

Outcomes in inclusive education: collaborative strategies for a sustainable future review

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Abstract

This study explores the role of collaboration in fostering inclusive education, highlighting the engagement of teachers, parents, policymakers, and communities. Using a systematic literature review of research articles from 2021 to 2025, data were analyzed through thematic analysis to identify key collaboration outcomes. Findings reveal that co-teaching, inclusive communication, teacher training, and stakeholder partnerships significantly enhance academic and social outcomes for students with special needs. The study aims to examine the sociological implications of inclusive education through Symbolic Interactionism, Functionalist Theory, and Conflict Theory, explaining the impact of social structures on educational equity. Despite progress, challenges such as limited awareness, policy gaps, and resource constraints persist. This research contributes to Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4 & SDG 10) by promoting inclusive, quality education. Future studies should explore policy interventions and technology integration to strengthen inclusive practices.

Keywords: Inclusive education, stakeholder collaboration, special needs, sociology of education, SDG.

Introduction

To ensure inclusive education enables children with disabilities to join their peers, collaboration of key stakeholders is essential in special education. Inclusive education is available for all learners to provide them with an equal opportunity to receive quality education irrespective of their ability. The same is in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 4: Quality Education (Devi, 2023) and SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities (Das & Mondal, 2023). Effective collaboration is said to be the factor by which people can share their wisdom, resources, and responsibilities to enhance students' performance, teacher strength, and improved support systems (García-Martínez et al., 2021) (Hornyák, 2020). There are alliances from which it should form a learning environment that prizes justice, physical access, and full support to students with special needs receive the help they need to succeed in school and later (Habtamu Debasu & Asnakech Yitayew, 2024) (J. Annapiro, 2023).

The Key Stakeholders in Inclusive Education are parents, teachers, policymakers and many other NGOs, companies, universities, and community groups (Ramakanta Pradhan & Bikshyatsib Sardar, 2024) (van Rensburg & Adcock, 2020) (Magaba, 2022). Families contribute significantly by advocating for children's interests and providing support at home. Teachers, special educationalists, and school leaders, who may be never outside the rule of inclusive education, are in open contact with other experts in strengthening their inclusive teaching of learning (Dona Liza et al., 2024) (Septy Nurfadhillah et al., 2022) (ALI, 2023). They may provide funding, charity programs, new technologies that improve access, and businesses. Such local community group supports build the networks, create awareness campaigns, and works for creating an inclusive society for students with disabilities (Wickenden et al., 2022).

Indeed, with strong collaboration, all these stakeholders can come together to make the needed effective and just education system beneficial for all the students, which also falls under SDG 4, for a better system for all (Ma, 2022) (Vindigni, 2024).

Research Objectives

1. To identify the key stakeholders involved in school-stakeholder collaboration for inclusive education.
2. To analyze the outcomes of collaboration between schools and stakeholders in supporting students with SEN.
3. To highlight best practices that enhance effective collaboration in inclusive education.

Methodology

This study used a systematic literature review (SLR) to collect and analyze existing research on inclusive education and school leadership for special needs students. The review focused on articles published between 2021 and 2025 from trusted academic databases, including **Scopus**, **ScienceDirect**, and **Google Scholar**. To begin with, a list of top journals was selected, focusing only on those ranked in **Q1**, **Q2** and **Q3**. These journals were chosen because they are known for high-quality research and include studies from different countries, helping to provide a global view of how school leaders handle inclusive education. A set of specific keywords was used to find the right articles. Table 1 shows the search strings used in each database.

Table 1

The Search String in Scopus, ScienceDirect and Google scholar

Database	Search String
Scopus	(TITLE-ABS-KEY (inclusive AND education) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (school) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (school AND leader) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (special AND need))
ScienceDirect	"Inclusive education" AND "leadership" AND "special needs" AND "school leader" AND "principal" AND "school"
Google Scholar	"principal" AND "inclusive education" AND "school" AND "disabilities"

Table 2

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Article Selection

Criteria Type	Description
Inclusion Criteria	
	Published between December 2021 and January 2025
	Focused on school leadership or principals in relation to inclusive education
	Written in English
	Were either empirical research and case study
Exclusion Criteria	
	Were outdated
	Not related to the topic
	Not from the selected high-impact journals

After this, the titles and abstracts were collected and saved for deeper analysis. Before presenting the reviewed articles, it is essential to identify the journals that were analyzed during the systematic literature review. These journals represent credible academic sources across various countries and contexts. Each publication focuses on inclusive education, school leadership, or special education, aligning with the research objectives of this study. The list below summarizes all the journals reviewed, including their authors, publication year, and country of origin.

