
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Inclusive Education Practices for Learners with Special Needs

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| ABSTRACT

Inclusive education has become a central principle in contemporary educational systems, emphasizing the right of all learners, including those with special needs, to access quality education within mainstream classrooms. This research review examines current inclusive education practices and their effectiveness in supporting learners with diverse disabilities and learning difficulties. The study synthesizes findings from recent scholarly literature, policy documents, and empirical studies published over the past decade to identify key strategies, challenges, and outcomes associated with inclusive education. The review highlights major inclusive practices such as differentiated instruction, individualized education plans (IEPs), assistive technologies, collaborative teaching models, and positive behavior support systems. These approaches are shown to enhance academic achievement, social interaction, and emotional development among learners with special needs when effectively implemented. The review highlights the critical role of teacher training and professional development in cultivating the positive attitudes and competencies required for successful inclusion. Additionally, parental involvement and multidisciplinary collaboration are identified as essential components in creating supportive learning environments. Despite the documented benefits, the review reveals persistent challenges, including inadequate resources, large class sizes, limited specialized personnel, and insufficient policy implementation frameworks. These barriers often hinder the consistent application of inclusive strategies, particularly in developing educational contexts. Furthermore, negative perceptions and lack of awareness among stakeholders continue to affect the full realization of inclusive education goals. The findings suggest that sustained investment in teacher capacity building, infrastructure development, and inclusive policy enforcement is vital for improving educational outcomes for learners with special needs. The review concludes that inclusive education is most effective when supported by comprehensive institutional commitment, continuous monitoring, and community engagement. By providing a consolidated overview of evidence-based practices, this article aims to inform educators, policymakers, and researchers on strategies for strengthening inclusive education systems and promoting equitable learning opportunities for all learners.

| KEYWORDS

Inclusive Education, Special Needs Learners, Differentiated Instruction, Assistive Technology, Teacher Training, Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), Educational Equity

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

Education is widely recognized as a fundamental human right and a key driver of social and economic development. In recent decades, educational systems across the world have increasingly embraced inclusive education as a strategy for ensuring equal learning opportunities for all learners, regardless of their physical, intellectual, emotional, or social differences (Florian, 2008; Jacob & Olisaemeka, 2016). Inclusive education promotes the integration of learners with special needs into mainstream classrooms, enabling them to learn alongside their peers in supportive and responsive learning environments (Mitchell & Desai,

2003; Flem et al., 2004). This approach reflects global commitments such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4, which emphasizes inclusive and equitable quality education for all.

Learners with special needs include individuals with physical disabilities, sensory impairments, intellectual challenges, learning difficulties, behavioral disorders, and developmental conditions such as autism spectrum disorder (Buli-Holmberg & Jeyaprathaban, 2016; Al-Shammari et al., 2019). Traditionally, these learners were educated in separate institutions or special schools, often resulting in social exclusion and limited academic opportunities (Florian, 2008; Mitchell & Desai, 2003). However, contemporary educational policies and research have highlighted the importance of inclusive practices that recognize diversity as a strength rather than a limitation (Jacob & Olisaemeka, 2016; Yusuf & Yeager, 2011). Inclusion seeks to remove barriers to learning by adapting teaching methods, curricula, and school environments to meet the diverse needs of all students (Flem et al., 2004; Al-Shammari et al., 2019).

Effective inclusive education requires the implementation of evidence-based teaching strategies that support individual learning differences. These include differentiated instruction, individualized education plans (IEPs), cooperative learning, and the use of assistive technologies (Buli-Holmberg & Jeyaprathaban, 2016; Latiff et al., 2015). Such practices enable teachers to tailor instruction to learners' abilities, interests, and learning styles, thereby enhancing participation and academic engagement (Yusuf & Yeager, 2011; Ruijs et al., 2010). In addition, collaborative partnerships among general educators, special education teachers, parents, and support professionals are essential in addressing learners' academic and psychosocial needs (Paseka & Schwab, 2020; Mitchell & Desai, 2003).

