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Paving the Way Ahead: A Systematic Literature Analysis of Inclusive Teaching Practices in Inclusive Classrooms

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APRIRE LA STRADA: UN'ANALISI SISTEMATICA DELLA LETTERATURA SULLE PRATICHE DI INSEGNAMENTO NELLE CLASSI INCLUSIVE

Abstract

Classroom deliberations in an inclusive environment is challenging yet rewarding. Teaching students with varied needs under the same roof provides the teachers with the opportunity to bring out their best and to help students to attain an optimum level of learning. The purpose set for this paper is to conduct a rigorous review of inclusive teaching-learning practices across countries to understand and present the best ways of conducting an inclusive classroom. To explore the stated objective the researchers opted for an extensive desk review method to review the available related literature in a systematic manner. As a result of conducting a systematic review analysis, certain themes have emerged under which plausible inclusive practices have been presented as a finding of the research. The study presented five categories of best teaching practices that emerged from the review. This paper presented a concise and accumulated version of the best practices and methods adopted by the practitioners in inclusive education across the world. Amalgamated findings present that using ICT, individualised learning and various classroom management techniques, collaboration and curriculum adaptations provide the best ways to promote inclusion.

Keywords: Inclusion; Inclusive education; Systematic review; Teachers; Teaching-learning practices.

1. Introduction

Inclusion does not happen in vacuum and on papers; inclusive education as an idea, policy or concept grows in the efforts of teachers who implement this in classroom settings with diverse students. Inclusive education in the school or classroom context is perceived as a process of delivery, engagement, and participation of all the students to ensure their learning and development by facilitating the socio-ecological environment inside a classroom (Amor *et al.*, 2019). It aims at providing access to students, addressing their needs and leading them to achievement in establishing them in the larger context of society. Students in an inclusive classroom are widely varied in their individualities and needs; not only the students with special needs but also the students without special needs require a certain set of dedicated and continuous efforts from the teachers to ensure their development and improving performances. Thus, the position of teachers inside an inclusive classroom is very much vital when it comes to the implementation of inclusive education (Schwab *et al.*, 2022); for carrying out this task, the major efficiency required is to choose the appropriate inclusive practices related to teaching-learning (Smantser & Ignatovitch, 2015).

Inclusive education is widely promoted and an integral component of the education system. It has been emphasised by different national educational policies and international policy regulations on making the schools and education system more inclusive. Moreover, the research on the implementation of inclusive education (Tamayo *et al.*, 2017; Efendi, 2018; Zwane & Malale, 2018; Asamoah *et al.*, 2021) have shown that well-planned quality based inclusive education remains elusive to many. One of the major setbacks in the implementation of inclusive education is that the teachers are not thoroughly proficient in adopting suitable teaching-learning practices teaching methods that bring them a step back in building their efficacy for teaching students with special needs.

The major aim of inclusive education is to provide quality education to children with and without disabilities. Inclusive education is a huge challenge in transforming the policy perspectives into a classroom reality (Nilholm & Alm, 2010). It requires fundamental changes in classroom deliberations; it demands a systemic change in the classroom process, starting from curriculum planning to student achievement. It requires teachers to view classroom teaching in an inclusive set-up as a shared activity and modify their teaching practices accordingly (Florian, 2015). However, it has been very difficult for the teachers to incorporate these changes into their practices (Escobedo *et al.*, 2014); lack of proper training and orientation toward managing an inclusive classroom is one of the biggest reasons for it. Makoelle

(2020) indicated in his study that teachers are on outcry due to a lack of pedagogical knowledge of teaching in an inclusive classroom (Smantser & Ignatovitch, 2015). To cater to all these problems, teachers must build a safe and secure environment in which the students feel emotionally capable and can gather courage and confidence. For creating such an environment in an inclusive classroom, certain areas require special consideration, such as classroom design, classroom procedure, teaching-learning methods (Bucholz & Sheffler, 2009), inclusive pedagogy (Smantser & Ignatovitch, 2015), teacher's attitude (González Pérez, 2014) and so on so forth.

Inclusive teaching practices promote diversity in teaching-learning and provide teachers and students with a broad range of best teaching practices that address the needs and requirements of learning of a varied group of students. In this study, we understand inclusive teaching practices as the methods, strategies, and practices adopted by the practitioners, teachers, and educators to carry forward the teaching-learning process.

