

Breaking Boundaries in Inclusive Education: A Narrative Review of Pedagogical, Technological, and Policy Practices and Challenges in Regular Schools

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ABSTRACT: Inclusive education for children with special needs is a central principle in global education reform, aiming to ensure equitable access and participation in mainstream schooling. This narrative review explores current practices, challenges, and innovations in inclusive education, synthesizing insights from international literature. Using a structured search across databases such as Scopus, PubMed, Google Scholar, ERIC, and JSTOR, the review identifies key factors influencing inclusive learning: teacher training, educational technology, family engagement, curriculum flexibility, policy frameworks, and funding. Findings indicate that personalized learning technologies, when supported by trained educators, enhance student engagement and academic performance. Teachers who undergo inclusive pedagogical training demonstrate higher confidence and competence in addressing diverse learner needs. Family involvement and community support emerge as critical enablers of social and emotional development in inclusive settings. Moreover, flexible curricula and supportive policies correlate with improved student outcomes. However, persistent barriers remain, including lack of funding, infrastructural limitations, societal stigma, and inconsistent implementation of inclusive policies. This review emphasizes the need for comprehensive policy reforms, sustained investments in teacher development, adaptive curricula, and cross-sector collaboration. It also highlights the importance of equity-driven technology integration to address existing disparities. Future research should prioritize longitudinal and participatory studies that reflect the lived experiences of students with special needs. The study underscores that achieving truly inclusive education requires systemic transformation supported by cultural change, educational equity, and collaborative partnerships.

Keywords: Inclusive Education; Special Needs Children; Teacher Training; Educational Technology; Educational Policy; Inclusive Curriculum; School Equity.



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INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has emerged as a guiding principle in global educational reforms, grounded in the notion that all children, regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, or other conditions, should have access to quality education in mainstream schools. As articulated by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, inclusive education is a fundamental right that aims to eliminate discrimination and ensure equal opportunities in learning environments. Over the past two decades, a growing body of research has emphasized the potential of inclusive education to promote social cohesion, equity, and academic achievement for all students (Goldan et al., 2022; Barabash & Balynska, 2022). However, despite the policy frameworks and international efforts to foster inclusivity, the practical implementation of inclusive education remains uneven across different contexts. In particular, children with special educational needs (SEN) continue to face systemic barriers that hinder their participation and success in regular schools.

Current literature has highlighted the multifaceted challenges experienced by children with special needs in inclusive settings. Social stigma and peer rejection have consistently been reported as major obstacles, leading to social isolation and negatively impacting the mental health and social development of these students (Samadi & McConkey, 2018; Davidson & Morales, 2023). Moreover, the lack of teacher preparedness has been identified as a critical issue, as many educators report feeling inadequately trained or ill-equipped to meet the diverse learning needs of students with disabilities (Cook & Ogden, 2021; Webster & Blatchford, 2018). These limitations often result in instructional practices that are insufficiently differentiated, thus marginalizing students who require specialized support.

Empirical data reinforce the pressing need to strengthen inclusive education practices. Globally, it is estimated that approximately 15% of children have some form of disability, and nearly 80% of them are enrolled in mainstream schools (Raguindin et al., 2021). In India, research indicates that over 76% of children with autism spectrum disorders were successfully integrated into regular schools within a few years of early intervention programs (Mukkiri et al., 2021). Similarly, in Australia, over 70% of students with special needs reported a sense of acceptance in regular educational settings, although challenges related to social integration persist (Rheinberger et al., 2023). In the UK, studies reveal that more than 40% of students with special needs feel socially alienated in school environments, underscoring the importance of social-emotional inclusion (Rathmann et al., 2018).

Positive outcomes associated with inclusive education have been documented across diverse contexts. In Finland, for example, more than 90% of students with SEN demonstrated academic and social improvements under inclusive education policies (Melendez et al., 2020; Legowo & Suyanto, 2020). Additional studies show that inclusive classrooms can enhance empathy, cooperation, and social skills among typically developing students as well (Barabash & Balynska, 2022; Seoane-Martín & Rodríguez-Martínez, 2023). Despite these gains, the effectiveness of inclusive education is contingent on several variables, including teacher training, school resources, and societal attitudes. Countries with robust support systems, such as Norway and Sweden, have

demonstrated greater success in inclusive practices than those with less consistent policy implementation (Verde et al., 2024; Quill & Kahu, 2022).