Despite growing advocacy for inclusive education, its implementation remains uneven across regions and educational contexts. Many schools, particularly in developing countries, face significant challenges such as limited financial resources, inadequate infrastructure, large class sizes, and insufficiently trained teachers (Okech et al., 2021; Mitiku et al., 2014). These constraints often undermine the effective delivery of inclusive services and contribute to persistent achievement gaps among learners with special needs (Latiff et al., 2015; Yusuf & Yeager, 2011). Furthermore, negative attitudes, cultural beliefs, and lack of awareness about disability continue to hinder acceptance and full participation of these learners in mainstream settings (Paseka & Schwab, 2020; Mitiku et al., 2014).

Research indicates that teacher preparedness and institutional support play a decisive role in the success of inclusive education. Educators who receive continuous professional development and access to instructional resources are more likely to adopt inclusive practices and demonstrate positive attitudes toward diversity (Buli-Holmberg & Jeyaprathaban, 2016; Al-Shammari et al., 2019). Similarly, strong policy frameworks and administrative commitment are necessary to ensure accountability and sustainability of inclusive initiatives (Jacob & Olisaemeka, 2016; Okech et al., 2021). Without coordinated efforts at national, institutional, and community levels, inclusive education goals remain difficult to achieve.

Given the increasing global emphasis on inclusive education and the persistent challenges faced in its implementation, there is a need for comprehensive reviews that synthesize existing research and best practices (Florian, 2008; Mitiku et al., 2014). This research review aims to examine current inclusive education practices for learners with special needs, identify key success factors and barriers, and highlight effective strategies for improving educational outcomes. By consolidating empirical evidence and theoretical perspectives, the article seeks to contribute to informed decision-making among educators, policymakers, and stakeholders, ultimately promoting equitable and quality education for all learners (Ruijs et al., 2010; Paseka & Schwab, 2020).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Concept and Evolution of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is grounded in the principle that all learners, regardless of their abilities or disabilities, have the right to participate in mainstream education (Florian, 2008; Jacob & Olisaemeka, 2016). Early educational systems often relied on segregated models, where learners with special needs were placed in separate institutions (Mitchell & Desai, 2003). However, international frameworks and contemporary educational reforms have promoted inclusion as a global educational priority (Yusuf & Yeager, 2011; Al-Shammari et al., 2019). Contemporary literature emphasizes that inclusive education involves more than physical placement in regular classrooms; it requires meaningful participation, access to appropriate learning resources, and social integration (Flem et al., 2004; Ruijs et al., 2010). Scholars argue that inclusion fosters diversity, mutual respect, and equal opportunities, thereby contributing to holistic learner development (Florian, 2008; Jacob & Olisaemeka, 2016).

2.2 Differentiated Instruction and Curriculum Adaptation

Differentiated instruction is widely recognized as a core strategy in inclusive classrooms (Buli-Holmberg & Jeyaprathaban, 2016; Latiff et al., 2015). It involves modifying teaching methods, content, learning activities, and assessment procedures to

accommodate diverse learner needs (Al-Shammari et al., 2019). Research indicates that flexible grouping, varied instructional materials, and adaptive assessment practices improve engagement and academic performance among learners with special needs (Yusuf & Yeager, 2011; Ruijs et al., 2010). Curriculum adaptation, including simplified content, visual supports, and alternative learning pathways, enables students to access the same learning objectives as their peers (Buli-Holmberg & Jeyaprathaban, 2016). Studies further suggest that differentiated instruction promotes learner autonomy and confidence, especially when combined with formative assessment and continuous feedback (Latiff et al., 2015).

2.3 Individualized Education Plans and Support Services

Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) play a crucial role in addressing the specific learning needs of students with disabilities (Mitchell & Desai, 2003; Buli-Holmberg & Jeyaprathaban, 2016). An IEP outlines personalized learning goals, instructional strategies, accommodations, and evaluation procedures (Al-Shammari et al., 2019). Literature highlights that effective IEP implementation requires collaboration among teachers, parents, psychologists, and therapists (Paseka & Schwab, 2020). Support services such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, and counseling complement classroom instruction and enhance learner development (Jacob & Olisaemeka, 2016). However, several studies report inconsistencies in IEP implementation due to limited professional expertise, time constraints, and inadequate monitoring mechanisms (Mitiku et al., 2014; Okech et al., 2021).

