

Evaluating Inclusive Programs as an Effort to Provide Non-Discriminatory Education for Students with Special Needs

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Abstract:

Inclusive education represents a progressive effort to ensure equal learning opportunities for all students, including those with special needs, within mainstream educational settings. This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of inclusive education programs using a mixed methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data were collected through standardized surveys assessing student academic outcomes, emotional well-being, and teacher preparedness. Meanwhile, qualitative data were obtained through in-depth interviews with teachers, school administrators, and parents, as well as direct classroom observations. The integration of these methods allowed for data triangulation, providing a comprehensive perspective on both the successes and challenges of inclusive education. Results show that inclusive programs positively influence students' social interaction and academic motivation; however, persistent barriers such as limited resources, insufficient teacher training, and systemic constraints hinder full implementation. The findings underscore the importance of continued program evaluation to identify best practices and areas needing improvement, ensuring that inclusive education not only remains a policy commitment but also becomes an effective, equitable, and sustainable educational practice.

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Introduction (مقدمة)

Inclusive education is increasingly recognized as a critical strategy in achieving quality, equitable, and non-discriminatory education for all learners. It represents a shift from segregated models of special education toward a unified system where students with diverse needs and abilities learn together in the same classroom environment. This transformative approach aligns with international frameworks such as the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006), and the Sustainable Development Goal 4, which emphasizes inclusive and equitable education. These frameworks

advocate for educational systems that accommodate all learners, particularly those historically marginalized due to disability, socioeconomic status, or learning differences (Díaz-León et al., 2024; Lindsay, 2007). Inclusive education is thus not merely a technical reform but a reflection of a broader social commitment to equality and justice.

Inclusion, as a practice and philosophy, assumes that diversity in learning is not a problem to be fixed, but a strength to be embraced. It is built on the premise that every child has the potential to learn and participate meaningfully when given appropriate support. Rather than isolating students with disabilities into separate classrooms or schools, inclusive education encourages their full participation in mainstream settings, alongside peers without disabilities. This model fosters mutual understanding, empathy, and social cohesion, which are essential for nurturing democratic societies (Kart & Kart, 2021). Numerous studies have shown that inclusive settings improve students' academic outcomes, social-emotional well-being, and overall life satisfaction—benefits that extend to both students with and without special needs (Chávez-Castillo et al., 2023; Dessemontet et al., 2012).

Despite its widespread theoretical support, the implementation of inclusive education is far from consistent or universal. In many countries, especially those with limited resources or centralized education systems, inclusion remains a concept more often discussed in policy documents than realized in classrooms (Okech et al., 2021; Opoku et al., 2015). Teachers often report feeling unprepared to manage the diversity of needs within their classrooms due to insufficient training or lack of professional development in inclusive pedagogy (Othman et al., 2025; Kurniawati et al., 2014). Compounding this issue is the shortage of adaptive teaching materials, classroom assistants, and technological supports such as assistive devices and learning platforms (Mamuladze et al., 2023). These constraints hinder the ability of schools to meet the diverse academic and psychosocial needs of learners with disabilities.

Moreover, social attitudes toward disability continue to present obstacles to the success of inclusion. In many educational communities, both teachers and parents may harbor implicit biases, misconceptions, or low expectations regarding the potential of students with disabilities (Ali et al., 2024; Kim & Han, 2023). Such beliefs can manifest in exclusionary practices, even within systems labeled as inclusive. Students with disabilities may still experience social isolation, bullying, or neglect in classrooms where the spirit of inclusion is not actively cultivated. This highlights that inclusion is not only a matter of infrastructure or training, but also of cultural and attitudinal change that requires long-term commitment and reflection from all stakeholders.

Given these challenges, there is an urgent need to systematically evaluate the effectiveness of inclusive programs to determine whether they truly meet their intended goals. Program evaluations provide critical insights into how policies are translated into practice, how support structures are functioning, and how students are experiencing inclusion in real time (Idol, 2006; Paseka & Schwab, 2020). Evaluations can reveal whether inclusive programs contribute meaningfully to students' academic performance, self-esteem, and social participation, or whether they risk becoming tokenistic efforts without substantive outcomes. Moreover, robust evaluations can highlight best practices, guide professional development priorities, and inform strategic policy revisions.