Table 3

Article Journal used in the Process of Review

No	Name of Journal	Aurthor	Year	Country
1.	Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation	M. P. Weiss and W. J. Rodgers	2025	USA
2.	Pakistan Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences	S. Ashraf, M. Jahan, and S. R. Basri	2025	Pakistan
3.	International journal of studies in inclusive education.	M. Morelle and G. M. Morelle	2025	South Africa
4.	Routledge eBooks	Kaushik, B.	2025	India
5.	British journal of educational psychology	L. M. Woolfson	2024	United Kindom
6.	GEO Academic Journal	L. C. Famisan	2024	USA
7.	American Journal of Education and	Makarios Kizito Chimowa, D.	2024	Malawi

continued

	Technology	Soko, S. Maganga, P. Muotcha, and G. Nkowani		
8.	The Australian Educational Researcher	J. Jeremy, Ilektra Spandagou, and J. Hinitt,	2024	Australia
9.	Advanced Qualitative Research	Gaviola, J. L., Lacuña, G., & Manigos, S.	2024	USA
10.	Proceeding of International Conference on Special Education in South East Asia Region	Syamsi, I., & Noormiyanto, F	2024	Indonesia
11.	International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science	Aleño, N. P., Mustapha, H. S., Omar, S. H., & Calil, S. S.	2024	Philippines
12.	Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation	P. A. Yates, R. V. Chopra, and M. Likins,	2024	USA
13.	JMPI: Jurnal Manajemen, Pendidikan dan Pemikiran Islam	J. Smith and L. Williams	2024	South Africa
14.	International journal of teacher education and professional development	M. Flood and A. Logan	2024	Ireland
15.	Pakistan Languages and Humanities Review	M. Fatima,	2023	Pakistan
16.	Journal of ICSAR	Jaya, Citra Ashri Maulidina, Irah Kasirah, Mohammad Arif Taboer, Bahrudin Bahrudin, and Muhammad Yusro	2023	Indonesia
17.	International Journal of Economic, Business, Accounting, Agriculture Management and Sharia Administration	A. Bhat	2023	India
18.	Acta Educationis Generalis	Tuğba Kamalı-Arslantaş and Gülistan Yalçın	2023	Turkey
19.	Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research	R. B. Fasting and N. Breilid,	2023	Norway
20.	African Journal of Disability	M. P. Opoku,	2022	Ghana
21.	Inclusive learning and educational equity	S. L. McDaniel, Z. Pietrantoni, and S. Chen	2022	USA
22.	Inclusive Practices	K. J. Bateman, I. S. Schwartz, and A. N. Gauvreau	2022	USA
23.	Intervention in School and Clinic	J. C. Chow	2021	USA
24.	International perspectives on inclusive education	J. S. Agbenyega and D. Tamakloe	2021	Australia
25.	International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research	R. Rasmitadila, M. A. Humaira, R. R. Aliyyah, and R. Rachmadtullah	2021	Indonesia

Thematic analysis is employed in this study to analyze the data collected from related published research works between 2021-2025. Further, the selected research articles are strictly limit concerning the trusted academic database such as Scopus and Google Scholar. Thus, only peer-reviewed and high-quality sources are included. Twenty-seven relevant articles were chosen according to their relevant connection with the research topic.

The data extraction process involved reviewing key findings from each article and organizing them in an Excel spreadsheet to highlight the main themes and key stakeholders identified in the literature. Each study was examined for its contribution to the research area, focusing on the outcomes and best practices discussed.