2. Placing the problem of research

Studies over the years in national and international ground have established the notion of developing a positive attitude towards inclusive education improves or facilitates inclusive teaching learning in the schools. Even if, the teachers had motivation and zeal to teach their lack of ability of managing and teaching diverse group of learners may end up with frustration (Schiemer, 2017, p. 121). However, the leading steps should be to make them skilled in creating an inclusive environment; most importantly it requires focusing more on inclusive teaching strategies and practice and inclusive pedagogy (Brennan *et al.*, 2021). Despite strengthening other components of inclusive education, inclusive teaching practices are the most important factor in executing the ideas and policy perspectives. Inclusion is not limited to the mere enrolment of the students. Rather, it must ensure on the skill improvement and development of the child at every level. Therefore it evinced suitable teaching-learning strategies and practices that promote inclusion in the classroom. Although there is enough literature to support inclusion, there is still a vacuum and guidance is required on how to run or enact the teaching strategies in an inclusive classroom (Florian & Spratt, 2013). It is also not deniable that there have been studies that have given light on the enactment of inclusive teaching strategies and inclusive teaching practices inside the classroom. Therefore, an attempt has been made to study, understand, synthesise and bring forth the findings of different

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researches conducted worldwide on inclusive teaching practices, strategies, and inclusive pedagogies and to understand and accumulate the best possible ways of teaching in an inclusive classroom.

2.1. *Objective*

An appropriate need-based teaching strategy or teaching practice in an inclusive classroom is pivotal. This paper aims to understand and investigate the different inclusive teaching practices adopted by the practitioners in an inclusive teaching-learning environment. The research was carried out on following the question: What teaching practices do teachers adopt while teaching in inclusive teaching-learning environments?

3. Methodology

3.1. *Study design*

In this, comprehensive desk reviews of related literature have been conducted following a search of the topic procedure. At first major concerns to be studied were listed, and the objective of the study was developed. Key search terms were selected, and a preliminary search was conducted. A systematic review protocol has been developed and followed for conducting the review analysis. For conducting the search, key terms like «inclusion», «inclusive teaching», «inclusive classroom practices», «classroom teaching», «inclusive schools», and «inclusive education» have been used. Initially, a search was conducted on Google Scholar, Eric, Proquest, Scopus database and Science Direct database, and the international journal of *Inclusive Education*, from where all the records have been extracted. Both quantitative and qualitative studies have been incorporated in this review.

3.2. *Criteria of selection*

For selecting the articles for the review following were the main criteria:
- The study mainly focuses on Inclusive education.
- It discusses primarily the inclusive teaching practices used by the practitioners.

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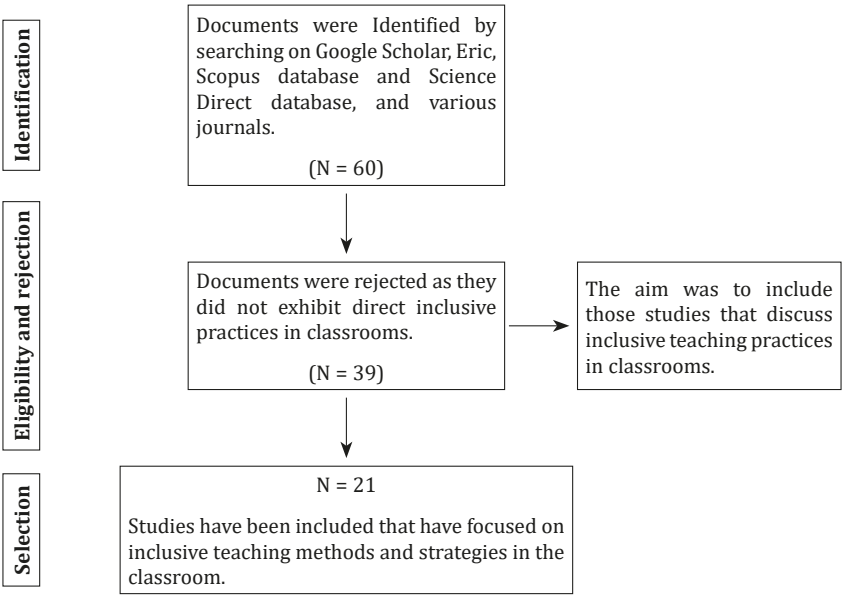
- The time frame was from 2000 to 2022.
- The articles were in English.

It is important to clarify the concept of inclusive teaching practices; in this study, only those articles were included that have used inclusive teaching practices and provided deep insights on different strategies and their usage. Total N = 56 records were identified after searching. After following the process of screening and scrutinising, N = 20 articles were selected for the final review. This paper aimed to find inclusive teaching practices used by the practitioners. These 20 studies meet the criteria and therefore have been selected for the study. There are several studies conducted in this area, but the researcher could locate only a few that serve the study's criteria; those are included in the study.



4. Results

What teaching practices do teachers adopt while teaching in inclusive teaching-learning environments?