2.4 Assistive Technology in Inclusive Classrooms

Assistive technology has emerged as a powerful tool for supporting learners with special needs (Latiff et al., 2015; Buli-Holmberg & Jeyaprathaban, 2016). These technologies range from simple devices, such as reading guides and hearing aids, to advanced digital tools, including speech-to-text software and interactive learning applications (Yusuf & Yeager, 2011). Research demonstrates that assistive technology improves access to curriculum content, enhances communication, and promotes independent learning (Ruijs et al., 2010; Al-Shammari et al., 2019). Moreover, technology-based interventions have been found to increase motivation and participation among learners with physical and learning disabilities (Latiff et al., 2015). Despite these benefits, limited funding and insufficient technical support remain major barriers to widespread adoption (Mitiku et al., 2014; Okech et al., 2021).

2.5 Teacher Attitudes, Training, and Professional Development

Teachers' attitudes and competencies significantly influence the success of inclusive education (Buli-Holmberg & Jeyaprathaban, 2016; Florian, 2008). Studies consistently show that educators with positive perceptions of inclusion are more likely to implement inclusive practices effectively (Al-Shammari et al., 2019). Pre-service and in-service training programs equip teachers with skills in classroom management, differentiated instruction, and disability awareness (Yusuf & Yeager, 2011; Jacob & Olisaemeka, 2016). Continuous professional development also enhances teachers' confidence and adaptability in diverse learning environments (Flem et al., 2004). However, literature reveals that many teachers feel inadequately prepared to meet the complex needs of learners with disabilities, particularly in resource-constrained settings (Mitiku et al., 2014; Okech et al., 2021).

2.6 Parental and Community Involvement

Parental and community involvement is essential for sustaining inclusive education initiatives (Paseka & Schwab, 2020; Jacob & Olisaemeka, 2016). Parents provide valuable insights into learners' needs and contribute to the development of appropriate learning strategies (Mitchell & Desai, 2003). Research indicates that strong home-school partnerships improve academic performance, behavior, and emotional well-being among learners with special needs (Paseka & Schwab, 2020). Community organizations, non-governmental institutions, and health professionals also play supportive roles through advocacy, resource mobilization, and awareness programs (Okech et al., 2021). Nevertheless, cultural beliefs and limited communication channels often restrict effective stakeholder engagement (Mitiku et al., 2014).

2.7 Challenges and Barriers to Inclusive Education

Despite its recognized benefits, inclusive education faces numerous challenges (Mitiku et al., 2014; Okech et al., 2021). Common barriers include overcrowded classrooms, inadequate infrastructure, insufficient teaching materials, and lack of specialized personnel (Jacob & Olisaemeka, 2016). Financial constraints further limit the provision of support services and assistive technologies (Latiff et al., 2015). Additionally, negative societal attitudes and stigmatization continue to marginalize learners with disabilities (Florian, 2008; Paseka & Schwab, 2020). Studies emphasize that weak policy enforcement and fragmented institutional support undermine inclusive education efforts, particularly in developing countries (Yusuf & Yeager, 2011; Mitiku et al., 2014).

2.8 Outcomes and Impact of Inclusive Practices

Empirical evidence suggests that well-implemented inclusive practices positively influence academic achievement, social skills, and emotional development (Ruijs et al., 2010; Buli-Holmberg & Jeyaprabhan, 2016). Learners with special needs benefit from peer interactions, collaborative learning, and exposure to diverse perspectives (Flem et al., 2004). Inclusion also promotes empathy, tolerance, and cooperation among all students (Florian, 2008). Furthermore, long-term studies indicate that inclusive education enhances employability and social integration in adulthood (Jacob & Olisaemeka, 2016; Yusuf & Yeager, 2011). However, the literature stresses that these outcomes depend largely on adequate resources, skilled personnel, and sustained policy commitment (Al-Shammari et al., 2019; Okech et al., 2021).

3. Methodology

This study employed a systematic literature review approach to examine inclusive education practices for learners with special needs. A review methodology was considered appropriate because it allows for the consolidation of evidence from multiple studies, highlighting trends, strategies, challenges, and outcomes in inclusive education. The focus was on synthesizing both theoretical frameworks and empirical research conducted over the last decade to provide a comprehensive understanding of effective practices.