To conduct such evaluations effectively, researchers must adopt methodologies that can capture the complexity of inclusive education. This study utilizes a mixed methods approach, combining quantitative measures (such as academic scores, survey results, and standardized scales like the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale) with qualitative data from interviews, observations, and focus group discussions. This integrative design allows for triangulation of data, enhancing the validity of findings and providing a richer, multidimensional understanding of how inclusive education is functioning at the classroom and school level (Tzivinikou & Papoutsaki, 2016; Chávez-Castillo et al., 2023). It also facilitates the inclusion of diverse voices – teachers, students,

parents, and administrators – thereby aligning the evaluation process with the democratic spirit of inclusion itself.

Ultimately, inclusive education must be more than a philosophical aspiration or policy mandate; it must be a lived experience for every student, supported by effective practices and sustained through continuous evaluation and improvement. This study contributes to the growing body of research that seeks not only to celebrate inclusion but to critically assess and strengthen it. By identifying both the enabling factors and persistent barriers to effective inclusive practice, this research aims to inform educators, policymakers, and school communities about the strategies needed to ensure that inclusive education delivers on its promise: an equitable learning environment where all students, regardless of their abilities, can participate, progress, and thrive.

Method (منهج)

This study employed a mixed methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of inclusive education programs for students with special needs. The rationale for using this design lies in the complex and multidimensional nature of inclusion, which involves not only measurable educational outcomes but also subjective experiences, social dynamics, and institutional practices. A mixed methods approach allows the researcher to triangulate findings, enhancing the reliability and depth of interpretation (Tzivinikou & Papoutsaki, 2016; Idol, 2006). This methodology is especially suited for evaluating educational settings where human interactions, policy applications, and emotional responses all play significant roles in shaping learning experiences.

The quantitative component of this study involved the collection of structured data through surveys and standardized instruments. A set of questionnaires was distributed to teachers, school administrators, and students with special needs in five inclusive primary schools. The teacher questionnaire assessed variables such as professional readiness, attitudes toward inclusion, perceived challenges, and the availability of teaching resources (Kurniawati et al., 2014; Othman et al., 2025). Meanwhile, students completed instruments measuring academic self-concept, emotional well-being, and perceptions of peer support, using validated scales such as the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and a modified version of the Beck Youth Inventory. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics to identify patterns and correlations relevant to inclusive practice.

The qualitative component focused on obtaining rich, contextual insights through semi-structured interviews and non-participant classroom observations. Interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of 15 individuals, including school principals, special education coordinators, classroom teachers, and parents of students with special needs. The interview guide covered themes such as inclusive policy implementation, daily classroom practices, support mechanisms, and perceived student progress. Observations were carried out in 10 inclusive classrooms using an adapted version of the Inclusive Classroom Profile (ICP), which focuses on areas such as instructional strategies, classroom climate, and peer interactions (Dessemontet et al., 2012). All qualitative data were transcribed and coded thematically using NVivo to uncover recurring patterns and emergent themes.

Data integration occurred at the interpretation stage, where quantitative trends were compared and contextualized with qualitative findings. For instance, low scores on teacher preparedness in surveys were matched with interview narratives revealing a lack of in-service training or support from school leadership (Ali et al., 2024; Yusuf & Fajari, 2025). This process of

triangulation ensured that the conclusions drawn from the research were grounded in both empirical data and lived experience. The inclusion of diverse stakeholders' voices—students, teachers, parents, and administrators—was crucial to achieving a balanced and holistic evaluation of inclusive education practices.

Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the research process. All participants provided informed consent prior to data collection, and anonymity and confidentiality were maintained in the handling and presentation of findings. The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the lead research institution and adhered to the ethical standards outlined by international educational research associations. The mixed methods approach not only allowed for a robust analysis of the existing inclusive programs but also facilitated the identification of both systemic strengths and challenges, thereby offering practical recommendations for future improvements in inclusive education.

Result (نتائج)

Descriptive Statistics

This study explored the effectiveness of inclusive education programs across five inclusive primary schools through a mixed methods approach that combined survey instruments, standardized scales, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations. The findings are presented in five major thematic areas: (1) Teacher readiness and attitudes, (2) Student academic and psychosocial outcomes, (3) Classroom practices and differentiation strategies, (4) Institutional resources and administrative support, and (5) Cross-analysis and triangulation of data sources.

Teacher Readiness and Attitudes Toward Inclusion

One of the core indicators for successful implementation of inclusive education is teacher preparedness. From the quantitative survey of 53 classroom teachers, it was found that while the majority (67.9%) expressed strong support for inclusive values, only 38.5% had received any formal pre-service or in-service training related to special education. Furthermore, only 31.2% of respondents reported being "very confident" in applying inclusive teaching strategies such as differentiated instruction, Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), or Universal Design for Learning (UDL).