From the review of the studies, it was evident that teaching students in an inclusive environment requires modifications at various levels. This

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modification is mainly required at the classroom teaching level (Bucholz & Sheffler, 2009). Teachers' flexible preparation of teaching methods for an inclusive classroom is a key factor that facilities learning and diversity (D'Intino & Wang, 2021). Based on the review of the selected papers, a concise tabular explanation has been given below (*Tab. 1*).

The common, inclusive practice is creating individualised and differentiated instructions for the students. The plurality of students' needs demands the creation of a plural classroom environment that seems inescapable. Individualised and differentiated teaching seems to provide an avenue to meet these demands (Lindner *et al.*, 2019).

Tabella 1. – Inclusive teaching practices.

Sl. No.	Inclusive teaching practices		
1	Classroom management	• Creating a comfortable classroom environment. • Use of semi-circles. • Value judgment and expressive intonations. • Setting ground rules for the class.	Flem *et al.*, 2004; Moen, 2008; Bucholz & Sheffler, 2009; Janney & Snell, 2009; Nilholm & Alm, 2010; Prediger & Buró, 2021.
2	Individualised and differentiated learning	• Complete undivided attention to students. • Individualised learning goals. • Use of universal design of learning while preparing the activities. • Value judgment and expressive intonation while dealing with children with special needs. • Find out the needs and potential pre-knowledge of the students. • Adopting action research and constructive pedagogy.	Howes *et al.*, 2004; Lawrence-Brown, 2004; Janney & Snell, 2006; Ford, 2013; Lindner *et al.*, 2019; Prediger & Buró, 2021.
3	ICT embedded teaching practices	• Using ICT-based learning materials for VI students. • Use of various online tools for engaging the students. • Use of tools like Lumi for online game-based learning. • Puppetry for developing skills in writing and storytelling. • Use of QWERTY keyboards installation of Internet.	Kilgore *et al.*, 2002; Starcic *et al.*, 2013; Deb *et al.*, 2018; Kaushik, 2020; Khanna & Kareem, 2021.

4	Modification and adaptations in the curriculum	• Curriculum planning strategies, cooperative learning strategies, classroom management. • Supplementary curriculum goals. • Alternative curriculum goals. • Determining and making adaptations. • Use of adapted, modified, and prioritised curriculum.	Lawrence-Brown, 2004; Janney & Snell, 2006; Kurawa, 2010; Prediger & Buró, 2021.
5	Collaboration (teacher-teacher, student-teacher, parent-teacher)	• Addressing linguistic diversity and utilising it to teach other lessons. • Co-teaching with its different forms. • Participatory action research. • Teacher collaboration. • Student participation.	Nilholm & Alm, 2010; Lakkala & Määttä, 2011; Escobedo *et al.*, 2014; Buli-Holmberg & Jeyaprathaban, 2016; Shultz, 2017; Ayaya *et al.*, 2020.

5. Discussion

5.1. *Classroom management*

Bucholz and Sheffler (2009) stated that the classroom environment greatly impacts the child's learning. They further advocate that the physical environment is of utmost importance in getting the children engaged in the classroom. In inclusive teaching practices, good classroom management and arrangement is strength. Bucholz (2009) has affirmed that creating a neat and clean classroom environment facilitates a way that the instructional requirements are met easily (Finkelstein *et al.*, 2021). Apart from arranging the physical necessities, certain non-verbal or communication classroom practices also encourages inclusive teaching-learning; Gartrell (2006) stated that conducting meetings also promotes communication among the students where they deal with and discuss inclusive teaching learning-related issues. Setting certain ground rules for classrooms also adheres to supporting inclusion (Nilholm & Alm, 2010). Teachers' use of positive and negative reinforcement increases classroom involvement (Flem *et al.*, 2004). Classroom management for inclusive education tends to increase productivity and sustainability among learners. Buli-Holmberg and Jeyaprathaban (2016) stated in their research that a healthy classroom environment where students can be actively engaged is necessary.

5.2. *Individualised learning*

Traditionally the classrooms have been more or less passive. Transforming it into an inclusive classroom requires different teaching methods that are well planned and suit the skin of all children and fit the principles of inclusive education. The differentiated nature of the classroom is addressed by using differentiated and individualised learning materials. In their study, Brown (2004) stated that the practitioner sets two different types of goals for teaching two different groups. Individualised and differentiated learning requires a different degree and level of expectation set by teachers from one single classroom (Brown, 2004). Differentiated instruction also urges a proactive, learner-centred approach in the inclusive classroom. D'Intino and Wang (2021) stated that pre-service teachers must be aware of how differentiated learning is incorporated into the classrooms. Prediger and Buró (2021) stated that the learners could be shared how to break the task and perform it well. Providing additional one-to-one support on learning concepts and building an individualised and differentiated learning environment (Prediger & Buró, 2021). Adopting action research and constructive pedagogical approaches also supports the teacher to become critical in their thoughts and planning and consistently helps them improve inclusive teaching practices (Howes *et al.*, 2004; Makoelle, 2020). In the process of using individualised learning in the inclusive classroom, the evaluation process also needs to be altered, the use of oral tests, reduced study notes, and guides for examinations can be adopted as an individualised evaluation practice (Janney & Snell, 2006). Inclusive classrooms assume two factors, i.e. standardisation and differentiation; standards of learning should not be compromised, and differentiation also needs to be maintained in inclusive teaching practices (Molbaek, 2018).

