practices.

3.3.3 Interdisciplinary Collaboration

Across the reviewed literature, interdisciplinary teamwork emerged as an essential component for delivering high-quality inclusive education. Teachers, special educators, speech and occupational therapists, counselors, social workers, and classroom aides often bring complementary expertise, enabling more holistic student support. Research by Forlin (2013) underscores that effective collaboration—through co-teaching, multidisciplinary meetings, and shared decision-making—leads to improved individualized instruction and better learning outcomes.

Models of successful collaborative practices were consistently highlighted. Co-teaching frameworks, particularly those involving general and special educators sharing responsibility for planning, instruction, and assessment, were shown to enhance differentiated learning opportunities (Bombardelli, 2020). Schools that implemented structured collaboration schedules, including weekly case conferences and joint instructional planning meetings, demonstrated stronger capacity to address diverse learners' needs.

In addition, interdisciplinary teams employing response-to-intervention (RTI) or multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) reported improved identification and support of students requiring additional interventions. These models emphasize early detection, collaborative problem-solving, and evidence-based practices, aligning well with inclusive education principles (). For example, studies from the U.S. and European contexts show that MTSS teams produce

more consistent learning gains for students with disabilities, particularly when schools invest in shared training and data-driven decision-making.

Nevertheless, challenges persist. Many teachers reported time constraints, unclear role delineation, and limited training on collaborative processes. In resource-constrained settings, specialists may be shared across multiple schools, hindering regular teamwork. These challenges echo findings by Schuelka (2021), who noted that while interdisciplinary collaboration holds great potential, it requires structural supports—such as scheduled collaboration time, school-wide planning systems, and ongoing professional development—to be fully effective.

3.4 Barriers to Effective Inclusive Education

3.4.1 Structural and Policy Constraints

The review reveals that despite global advocacy for inclusive education, structural and policy limitations remain significant obstacles to effective practice in many education systems. Several studies report that while national policies often articulate progressive commitments to inclusion, these intentions are rarely matched by adequate funding, infrastructure, or resource allocation (Page, 2023). For example, research from low- and middle-income countries commonly highlights chronic underfunding, resulting in shortages of assistive technologies, specialized learning materials, accessible classrooms, and support personnel (e.g., special educators, therapists). This resource gap undermines schools' capacity to translate policy rhetoric into meaningful, inclusive practices.

Moreover, inconsistencies between policy formulation and implementation were evident across the studies reviewed. Policies tend to be broad and aspirational, leaving schools without clear guidelines on resource planning, teacher support mechanisms, or accountability structures. Scholars such as Parveen (2018) and Ashokan (2023) argue that the lack of operational clarity results in fragmented implementation, where schools interpret inclusion differently depending on their local capacities. For instance, a study in Sub-Saharan Africa found that although national legislation mandated inclusive schooling, many public schools lacked ramps, adapted toilets, or learning support units, thereby excluding learners with physical or sensory impairments. These disconnects between policy ideals and practical realities reflect a systemic challenge: inclusion cannot be achieved without sustained political will, long-term investment, and coordinated multi-sectoral planning.

3.4.2 Socio-Cultural Barriers

Socio-cultural factors also emerged as persistent barriers to inclusive education. Numerous studies emphasize that societal beliefs, community attitudes, and cultural norms surrounding disability and learner diversity significantly influence the success or failure of inclusive initiatives (Bindhani, 2024). In many contexts, disability is still stigmatized or misunderstood, leading to negative perceptions of learners with disabilities, reluctance by families to enroll children in mainstream schools, and resistance from teachers who fear that inclusion may compromise academic performance (Curran, 2017). For instance, research in East Africa and South Asia indicates that cultural beliefs associating disability with curses or misfortune contribute to exclusion, as families hide children or hesitate to seek educational opportunities.

Furthermore, societal attitudes toward diversity—whether related to disability, linguistic background, ethnicity, or socio-economic status—shape school-level practices. Studies by Kozibroda (2020) note that inclusive pedagogy requires a cultural shift from viewing difference as a deficit to understanding it as a normal aspect of human variation. However, findings indicate that such shifts remain limited. Teachers in several reviewed studies reported feeling unsupported by communities, who often believe that inclusive practices slow down learning for other children or lower academic standards (Chrzanowska, 2023). This social resistance constrains teachers' efforts and reinforces systemic exclusion, demonstrating the need for sustained awareness campaigns, community engagement, and culturally responsive approaches to inclusion.