The thematic analysis was then conducted on the information collected as grouped under themes and subthemes across studies. This way, one can arrange the same pattern of finding across various sources into an identifiable form and produce valuable insights. The final themes were refined through multiple reviews to ensure they accurately reflect the key findings from the literature.

Findings and discussions

Types of Stakeholders in Special Education Collaboration for Inclusive Education

Different stakeholders promote inclusive education activities ensuring that students with special needs get proper support, accommodation, and opportunities for academic and social growth. Studies have identified multiple stakeholders in inclusive education by ranging from educators to policymakers. All stakeholders must work together to create a conducive learning environment.

1. Educators and School Staff

Teachers, both general and special education teachers, are key figures in inclusive education. Special education teachers offer individualized help and teaching strategies to enhance the success of students with disabilities, while general education teachers provide an atmosphere conducive to inclusiveness in the classroom environment. Co-teaching by general education and special education teachers in one classroom fosters the enhancement of teaching. Other important school staff who contribute to inclusive education include:

- i. **School administrators and principals** - They enforce inclusive policies and manage resources.
- ii. **Speech-language pathologists (SLPs) and occupational therapists** – They provide targeted support for students having functional limitations in the areas of communication or movement.
- iii. **Counselors** – They provide guidance on emotional and psychological well-being to students with special needs.
- iv. **Universities educator and faculties** – They create awareness among pre-service teachers about inclusive education.

2. Parents and Families

Parents are critical partners in supporting their child learning and are active participants in decision-making. Their collaboration with teachers and schools provides a meaningful bridge whereby students gain support both at home and in school. The parents of the children with disabilities usually closely work with the teachers and specialists in the preparation of the individual education plans. Allowing parents to take part in extracurricular activities and training organized by the school will enhance communication and understanding regarding their child's needs.

3. Students and Peers

That is, students with disabilities, inclusive education holds that the needs and voices of all people should be taken into consideration in educational decisions. Peer support for inclusion encourages friendship and socialization among peers with and without disabilities. This helps reduce stigma, create empathy, and make a supportive learning environment.

4. Policymakers and Government Agencies

They will be the government bodies and education heads who formulate and implement policies regarding the inclusion of people with disabilities into education systems. This includes finding the funding, parameters, and training of teachers. A good example of this is the Norwegian Educational Psychological Service (EPS). The EPS aids schools in their pursuit of inclusive learning environments.

5. Community and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

Community organizations and NGOs promote inclusive education by campaigning for the rights of persons with disabilities, running training programs, and providing extra support to schools. Schools in partnership with NGOs working on neurological and developmental disabilities can help better student wellness and access to resources.

6. Private Sector and Industry Partners

The corporate sector can support inclusive education through CSR activities, funding initiatives, and technological developments to assist students with disabilities. For instance, assistive technology companies create devices that enable students to learn better.

By working together, these stakeholders can create an inclusive education system that ensures all students, regardless of their abilities, have equal opportunities to succeed.

Key Outcomes of Collaboration

There are multiple outcomes after successfully working on collaborating among stakeholders to get a better quality of education and life among students and stakeholders. This finding has been extracted from previous articles that were published.