Interviews revealed a disconnection between teachers' philosophical support for inclusion and their practical readiness. One teacher remarked: "Inclusion is something we all agree on, but when it comes to applying it in the classroom, we are often improvising without real guidance." Additionally, 47.2% of teachers reported feeling burdened by the additional planning required for inclusive settings, often citing limited time and institutional support.

Table 1. Teacher Preparedness and Attitudes Toward Inclusive Education

Indicator	Percentage (%)
Support inclusive values (strongly agree/agree)	67.9%
Received formal training in inclusive education	38.5%
Confident in differentiating instruction	31.2%
Feel adequately supported by school administration	42.6%
Report high workload due to inclusion responsibilities	47.2%

Academic and Psychosocial Outcomes of Students with Special Needs

A total of 61 students with special needs participated in the student survey. Emotional well-

being indicators were moderately positive, with 73.8% of respondents reporting that they felt “safe” and “accepted” by their classmates. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale showed an average score of 21.4 out of 30, indicating a moderate level of self-esteem. However, academic self-concept remained a concern: only 45.1% of the students believed they were performing at the same academic level as their peers.

Observations corroborated these findings. Students with disabilities were more actively engaged during collaborative group work or when paired with peers for support. However, their participation in whole-class instruction was often minimal, and teachers seldom employed scaffolding strategies. A parent stated during interviews: *"My daughter loves her friends and enjoys going to school, but I rarely see any academic progress when she brings home her assignments."*

Classroom Practices and Instructional Strategies

Direct classroom observations (10 sessions across five schools) revealed varied practices in implementing inclusive strategies. In three classrooms, teachers used adaptive worksheets and provided multi-level instructions to accommodate student needs. However, in the remaining classrooms, most lessons followed a “one-size-fits-all” approach with limited differentiation. Teachers frequently relied on peer tutoring or informal accommodations such as seat placement, but individualized learning goals were rarely articulated.

One key finding was the lack of structured use of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) or progress monitoring systems. None of the observed classrooms had visible learning goals for students with disabilities, and learning progress was seldom tracked with personalized benchmarks. This reflects a gap between policy rhetoric and daily instructional practices.

Institutional Support and Availability of Resources

Institutional capacity varied significantly among the schools. Only 3 out of the 5 schools had designated inclusion coordinators, and only 2 reported receiving specific funding for inclusive programs from the local education authority. Assistive technologies (such as speech-to-text software, audiobooks, or tactile learning materials) were present in two schools but were either underused or unused due to lack of teacher training.

From interviews with school principals and administrators, several challenges were highlighted: lack of funding, inconsistencies in national inclusion policies, and limited access to special education experts. One principal emphasized: *"We want to be inclusive, but we are left to figure it out ourselves. We need clearer guidelines and consistent support."* These institutional weaknesses often translated directly into classroom-level limitations, impacting the quality of student experiences.

Cross-Analysis and Triangulation

The integration of qualitative and quantitative data revealed several key patterns. First, teacher attitudes were generally supportive of inclusion, but this did not translate into confident or consistent practice due to lack of training and support. Second, students reported feeling socially included, but academic inclusion remained shallow, often limited to physical presence rather than active engagement. Third, while some schools had adopted inclusive practices, there was no systemic approach across the board—success depended heavily on individual teacher initiative or principal leadership.

The triangulation between surveys, interviews, and observations validated the complexity of inclusive education implementation. It showed that inclusion, when inadequately supported, could become symbolic rather than substantive. Teachers were often enthusiastic but under-equipped; students were emotionally safe but not academically challenged; and administrators were committed but under-resourced.

Summary of Results

Overall, this study revealed that while inclusive education programs have led to improved social inclusion and student well-being, they fall short in delivering consistent academic outcomes and institutional coherence. The lack of systemic training, clear implementation models, and sustainable support structures emerged as key barriers. The mixed methods approach provided both measurable patterns and rich narratives, which together underscore the urgent need for comprehensive, multi-level reforms to strengthen the implementation of inclusive education.

Discussion (مناقشة)

Interpretation of Results

The findings of this study reveal a consistent gap between the philosophical commitment to inclusive education and its practical implementation in classroom and institutional settings. While the majority of teachers support the idea of inclusion, this support has not been matched by adequate training, resources, or systematic guidance. This supports existing literature which emphasizes that teacher attitude alone is not sufficient to implement effective inclusive education; professional competence and continuous capacity-building are equally essential (Kurniawati et al., 2014; Othman et al., 2025). Without structured training on inclusive pedagogy, teachers are left to navigate diverse learning needs based on personal intuition or peer support, often resulting in inconsistent and improvisational teaching practices.