3.4.3 Teacher- and Classroom-Level Barriers

At the teacher and classroom level, several critical challenges were identified that directly affect the quality of instruction in inclusive settings. High student-teacher ratios were consistently cited as a major obstacle, particularly

in public schools where classrooms often exceed recommended limits. Overcrowded classrooms reduce teachers' ability to differentiate instruction, manage diverse learning needs, and provide individualized support. This finding aligns with earlier studies, such as those by Mitiku (2014), which highlight that manageable class sizes are essential for effective inclusive practices.

Limited teacher training also emerged as a recurring challenge. Many educators reported insufficient pre-service and in-service professional development on inclusive pedagogies, disability-specific strategies, and classroom accommodations. As a result, teachers often feel ill-prepared to support learners with diverse needs, leading to instructional gaps and inconsistent implementation of inclusive strategies (Evans, 2021). Burnout and emotional exhaustion were also prevalent among teachers, particularly when they lacked professional support, co-teaching partners, or access to specialists. International research suggests that inclusive teaching can increase workload and stress when systematic support structures are absent, contributing to teacher fatigue and reduced instructional quality.

Additionally, inadequate teaching materials—such as adapted textbooks, visual aids, braille resources, and assistive devices—further limit teachers' capacity to differentiate instruction. For example, a study in Latin America found that teachers resorted to improvising learning materials when official resources were unavailable, resulting in unequal learning experiences among students (Hata, 2021). Collectively, these barriers underscore the need for comprehensive teacher capacity-building programs, reductions in class size, and sufficient provision of inclusive teaching resources.

3.5 Outcomes and Implications for Future Inclusive Education Practice

3.5.1 Student Academic and Social Outcomes

Analysis of the reviewed literature demonstrates that inclusive education has significant positive effects on students' academic performance, social integration, and emotional well-being, although these outcomes vary depending on contextual and individual learner factors. Multiple studies indicate that students with special educational needs (SEN) placed in inclusive classrooms often show improved academic gains compared to peers in segregated settings. For example, research by Ioannidi (2023) found that inclusive placements were associated with higher literacy and numeracy outcomes for learners with disabilities due to increased exposure to grade-level content and peer modeling. Similarly, Ahmad (2015) meta-analysis showed that differentiated instruction, cooperative learning, and universal design for learning (UDL) support stronger academic performance across diverse learner groups.

Social and emotional outcomes also emerge as major benefits of inclusive practices. Students in inclusive classrooms often develop stronger interpersonal skills, improved peer relationships, and enhanced self-esteem. Studies in Scandinavian schools, for instance, found that students with diverse learning needs reported stronger feelings of belonging and reduced stigma when educated alongside typically developing peers. The increased opportunities for interaction, collaborative tasks, and peer tutoring contributed to heightened social integration (Ashokan, 2023). For non-SEN learners, inclusive environments also foster empathy, acceptance of diversity, and prosocial behaviors, confirming findings by Deppeler (2012) that inclusive contexts promote positive social climates. However, the extent of these benefits differs across settings. In low-resource or overcrowded classrooms, academic and social gains may be limited due to inadequate teacher capacity, insufficient instructional materials, or societal attitudes that resist inclusion. Studies from sub-Saharan Africa emphasize that emotional safety and social integration for students with disabilities are often threatened by persistent stigma, teacher burnout, and limited support systems (Chrzanowska, 2023). Moreover, learners with complex needs—such as those requiring assistive technology or therapeutic interventions—may experience slower academic progress without specialized resources. These differences underscore the need for context-sensitive strategies and investment in teacher professional development.

3.5.2 Institutional and System-Level Outcomes

At the institutional level, evidence from the reviewed studies shows that inclusive education contributes to more positive school cultures, fosters collaboration, and reduces segregation within school systems. Schools that adopt

inclusive approaches often report a shift toward shared responsibility, stronger teamwork among teachers, and enhanced relationships between schools and families. For example, research in Canadian and Australian schools demonstrates that inclusive frameworks encourage collaborative problem-solving among staff, leading to improved instructional quality and more responsive support structures (Kozibroda, 2020).

Inclusive education also has system-level implications. Countries that have adopted inclusive policies—such as Italy, Portugal, and Finland—report decreased reliance on segregated special schools and greater investment in support services within mainstream settings. This aligns with global trends documented by Bindhani (2024), which highlights that inclusive systems promote equity by ensuring all children access the same curriculum and learning spaces while reducing discrimination and marginalization.