Table 5

Outcome of Collaboration Between Special Needs Schools and Stakeholders

1.	Improved Student Outcomes Collaboration significantly enhances academic performance, social skills, and transition opportunities for students with special needs.	
	Enhanced academic skills	(Jaya et al., 2023; Fatima, 2023; Chow, 2022; (Garg et al., 2024))
	Increased access to learning resources	(Yates et al., 2024; Bateman et al., 2022)
	Better social integration and communication skills	(Gaviola et al., 2024; (Garg et al., 2024))
	Higher transition rates to employment	(Kaushik, 2024; Bhat, 2023; McDaniel et al., 2022)
2.	Professional Development for Teachers Collaboration leads to better training opportunities, improved teaching strategies, and skill development for educators.	
	Teachers' knowledge on inclusive education improves through workshops and training	(Chimowa et al., 2023; Woolfson, 2024; Rasmitadila et al., 2021; Famisan, 2024)
	Collaboration enhances planning and collective decision-making	(Flood & Logan, 2023 ; (Jeremy et al., 2024))
	Interdisciplinary teamwork strengthens teacher readiness	(Kamali-Arslantaş & Yalçın, 2023; Secora & Shaham, 2023; Famisan, 2024; Agbenyega & Tamakloe, 2019)
3.	Policy Development and Institutional Support Collaboration influences education policies and institutional frameworks, creating a more structured approach to inclusive education.	
	Stronger policies on inclusive education	(Weiss & Rodgers, 2025; Morelle & Morelle, 2024)
	Increased institutional awareness and policy discussions	(Opoku, 2022; Aleño et al., 2024)
	Policy gaps remain a challenge due to unclear implementation strategies	(Fasting & Breilid, 2023)
4.	Community Awareness and Parental Involvement Stakeholder collaboration strengthens community support and parental engagement in inclusive education.	
	Parents acknowledge their role in inclusive education but lack active participation	(Chimowa et al., 2023)
	Collaboration fosters stronger community engagement and support	(Fatima, 2023; Bhat, 2023; Smith & Williams, 2024)
	Inclusive education policies are more effective when communities are involved	(Kaushik, 2024)
5.	Challenges in Collaboration Despite its benefits, collaboration remains erratic, conditional, and unstructured in many cases.	
	Limited collaboration with health and social welfare departments	(Ashraf et al., 2024; Rasmitadila et al., 2021)
	Unstructured teamwork and lack of coordination among stakeholders	(Chimowa et al., 2023 ; (Syamsi & Noormiyanto, 2024; Secora & Shaham, 2023; Famisan, 2024))
	The focus remains on placement rather than active collaboration	(Fasting & Breilid, 2023; McDaniel et al., 2022; Famisan, 2024)

Best Practices for Successful Collaboration in Inclusive Education

Good collaboration is what makes inclusive education happen so that children with diverse learning needs can find enough support in school and social life. When educators and parents, policymakers, and community members work together, it benefits the students, enables great growth for the teachers, and reinforces schools in championing their policies. This is the best possible outcome or benefit for students facing learning challenges even as inclusive education grows the best practices to go along with trending practices.

Strengthening Co-Teaching and Teamwork

Part of inclusive education is co-teaching; whereby special education teachers and general education teachers teach at the same time in a joint classroom. This helps in offering more personalized learning to students and become accustomed to a culture of team building among teachers. If the appropriate support and training are not provided, co-teaching has many challenges. This means that schools should have guidelines on how and where training is to be offered and other professionals like speech therapists, counselors, and learning support specialists incorporated into a strong support system for students.

Improving School Policies and Leadership Support

It needs such policies and leadership that there will be inclusive schooling. Such plans must be clearly available at schools for resourcing, training teachers, and good rules that apply for individual students' use. School leaders must guarantee education accessible to all students as well as that the national policies are in line with global goals such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4 - Quality Education, SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities) to create a long-term impact.

Encouraging Parent and Community Involvement

A big role in effective inclusive education is played by parents. So, students will have a consistent support base both at and outside school when their parents form partnership with teachers. Schools should include parents in decisions made for their children and engage them in programs on awareness for communities to understand inclusive education better. This would be much needed in areas where negative attitudes, as well as ignorance, are impediments to the implementation of inclusive policies.

Providing Better Teacher Training and Development

Well-trained teachers are key for inclusive education. Every school needs to invest in an ongoing program for teachers to learn teaching methods, assistive technology, and maintain diversified classrooms. In the spirit of collegiality, mentor programs should exist for teachers, especially general versus special education. Continuous training will help teachers prepare to meet the ever-changing needs of students.

Using Clear and Inclusive Communication

Effective communication can facilitatively enhance collaboration in promoting inclusion. Schools should apply teaching strategies intelligible to all students within the principles of the universal design for learning (UDL). Communication, in general, should be as open as possible amongst teachers, parents, and learners to create a more nurturing learning atmosphere. Schools should integrate various alternative communication systems, such as sign language or assistive speech devices, to cater to the needs of students with disabilities.