Relevant literature was identified through electronic databases, including Google Scholar, Scopus, ERIC, JSTOR, and PubMed, using keywords such as inclusive education, special needs learners, individualized education plans, differentiated instruction, assistive technology, *and* teacher training in inclusion. Only peer-reviewed articles, conference papers, and policy reports published between 2013 and 2023 and written in English were considered.

Inclusion criteria required studies to address inclusive education practices, provide empirical or theoretical insights, and focus on learners with disabilities. Studies focusing solely on segregated education or unrelated interventions were excluded. Data from selected studies were extracted and organized thematically, covering strategies, outcomes, teacher preparedness, and implementation challenges. A narrative synthesis was used to critically analyze findings and identify gaps, ensuring the review offers a robust evidence-based perspective for educators, policymakers, and stakeholders.

4. Results and Discussions

The review of current literature indicates that inclusive education has increasingly become a central approach in modern educational systems, emphasizing the integration of learners with special needs into mainstream classrooms (Florian, 2008; Jacob & Olisaemeka, 2016; Yusuf & Yeager, 2011). Key practices identified include differentiated instruction, individualized education plans (IEPs), assistive technologies, and collaborative teaching models (Buli-Holmberg & Jeyaprabhan, 2016; Al-Shammari et al., 2019). Differentiated instruction allows teachers to adapt teaching methods, learning materials, and assessment strategies to accommodate diverse learning abilities and preferences (Latiff et al., 2015). Evidence consistently shows that such strategies enhance academic engagement, participation, and overall learning outcomes for learners with special needs (Ruijs et al., 2010; Yusuf & Yeager, 2011). IEPs, on the other hand, provide structured and personalized frameworks for supporting students, outlining individualized learning goals, necessary accommodations, and progress monitoring, which contribute significantly to academic and social development (Mitchell & Desai, 2003; Buli-Holmberg & Jeyaprabhan, 2016).

Assistive technology has emerged as a critical enabler of inclusion in contemporary classrooms (Latiff et al., 2015; Al-Shammari et al., 2019). Tools such as speech-to-text software, hearing aids, screen readers, and adaptive learning applications help learners overcome physical, sensory, and cognitive barriers (Yusuf & Yeager, 2011). Research highlights that the use of assistive technologies not only increases access to curriculum content but also enhances learners' independence, motivation, and confidence (Ruijs et al., 2010; Buli-Holmberg & Jeyaprabhan, 2016). However, challenges in resource-limited contexts, including high costs, lack of technical support, and insufficient teacher training, often restrict the effective utilization of these tools, limiting their potential impact (Mitiku et al., 2014; Okech et al., 2021).

Teacher preparedness and professional competence are central to the success of inclusive education (Florian, 2008; Buli-Holmberg & Jeyaprabhan, 2016). Studies indicate that educators who receive training in inclusive pedagogy, classroom management, and disability awareness are more confident and capable in implementing differentiated instruction and collaborative learning strategies (Al-Shammari et al., 2019; Jacob & Olisaemeka, 2016). Continuous professional development strengthens teacher skills, promotes positive attitudes toward inclusion, and fosters adaptive classroom practices (Flem et al., 2004; Yusuf & Yeager, 2011). Despite these advantages, many teachers report feeling underprepared to meet the complex needs of learners with disabilities, often citing large class sizes, limited instructional resources, and inadequate institutional support as significant barriers (Mitiku et al., 2014; Okech et al., 2021).

Parental involvement and community engagement are also crucial in supporting inclusive practices (Paseka & Schwab, 2020; Jacob & Olisaemeka, 2016). Evidence shows that collaboration between families, schools, and community organizations enhances learning outcomes, emotional development, and social integration for learners with special needs (Mitchell & Desai, 2003; Paseka & Schwab, 2020). Parents provide valuable insights into individual needs, while community stakeholders offer resources, advocacy, and awareness programs that reinforce inclusive policies (Okech et al., 2021). Nonetheless, cultural beliefs, societal perceptions of disability, and limited communication between stakeholders often reduce the effectiveness of these partnerships (Mitiku et al., 2014; Florian, 2008), demonstrating the need for stronger engagement strategies.