The data also highlight that social inclusion has been more successfully realized than academic inclusion. Students with special needs report feeling welcomed and accepted, which indicates that schools have made some progress in fostering a positive socio-emotional environment. However, the lack of individualized academic scaffolding and formal implementation of IEPs suggests that these students are not yet fully integrated into the learning process. This aligns with the critique by Lindsay (2007), who noted that inclusion often remains at the level of physical placement rather than meaningful participation. Without intentional instructional differentiation, students with disabilities risk becoming passive participants, which undermines the goal of equity in learning outcomes.

Institutional support emerged as a pivotal determinant of success in inclusive implementation. Schools that had inclusion coordinators, resource rooms, and access to assistive technologies performed better in terms of teacher confidence and student engagement. This observation resonates with Idol's (2006) study, which argued that whole-school commitment and infrastructure are necessary for inclusion to succeed beyond the classroom level. Conversely, the absence of clear policies and funding mechanisms in some schools created uncertainty and inefficiencies, leading to fragmented and unsustainable practices. These institutional limitations also weakened the feedback loop between policy and practice, where teachers and administrators often felt disconnected from broader educational mandates.

An important insight from the triangulation of qualitative and quantitative data is the finding that inclusion often depends more on individual effort than systemic support. Some teachers went beyond formal requirements to accommodate students, often using personal resources or improvising with peer-assisted learning. While commendable, this model is not scalable or sustainable, especially in schools with high student-to-teacher ratios or limited professional development. Inclusion must therefore be institutionalized not as an ideal but as a practical, daily process supported by ongoing training, collaborative planning, and clear evaluative frameworks (Tzivinikou & Papoutsaki, 2016).

Moreover, the role of leadership is crucial. In schools where principals were actively

involved in planning and monitoring inclusive programs, a more coherent and effective implementation was observed. This supports the view of Ainscow and Sandill (2010), who emphasized that inclusive education is a reflection of organizational culture, and that change must begin with committed and informed leadership. Therefore, investing in leadership training specifically targeting inclusive management practices may be an effective strategy to drive systemic change.

Another emerging concern is the underutilization of assistive technologies. Although some schools had access to digital tools, these were rarely used effectively due to lack of teacher training. This finding mirrors those of Mamuladze et al. (2023), who demonstrated that the presence of technology alone does not guarantee its integration into inclusive pedagogy. Hence, future interventions should not only focus on the provision of resources but also ensure that educators are equipped with the knowledge and confidence to use these tools in pedagogically sound ways.

In sum, this study reinforces the argument that inclusive education cannot succeed through policy rhetoric or isolated efforts. It requires an ecosystemic approach involving all stakeholders—teachers, students, parents, school leaders, and policymakers. Policies must be followed with practical guidelines; training must be ongoing and context-sensitive; resources must be adequate and equitably distributed; and evaluations must be embedded in practice. Only through this comprehensive and coherent approach can inclusion evolve from aspiration into a lived educational reality for all learners.

Conclusion (خاتمة)

This study set out to evaluate the effectiveness of inclusive education programs in promoting equitable and non-discriminatory learning opportunities for students with special needs. Through a mixed methods approach combining quantitative surveys, standardized assessments, classroom observations, and qualitative interviews, the research uncovered significant insights into how inclusion is perceived, practiced, and supported at the school level.

The findings reveal a meaningful commitment to inclusive values among teachers and school leaders, as evidenced by their positive attitudes and willingness to embrace diverse learners. However, this commitment has not been consistently matched by professional preparedness, resource availability, or institutional support. Students with special needs generally report feeling socially accepted, yet their academic inclusion remains limited due to inadequate differentiation and the absence of structured educational planning such as IEPs.

Institutional capacity—particularly leadership, funding, and the presence of support personnel—emerged as a decisive factor in determining the quality of inclusive implementation. Where such elements were present, inclusive practices flourished; where they were lacking, inclusion tended to be superficial and inconsistent. Moreover, the underutilization of assistive technology due to lack of training highlights a broader issue: that tools alone are insufficient without pedagogical empowerment.

In conclusion, inclusive education remains a vital but under-realized ideal. To move from aspiration to realization, schools must be equipped not only with inclusive policies but with the tools, training, and leadership required to implement them. Future efforts should focus on systemic capacity building, ongoing teacher development, and sustained evaluation to ensure that inclusion becomes not just a right in principle, but a reality in practice—for every student, in every classroom.

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