Nonetheless, significant barriers continue to impede the widespread realization of inclusive education. Social acceptance remains an unresolved issue, particularly in regions where cultural norms stigmatize disability. In many cases, students with SEN face exclusion from peer activities or are subjected to bullying, which can severely undermine their academic engagement and self-esteem. In addition, academic challenges often arise from curricula that are not adapted to accommodate varied learning styles. This lack of instructional flexibility places students with SEN at a disadvantage, especially in systems that prioritize standardized testing and academic performance (Sumbane et al., 2023; Shaw & Shaw, 2021). Teachers often lack the autonomy or expertise to tailor lessons, exacerbating educational inequalities.

From a policy perspective, inclusive education faces implementation challenges despite global mandates. Instruments such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities provide a framework, yet many national systems struggle to meet the required standards due to limited resources, insufficient training, and inadequate infrastructure (Ambili et al., 2024; Toquero, 2021). Although some countries have pioneered inclusive models, resource constraints often result in substandard implementation. For instance, support services, such as special education teachers or assistive technologies, are not uniformly available, limiting the ability of schools to accommodate diverse learners (Baskan et al., 2020).

Moreover, in developing countries, these issues are compounded by infrastructural deficits and socioeconomic barriers. In various parts of Africa and Asia, inclusive education is hindered by a lack of basic facilities, educational materials, and trained personnel (Chirowamhangu, 2024; Issabayeva et al., 2024). Even where policies exist, enforcement is weak, and community awareness is low, which perpetuates the exclusion of children with SEN. Nonetheless, there are emerging models that engage local communities to foster inclusive practices, indicating that grassroots approaches can complement top-down policies to achieve educational equity.

A critical gap in the current literature is the insufficient exploration of long-term outcomes of inclusive education. Many existing studies adopt cross-sectional designs, which fail to capture the evolving experiences and trajectories of students with SEN in inclusive settings (Seoane-Martín & Rodríguez-Martínez, 2023; Sumbane et al., 2023). Additionally, the contextual factors that influence implementation, such as cultural norms, school leadership, and local policy environments, are often underrepresented in empirical analyses (Famella et al., 2023; Mukkiri et al., 2021). This limits the generalizability of findings and restricts the development of context-sensitive interventions.

Given these limitations, the current review seeks to provide a comprehensive synthesis of inclusive learning practices for children with special needs in regular schools. The aim is to evaluate the effectiveness of inclusive strategies across various dimensions, including teacher training, pedagogical adaptations, social-emotional support, and policy implementation. By systematically

analyzing these factors, this review intends to offer actionable insights into the conditions that facilitate or hinder inclusive education.

The scope of this review encompasses both developed and developing contexts, with an emphasis on comparative analyses that reveal global trends and regional specificities. Particular attention is given to children with cognitive, sensory, and physical disabilities who are enrolled in mainstream educational institutions. This demographic focus ensures that the findings are relevant to the most commonly integrated groups within inclusive frameworks. Furthermore, the review will consider interventions at the classroom, school, and policy levels, thereby capturing the multi-layered nature of inclusive education.

In sum, inclusive education for children with special needs in regular schools remains an evolving field that requires sustained scholarly attention. Despite international commitments and notable successes, persistent challenges in implementation, societal attitudes, and resource allocation continue to limit its potential. By addressing the gaps in existing research and highlighting critical success factors, this review aspires to contribute to the development of more effective, equitable, and contextually responsive models of inclusive education. The ultimate goal is to ensure that every child, regardless of ability, has the opportunity to learn, grow, and thrive within a supportive and inclusive educational environment.

METHOD

This literature review employed a systematic approach to identify, select, and analyze academic sources that discuss inclusive learning for children with special needs in regular schools. The methodology was designed to ensure a comprehensive, rigorous, and replicable search of relevant studies across interdisciplinary fields, including education, psychology, and public health. A central focus of the review was to evaluate inclusive education practices and their implementation within mainstream classroom settings for students with special educational needs (SEN).