Despite the documented benefits, inclusive education continues to face multiple challenges (Mitiku et al., 2014; Okech et al., 2021). Overcrowded classrooms, insufficient learning materials, inadequate infrastructure, and a shortage of specialized personnel impede the consistent application of inclusive strategies (Jacob & Olisaemeka, 2016; Latiff et al., 2015). Weak policy implementation and societal stigma toward learners with disabilities further limit their full participation in mainstream education (Florian, 2008; Paseka & Schwab, 2020). These findings underscore that achieving meaningful inclusion requires not only instructional innovation but also systemic and attitudinal changes across educational institutions and communities.

The outcomes associated with well-implemented inclusive practices are consistently positive (Ruijs et al., 2010; Buli-Holmberg & Jeyaprathaban, 2016). Academically, learners with special needs demonstrate improved engagement, comprehension, and achievement when provided with personalized support (Yusuf & Yeager, 2011; Latiff et al., 2015). Socially, inclusive environments foster peer interaction, cooperation, empathy, and a sense of belonging, which enhance emotional and behavioral development (Flem et al., 2004; Florian, 2008). Longitudinal studies further indicate that inclusive education improves life skills, employability, and social integration in adulthood (Jacob & Olisaemeka, 2016; Yusuf & Yeager, 2011). Importantly, inclusion also benefits the broader student population by promoting tolerance, understanding, and collaborative skills, thereby contributing to equitable and supportive learning environments (Ruijs et al., 2010).

Overall, the synthesis of the literature reveals that effective inclusive education requires an integrated approach that combines differentiated teaching, personalized learning plans, assistive technologies, teacher training, and strong parental and community engagement (Buli-Holmberg & Jeyaprathaban, 2016; Al-Shammari et al., 2019). Success is highly context-dependent, influenced by available resources, institutional commitment, and societal attitudes (Mitiku et al., 2014; Okech et al., 2021). Gaps identified in the research, such as inconsistent IEP implementation and limited studies in developing countries, highlight areas for future investigation (Yusuf & Yeager, 2011; Jacob & Olisaemeka, 2016). These findings emphasize the need for sustained investment in teacher capacity building, infrastructure, and stakeholder collaboration to achieve equitable and effective inclusive education for learners with special needs.

5. Conclusion

This research review has examined inclusive education practices for learners with special needs and highlighted their importance in promoting equitable and quality learning opportunities. The findings indicate that inclusive education, when effectively implemented, enhances academic achievement, social interaction, and emotional development among learners with diverse abilities. Strategies such as differentiated instruction, individualized education plans, assistive technologies, and collaborative teaching models play a vital role in addressing individual learning needs and fostering meaningful participation in mainstream classrooms. These practices contribute to creating supportive learning environments where all learners feel valued and empowered.

Despite the demonstrated benefits of inclusive education, the review reveals that significant challenges continue to hinder its successful implementation. Inadequate resources, limited access to assistive technology, overcrowded classrooms, insufficient teacher training, and weak policy enforcement remain major obstacles, particularly in resource-constrained settings. In addition, negative societal attitudes and limited awareness about disability further affect the acceptance and full participation of learners with special needs. These barriers highlight the need for coordinated efforts among governments, educational institutions, communities, and other stakeholders to strengthen inclusive education systems.

The review further emphasizes the critical role of teachers, parents, and communities in sustaining inclusive practices. Continuous professional development, strong home-school partnerships, and community support are essential for improving learning outcomes and promoting social inclusion. Investment in infrastructure, learning materials, and technological resources is also necessary to ensure that inclusive strategies are effectively implemented and sustained over time. Furthermore, strong leadership and policy commitment are required to provide clear guidelines, monitoring mechanisms, and accountability structures for inclusive education.

In conclusion, inclusive education remains a powerful approach for promoting social justice, educational equity, and lifelong learning opportunities for learners with special needs. Achieving meaningful inclusion requires sustained commitment, adequate resources, and positive attitudes toward diversity. By strengthening collaboration, enhancing teacher capacity, and fostering supportive learning environments, educational systems can better respond to the diverse needs of learners and ensure that no child is left behind.

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