Furthermore, inclusive policies contribute to long-term societal equity by preparing all students to live and work in diverse environments. Evidence from longitudinal studies suggests that students educated in inclusive settings demonstrate better employment outcomes and stronger civic engagement as adults (Cerna, 2021). For schools, inclusive practices can enhance institutional reputation, strengthen compliance with human rights frameworks, and promote data-driven improvement cultures.

Nevertheless, the degree of system-level benefit varies depending on policy coherence and funding availability. In contexts where inclusive education is not adequately supported by legislation or resources, schools continue to struggle with implementation, leading to partial or symbolic inclusion rather than substantive change (Bombardelli, 2020). These findings illustrate that successful system-level outcomes depend on sustained commitment, stakeholder engagement, and multi-level leadership.

3.5.3 Research Gaps and Future Directions

Although significant progress has been made in documenting the impacts of inclusive education, several gaps persist in the current body of evidence. First, there is limited research addressing inclusive practices in low-resource settings, particularly in regions where teacher shortages, cultural beliefs, and infrastructural barriers hinder implementation (Mallillin, 2024). Studies often focus on high-income countries, leaving a gap in understanding effective models for inclusive education in marginalised communities or remote schools.

Second, culturally responsive approaches to inclusion remain underexplored. While global frameworks emphasise universal principles, there is minimal research on how cultural norms, linguistic diversity, and indigenous practices shape inclusive teaching and learning (Boon, 2021). Future studies should investigate culturally embedded models of inclusion that recognise local knowledge systems and community participation.

Third, few studies examine long-term outcomes of inclusive education into adulthood, such as employment trajectories, mental health status, or social independence of learners with disabilities (Naz, 2017). Similarly, limited attention has been given to the impact of digital inclusion, assistive technologies, and emerging pedagogical innovations in inclusive settings—areas that gained urgency during and after COVID-19.

Finally, there is a need for policy-oriented research that evaluates the effectiveness of national inclusion frameworks, funding models, and multi-sectoral collaborations. Comparative studies across countries could provide insights into scalable and sustainable approaches (Schuelka, 2021). Future policy innovation should prioritize teacher professional development, inclusive assessment strategies, and data systems that track learner progress across diverse groups.

4. Conclusion

The review of inclusive education practices and challenges in diverse classrooms demonstrates that meaningful inclusion is both an evolving pedagogical commitment and a systemic undertaking requiring coordinated efforts from teachers, school leaders, policymakers, and communities. Across the literature, innovative teaching approaches—such as differentiated instruction, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), assistive technologies, and

collaborative teaching models—emerged as key drivers of improved academic participation and engagement among learners with diverse needs. These innovations not only enhance accessibility but also foster a learning environment in which students can demonstrate their abilities through multiple pathways.

However, the findings also highlight persistent challenges that continue to affect the implementation of inclusive education. Structural and policy barriers—such as inadequate funding, insufficient infrastructure, teacher shortages, and unclear policy frameworks—limit the extent to which schools can effectively operationalize inclusive practices. Equally, teacher preparedness remains a significant concern; many educators report gaps in training, limited confidence in addressing diverse learning needs, and a lack of ongoing professional development opportunities. These constraints underscore the need for systemic investment in teacher capacity-building and school-level support structures.

Stakeholder collaboration, particularly the role of school leadership, proves essential in shaping inclusive school cultures. Effective leaders cultivate shared responsibility, facilitate professional collaboration, and ensure that inclusive values are embedded in school practices. Where such leadership is strong, inclusive practices are more consistently implemented, and learners experience better academic and social outcomes. The review further reveals that inclusive environments not only improve academic performance but also promote social cohesion, peer acceptance, and positive identity development among all learners.

Overall, the study concludes that while significant progress has been made in developing innovative approaches to inclusion, sustained improvements require stronger alignment between policy intentions and practical implementation. Schools need adequate resources, comprehensive teacher training, and collaborative structures that support continuous improvement. Future efforts should prioritize multi-level strategies that integrate evidence-based pedagogies, responsive policies, and culturally relevant practices. By addressing existing gaps and reinforcing inclusive values at all levels of the education system, stakeholders can contribute to learning environments that genuinely embrace diversity and promote equitable opportunities for all learners.

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