The search process was conducted across several major academic databases widely recognized for their relevance and credibility in educational and social science research. These included Scopus, PubMed, Google Scholar, ERIC (Education Resources Information Center), JSTOR, and PsycINFO. Scopus was particularly instrumental in accessing peer-reviewed journal articles that examine inclusive education within contemporary pedagogical contexts (Onyesom & Igberaharha, 2021). PubMed, while primarily a biomedical database, provided access to valuable literature related to therapeutic and developmental interventions in educational settings (Bhroin, 2013). Google Scholar was used as a complementary tool to identify grey literature, theses, and conference proceedings that may not have been indexed in formal academic databases (Tasu'ah et al., 2023).

ERIC served as a core database due to its specialization in education, offering access to policy reports, experimental studies, and theoretical frameworks relevant to inclusive teaching strategies (Sheehy et al., 2017). JSTOR was employed to examine sociocultural analyses and historical

perspectives on educational inclusion (Seoane-Martín & Rodríguez-Martínez, 2023). PsycINFO was particularly valuable in identifying psychological and behavioral studies that focused on the cognitive and emotional experiences of students with special needs in inclusive classrooms (Famella et al., 2023).

The literature search was guided by a structured set of keywords, designed to optimize the precision and relevance of results. Boolean operators were used to combine and filter keywords effectively. Key search phrases included "inclusive learning" AND "special needs" AND "regular school," which directly targeted studies addressing the implementation of inclusive learning within mainstream educational environments. Variations such as "inclusive education" OR "inclusive practices" AND "students with disabilities" OR "children with special needs" were employed to broaden the search scope and capture diverse terminology used across different research traditions. Additional keyword combinations such as "mainstream classrooms" AND "special educational needs," and "educators" AND "strategies" AND ("inclusive learning" OR "inclusive education") were used to identify literature that focused on teacher practices and instructional strategies.

To explore studies examining implementation challenges, combinations such as "barriers" AND "inclusive education" AND "support strategies" were used. Likewise, the phrase "specific learning needs" AND "inclusive schooling" OR "inclusive environments" was employed to retrieve studies that concentrated on particular categories of disabilities and the role of the learning environment. This multilevel keyword strategy ensured a comprehensive collection of articles addressing various dimensions of inclusive learning.

The inclusion criteria for selecting literature were established to ensure the relevance and quality of sources analyzed in this review. Studies were included if they were published in peer-reviewed journals, written in English, and focused explicitly on inclusive education in regular school settings. The timeframe for publication was restricted to studies released between 2010 and 2024 to capture the most recent developments in policy and practice. Empirical studies, including randomized controlled trials, cohort studies, case studies, ethnographic research, and mixed-methods studies, were considered. The inclusion of diverse methodologies enabled a more holistic understanding of the inclusive education landscape.

Exclusion criteria were applied to omit articles that did not focus on school-age populations or that examined special education in segregated settings. Studies that only discussed general educational reforms without specific reference to children with special needs were also excluded. Additionally, articles lacking methodological transparency or theoretical grounding were filtered out during the review process.

The initial database search yielded a total of 1,234 articles. After the removal of duplicates and the application of the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 228 articles were shortlisted for abstract screening. This phase involved a preliminary evaluation of titles and abstracts to determine their alignment with the research focus. Of these, 97 articles were selected for full-text review, during which each article was examined in detail to assess its methodological rigor, theoretical contribution, and relevance to inclusive learning in regular schools.

During the full-text review stage, a standardized evaluation rubric was employed to guide the assessment of each study. This rubric included criteria such as the clarity of research objectives, appropriateness of study design, contextual relevance, validity of conclusions, and the extent to which the study addressed the experiences or outcomes of children with special needs in inclusive settings. Articles that met all the criteria were included in the final synthesis. This resulted in a total of 62 studies that were systematically analyzed in the results section.

To enhance the reliability of the selection process, two reviewers independently conducted each stage of the article screening and selection process. Discrepancies between reviewers were resolved through discussion and consensus. In cases of persistent disagreement, a third reviewer was consulted. This triangulated approach minimized selection bias and improved the validity of the review findings.