Building Partnerships with Organizations

Schools can also collaborate with businesses, non-governmental organizations, and other institutions interested in inclusive education. Through these partnerships, schools can access career programs and internships while also providing financial resources to students with special needs. In addition, they can facilitate improvements in the learning tools and infrastructure of schools, thus eliminating barriers to effective learning.

Using Technology to Support Learning

Apart from that, technology has an immense potential of bridging learning gaps or making education accessible to all students. Installation of assistive technologies, AI-powered learning tools, and the internet-mediated digital solutions should be at schools for use by students having disabilities. Moreover, such online learning platforms can manage access for students located in remote or underserved regions to have quality education.

Creating an Inclusive School Environment

The school staff, including all teachers, administrators, and support personnel, should be trained in inclusion. The school can also provide peer support programs in which students help and understand each other. A positive school culture nurtures empathy, discourages discrimination, and creates environments for every student to feel valuable.

Researching and Improving Inclusive Education Policies

To keep improving inclusive education, the schools and policymakers should engage researchers in studying what works and what does not. Regular evaluation of policies and practices also exposes new avenues for dealing with persistent challenges. Each inclusive education policy should be in line with the international goals of education, keeping inclusive education at the forefront of national and international agendas.

Sociological perspective

This research underscores the importance of social structures and interactions in shaping inclusive education. The study aligns with Symbolic Interactionism, which shows how teachers, parents, and peers influence the development of students with special needs through daily interactions (Bentley, 2008; Miranda & Fortunato Vendivel, 2021). Moreover, Functionalism Theory supports the idea that each stakeholder plays a vital role in maintaining the balance of the educational ecosystem, ensuring that inclusive education benefits both students with disabilities and the broader school community (J. Annapiro, 2023; Jardinez & Natividad, 2024; Sengerbekova et al., 2024). The literature aligns with Conflict Theory, which recognises systemic barriers to wider access to education into and beyond the school through unequal resource availability, teacher readiness, and gaps in policy that leave out barriers to complete inclusivity within education (Chen, 2024; Ferrare & Phillip, 2021; Sharma & Mullick, 2020). These inequalities will require collaboration across all sections of society to remedy them (Davis et al., 2021).

The findings from the study have revealed that to break down barriers of inclusive education there is need for co-teaching, inclusive communication, professional development, and strong school-community partnerships (Alnasser, 2020). Nonetheless, challenges remain, especially in the areas of limited awareness in communities, preparedness of teachers, and implementation of policies (Motlalepula Alphonci Khumalo & Paseka Andrew Mosia, 2023; Ramli et al., 2024; Shiwakoti, 2022). Future studies should focus on looking into the policy interventions, integration of technology, and culturally responsive pedagogies to enhance opportunity for inclusive education frameworks (Citra Eka Wulandari et al., 2024; Lubna Oad, 2023).

Eventually this study makes contributions towards the broader discussions going around inclusive education as a societal responsibility, which, in turn, creates a strong requirement for sustained partnership among all stakeholders (Subban et al., 2022; Subban et al., 2024). Education systems can therefore carry all learners along-whoever they are or even based on ability-through their system initiative in ensuring that everyone would have what to thrive on.

Conclusions and recommendations

The relevance of the collaboration among stakeholders in inclusive education has been examined, with teachers, parents, policymakers, professionals, and the community being highlighted as very significant contributors to fostering an inclusive learning environment. A systematic literature review and thematic analysis revealed some main outcomes of collaboration: increased academic and social outcomes for children; teacher professional development; and the strengthening of community support for inclusive education policies. These results confirm the objectives of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) in providing equitable access to education for all students, including those with special needs.

Conflict of interest

I declare no conflicts of interest. I have not received any financial or non-financial support or services from any third parties. There are no relationships or affiliations that could be perceived as influencing this manuscript. I affirm that the work was conducted independently and that all opinions expressed are my own.

Author contribution

1. Dr. Nazmin Abdullah: Sole author and Research Advisor
2. Siti Suriati Khairon: Technical author

Data availability statement

The data of this article have been used from previously published article from original author.

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