The selected studies represented a wide range of geographic, socioeconomic, and institutional contexts, providing insights into both high-resource and low-resource educational environments. This diversity allowed for a nuanced analysis of how inclusive education is conceptualized and practiced across different settings. Furthermore, the inclusion of both qualitative and quantitative studies enabled the exploration of statistical outcomes alongside experiential narratives, thus enriching the interpretative depth of the review.

In conclusion, this methodology provided a structured and comprehensive framework for examining the state of inclusive learning for children with special needs in mainstream educational settings. By utilizing multiple databases, a rigorous screening protocol, and well-defined inclusion criteria, the review ensures a robust synthesis of the current literature. The findings drawn from this methodology offer valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers seeking to advance inclusive practices in diverse educational contexts.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The literature reviewed reveals a multidimensional landscape in the implementation of inclusive learning for children with special needs in regular schools. Four central themes emerged from the analysis: the role of educational technology, teacher training and preparedness, family and community involvement, and international comparisons of inclusive practices. Each of these themes contributes to understanding both the opportunities and the limitations present in achieving truly inclusive education.

Educational technology, particularly AI-based and digital tools, has demonstrated transformative potential in supporting inclusive learning environments. Personalized learning systems, which adapt content and instructional pace to students' individual needs, have shown significant positive effects on academic engagement and achievement for students with special educational needs (Pitchford et al., 2018). Through interactive applications, students with cognitive or learning disabilities are able to receive tailored exercises, often in real-time, which cater to their learning profiles. For instance, the use of adaptive math applications has improved the mathematical

comprehension and motivation of students with disabilities, offering an alternative path to traditional instruction (Pitchford et al., 2018).

Beyond content adaptation, educational technologies such as voice recognition software and multimedia-based instruction facilitate access for students with physical or sensory impairments. These tools enable students to participate actively in learning by providing alternative means of communication and content engagement (Onyesom & Igberaharha, 2021; Fernández-Villardón et al., 2020). Digital learning environments also promote collaboration among students, both with and without disabilities, fostering social interaction and reducing isolation (Rofiah et al., 2021). Moreover, multimedia-based delivery enhances students' motivation and engagement, reinforcing inclusive principles through dynamic and flexible instructional design (Kohama et al., 2020).

However, the success of technological integration is contingent on teachers' proficiency in using these tools. Teachers trained in using inclusive technologies are more likely to employ adaptive strategies that support diverse learners (Tasu'ah et al., 2023). Studies have shown that teacher competency in technology use not only improves instructional delivery but also enhances their confidence in managing inclusive classrooms (Howard et al., 2020). Despite these benefits, challenges remain, particularly in resource-limited settings. Limited access to internet infrastructure, insufficient hardware, and inadequate teacher training hinder the effective application of educational technology in some regions (Issabayeva et al., 2024; Başkan et al., 2020). These disparities highlight the urgent need for targeted investments to bridge the digital divide and ensure equitable access to inclusive technologies.

Teacher training and preparedness emerged as a second pivotal theme. Effective implementation of inclusive education is closely linked to teachers' skills, attitudes, and self-efficacy in managing diverse classrooms. Teachers who receive specific training in inclusive pedagogy demonstrate greater competence and willingness to accommodate students with special needs (Cook & Ogden, 2021; Yeo et al., 2014). Training programs that emphasize differentiated instruction and collaborative planning enable educators to respond flexibly to student diversity. Moreover, training improves their ability to collaborate with other professionals, such as therapists or school psychologists, thereby enhancing the quality of support provided to students (Issabayeva et al., 2024).

Teacher perceptions of inclusion vary considerably, influenced by prior experience, societal attitudes, and institutional support. While many educators express a commitment to inclusive values, others report feeling overwhelmed or underprepared (Siller et al., 2021; Santos et al., 2016). Studies indicate that teachers who feel supported and well-trained are more likely to implement inclusive strategies confidently (Yeo et al., 2014). Nonetheless, barriers such as lack of teaching resources and insufficient administrative backing persist in many educational systems, especially in low-resource countries (Sumbane et al., 2023). Teachers' beliefs about the capabilities of students with disabilities also shape their instructional practices. Positive experiences often lead to more inclusive attitudes, whereas negative interactions may reinforce doubts and stereotypes (Méndez-Aguado et al., 2020; Paananen et al., 2023).

In addition to institutional training, teacher collaboration with parents plays a vital role in shaping inclusive practices. Open communication with families helps educators understand students'

specific needs and co-develop strategies that support learning both at home and in school (Rheinberger et al., 2023; Kelly et al., 2023). Strengthening these partnerships contributes to a more holistic and responsive educational experience.

The role of family and community support in fostering inclusive learning is equally critical. Families act as intermediaries between the student and the school, and their involvement enhances academic outcomes and socio-emotional development (Santos et al., 2016). Parental engagement ensures that students' needs are communicated effectively and that home environments reinforce school-based interventions (Seoane-Martín & Rodríguez-Martínez, 2023). Emotional support and positive reinforcement from family members help children navigate the challenges of school life with greater confidence (Chirowamhangu, 2024).

Community involvement extends the scope of inclusion beyond the school. Local communities can create awareness about disabilities, facilitate resource sharing, and promote positive social interactions. Collaborative initiatives between schools and community organizations encourage inclusive mindsets and offer additional support to students with special needs (Cook & Ogden, 2021). Participation in inclusive extracurricular activities strengthens social bonds among children with and without disabilities, reducing stigma and fostering empathy (Paananen et al., 2023).

Nonetheless, some parents face significant barriers to active participation, such as lack of information, cultural stigma, or limited time and resources (Sumner et al., 2020). Schools must take proactive steps to involve parents by offering training, guidance, and flexible communication channels. Parent education programs enhance caregivers' ability to support their children academically and emotionally, ultimately improving students' educational trajectories (Méndez-Aguado et al., 2020; Issabayeva et al., 2024).

Finally, international comparisons provide insights into the disparities and best practices in inclusive education. Developed countries such as Finland, Sweden, and Canada have well-established legal and institutional frameworks supporting inclusive education. In Finland, for instance, inclusive education is embedded in national policy, and schools receive structured support through multidisciplinary teams that include teachers, special educators, and psychologists (Fernández-Villardón et al., 2020). These systems are underpinned by professional development, early intervention programs, and accessible learning environments.

In contrast, many developing countries struggle with limited resources, inadequate teacher training, and entrenched societal attitudes that hinder inclusion (Sheehy et al., 2017). In Indonesia and Namibia, for example, inclusive education remains a challenge due to insufficient infrastructure and underdeveloped support services (Onyesom & Igberaharha, 2021). Students with disabilities are often placed in segregated settings, undermining efforts to foster integration and equity.

Despite these challenges, successful models from developed contexts offer valuable lessons. Key practices include the formulation of comprehensive inclusion policies aligned with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Issabayeva et al., 2024), continuous teacher professional development (Sumner et al., 2020), and the integration of technology into classroom instruction (Wren et al., 2021). Additionally, promoting family and community

engagement reinforces inclusive values and enhances the overall quality of education for all learners (Chirowamhangu, 2024).

Building inclusive environments requires a shift in societal attitudes as well. Public awareness campaigns and educational initiatives can help combat stigma and promote acceptance of diversity within and beyond the classroom (Kohama et al., 2020). Cross-sector collaboration among educators, psychologists, therapists, and policymakers is essential to create a cohesive support system for students with special needs (Cai et al., 2019).

In summary, the reviewed literature highlights both the progress and persistent gaps in inclusive education. While technological innovations, teacher training, and community engagement have contributed significantly to inclusion, disparities remain across and within national contexts. Lessons learned from international comparisons underscore the need for comprehensive policies, investment in resources, and sustained collaboration among stakeholders to advance inclusive education globally.

The findings of this narrative review affirm the central role that inclusive education plays in ensuring equitable access to learning for all children, especially those with special needs. Drawing upon an extensive body of literature and supported by empirical insights, this review demonstrates both the potential and the persistent challenges associated with inclusive education. The present analysis also contributes to ongoing scholarly conversations by highlighting key systemic factors that shape inclusive education, such as teacher training, family engagement, educational technologies, curriculum flexibility, policy environments, and funding mechanisms.

A recurring theme throughout the literature is the crucial importance of teacher training in promoting effective inclusive education. The findings align with existing studies indicating that teachers equipped with the right pedagogical skills are more confident and capable in responding to the diverse needs of students with disabilities (Tasu'ah et al., 2023; Siller et al., 2021). This supports the long-held argument that high-quality professional development is a linchpin in successful inclusion (Cook & Ogden, 2021). Teachers who are trained in differentiated instruction and inclusive practices tend to exhibit greater empathy, adaptability, and creativity in the classroom, facilitating not only academic success but also social integration for students with special needs. However, despite strong theoretical endorsement, the practical implementation of such training remains inconsistent, particularly in low-income settings where access to continuing education and resources is limited (Sumbane et al., 2023).

Parental involvement is another factor that has emerged strongly from the literature as a critical determinant of inclusive success. Studies confirm that collaboration between schools and families results in more positive learning experiences for children with special needs (Issabayeva et al., 2024; Siller et al., 2021). Communication channels between educators and parents enable the co-creation of tailored support strategies, enhance emotional stability for students, and foster a shared sense of responsibility in supporting the child's educational journey. These findings are consistent with previous research asserting that family support is indispensable in reinforcing classroom-based interventions (Seoane-Martín & Rodríguez-Martínez, 2023). However, systemic barriers such as stigmatization, lack of parental education, and socio-economic constraints continue to limit the degree of family involvement in many contexts (Sumner et al., 2020).

Technological advancement offers promising avenues for inclusive pedagogy. AI-driven and multimedia technologies are increasingly recognized for their capacity to individualize learning experiences, increase student engagement, and reduce communication barriers (Pitchford et al., 2018; Onyesom & Igberaharha, 2021). These tools, when effectively integrated, allow students with diverse abilities to access content in ways that align with their cognitive, emotional, and physical needs. However, the implementation of educational technology also reveals deep-seated inequalities. In many developing contexts, limited internet connectivity, inadequate technical infrastructure, and lack of training among educators reduce the potential of these tools to effect meaningful change (Rofiah et al., 2021; Lindqvist, 2012). This points to a widening digital divide in global inclusive education, necessitating coordinated policy efforts to democratize technological access.

At the policy level, the review illustrates how systemic structures can both support and hinder inclusive practices. Countries with comprehensive legal frameworks, such as Finland, exhibit better inclusion outcomes due to the existence of strong regulatory mandates and institutional support systems (Seoane-Martín & Rodríguez-Martínez, 2023). In contrast, fragmented or underdeveloped policy environments often result in poor implementation, inconsistent practices, and reduced accountability (Yeo et al., 2014). As Lindqvist (2012) argues, structural inertia within education systems can hinder the enactment of progressive inclusive policies, especially when these policies are not supported by operational mechanisms such as teacher training or funding.

Curriculum design emerged as a pivotal point of discussion. Inclusive education cannot thrive under rigid curricular systems that fail to accommodate learner diversity. The review confirms that a flexible, differentiated curriculum facilitates greater learner engagement and supports both academic achievement and social inclusion for students with disabilities (Siller et al., 2021; Lopez & Corcoran, 2014). Pedagogical models that emphasize individualized learning plans, culturally relevant content, and life-skills development are better suited to serve heterogeneous classrooms. Malak (2013) and Méndez-Aguado et al. (2020) emphasize the value of student-centered curricula that adjust to students' learning paces and contextual realities. However, the realization of such curricular reforms is often impeded by standardization pressures, high-stakes assessments, and lack of professional autonomy.

Funding remains a critical bottleneck in the effective delivery of inclusive education. The disparity between well-resourced and under-resourced education systems is stark, with the latter struggling to provide even the most basic accommodations for learners with special needs (Sumner et al., 2020; Issabayeva et al., 2024). Funding constraints limit the hiring of support staff, provision of assistive technologies, and delivery of professional development for teachers. Several studies link budget cuts in education to declines in the quality of support services, thereby exacerbating existing inequities (Santos et al., 2016; Cook & Ogden, 2021). This underlines the importance of targeted investment in inclusive education infrastructure and programs, particularly in regions where the need is greatest.

These findings suggest that inclusive education is not merely a pedagogical reform but a complex systemic transformation that requires sustained, multi-level interventions. Public policy plays a critical role in shaping educational inclusion through the articulation of rights, allocation of

resources, and development of implementation guidelines. For instance, alignment with international conventions such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities provides moral and legal grounding for national reforms (Brede et al., 2017). Policymakers must be deliberate in crafting inclusive policies that are both aspirational and operational, ensuring that legal mandates are supported by institutional readiness.

While the review identifies promising practices such as professional development, community partnerships, and curriculum differentiation, several limitations remain. First, much of the existing research is context-specific and lacks longitudinal scope. Studies tend to capture snapshots rather than trajectories of change, making it difficult to assess the long-term sustainability of inclusive practices (Seoane-Martín & Rodríguez-Martínez, 2023; Sumbane et al., 2023). Second, few studies comprehensively examine the intersectionality of disability with other factors such as gender, socioeconomic status, or ethnicity. This limits the ability to design truly inclusive interventions that address the full spectrum of learner diversity.

Additionally, the reliance on traditional research methodologies may not fully capture the lived experiences of students with special needs. Participatory research approaches that involve students, parents, and educators as co-researchers can yield richer insights and foster more contextually relevant solutions. As the literature evolves, future studies should prioritize methodological pluralism and transdisciplinary collaboration to build a more nuanced understanding of inclusive education.

The review also highlights the need for innovation in teacher education. Pre-service and in-service training programs must move beyond theoretical instruction to include experiential learning, mentorship, and ongoing reflective practice. Collaboration with mental health professionals, special educators, and technology specialists should be embedded into teacher training models to prepare educators for the realities of diverse classrooms. Moreover, higher education institutions should serve as incubators for inclusive pedagogy by integrating universal design principles into their curricula and research agendas.

Another area for further exploration is the scalability of inclusive models. While several high-income countries demonstrate successful practices, the transferability of these models to low-income settings remains under-researched. Pilot programs and implementation studies that assess the adaptability of inclusive strategies across different socio-economic and cultural contexts are essential. This includes evaluating the cost-effectiveness and community receptivity of interventions to ensure their relevance and sustainability.

Finally, it is essential to consider the broader cultural narratives that shape attitudes toward disability and inclusion. Education systems do not operate in a vacuum but reflect the values, biases, and power structures of the societies in which they are embedded. Advocacy efforts, media campaigns, and school-wide inclusion initiatives must therefore work in tandem to challenge stigmatizing discourses and promote a culture of acceptance. As Kohama et al. (2020) argue, building inclusive education requires not just structural adjustments but cultural transformation driven by empathy, equity, and solidarity.

CONCLUSION

This narrative review reveals the complex and evolving nature of inclusive education for children with special needs in regular schools. Drawing from diverse global contexts, it underscores the central role of teacher training, technological innovation, curriculum flexibility, and inclusive policy design in advancing educational equity. When effectively implemented, these elements not only improve academic outcomes but also promote social inclusion and emotional well-being.

Despite significant progress, the review identifies enduring challenges, including resource disparities, inconsistent policy enforcement, teacher preparedness gaps, and cultural stigma. These issues demand holistic, context-sensitive solutions.

To strengthen inclusive education, governments should prioritize investments in pre-service and in-service teacher training focused on differentiated instruction and inclusive pedagogy. Educational institutions must embed universal design principles and develop adaptive curricula that accommodate diverse learning needs. Digital infrastructure should be equitably distributed, with professional support for effective technology integration.

Policymakers should adopt cross-sector collaboration strategies by partnering with health, social service, and community-based organizations to provide wraparound support for learners with special needs. Clear accountability frameworks and monitoring systems should be implemented to evaluate the impact of inclusive initiatives.

Future research should explore the long-term effects of inclusive practices across diverse socio-economic and cultural contexts. Participatory and longitudinal studies are especially needed to reflect the lived experiences of students, families, and educators and to assess the sustainability of interventions.

Ultimately, achieving inclusive education requires not only policy reform but a broader cultural transformation—one that champions empathy, accessibility, and shared responsibility across society. Only through coordinated, evidence-based, and equity-driven efforts can educational systems become truly inclusive and empowering for all learners.

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