5.3. *Use of ICT in IE*

Besides, technology and ICT have been un-debatable support for implementing inclusive teaching strategies. Various skills like enhancing language and proficiency and improving the attention and working memory of the students in inclusive classroom ICT provide a great deal of assistance (Prediger & Buró, 2021). Khanna and Kareem (2021) have stated in their paper that the amalgamation of ICT, such as using energisers, puppetry, and imaginary creations, can lift up the energy of online learning, and it can be brought to an inclusive classroom as well. Their study stated that «the application of marker-based technology is likely to assist users

intended to learn Hindi letters in a playful animated augmented environment. This system can also be extended to practically implement the AR in real-time classroom interaction for the specially-abled students». Materials like the Tangible User Interface (TUI) enable learners to learn geometry and other subjects in an online mode as well. Also, classroom learning promotes collaborative learning (Starcic *et al.*, 2013) among peer groups. ICT-enabled learning provides learners with an experience of the real physical world, which helps develop their cognition and articulation of a particular concept. More innovations in this area are required for widely incorporating ICT in teaching-learning to emerge more user-accessible materials for teaching diverse learners.

5.4. *Modifying the curriculum*

One of the inevitable aspects of inclusive teaching practices is modifications of the curriculum and the lessons planned for the class. A diverse classroom setting, like an inclusive one, tends to demand variances in the objectives for the classrooms. Lawrence-Brown (2004) advocates that a child who cannot read a specific lesson may not be his/her lacuna, but the curriculum must be redesigned for such children. While redesigning the curriculum, types of resources such as visual aids, manipulative, charts, and outlines can be introduced in the class to encourage their interest in learning (Lawrence-Brown, 2004).

5.5. *Collaboration*

Another imperative practice in the IE classroom is collaboration. Collaboration within the teacher community within the institute widens the room for discourses and exchange of thoughts among teachers on resolving difficulties that come across in inclusive classrooms and strengthening the system. This practice promotes a better teacher-learning environment (Buli-Holmberg & Jeyaprathaban, 2016). Collaboration is a creative partnership between teachers, teachers-students, and teachers-parents (Adams *et al.*, 2016). It opens up room for communication which facilitates the teacher to better understand their students' group and to adopt measures for teaching; as a result, modification occurs simultaneously in the teaching practices as a result of better collaboration. Paju *et al.* (2022) examined that inclusive teaching practices require the active engagement of the students and teachers, and collaboration as a practice tends to serve this goal.

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Further, Paju *et al.* (2022) suggest that collaboration needs to be lifted up from mere coordination and cooperation to more effective and reflective communication between the groups (Ainscow, 2016). Lakkala and Määttä (2011) stated very clearly in their study that various collaborative instructional strategies such as meditative instruction and scaffolding, along with grouping children and providing them assistance as per their needs, yield very positive results in their learning. Also, when students share common goals, cooperative learning is a vital tool to reach them. They commonly strive and work together to achieve them while constantly learning and evolving. Collaboration as an inclusive classroom practice promotes the culture of sharing the loads and providing assistance to each other, the teachers (Paju *et al.*, 2022). Another benefit of collaboration is that it promotes participatory action research that empowers teachers to understand and solve the problems in an inclusive class (Ayaya *et al.*, 2020). In Shultz (2017) work on of the respondent have stated that co-teaching strengthen their capacity to teach students with special need in their classroom.

Although it is being widely discussed, discourses have resulted in many useful teaching strategies and practices for an inclusive classroom. However, there cannot be any specific method of inclusive teaching-learning as it unfolds a new context every time. Therefore the teaching strategies must be flexible and divergent to address the changing requirements and needs of the students (Makoelle, 2014).

6. Conclusion

This review has provided a précis outline of inclusive teaching-learning practices carried out across the world. This paper mainly focused on the classroom strategies and methods that the practitioners have adopted to create an inclusive environment and increase the quality of education. Even though there are certain questions and lies, such as suitability of the practices, background of the learners and learning environment, and socio-economic conditions, all of these factors require consideration while adopting inclusive teaching practices. Finally, further researchers can also categorise the best teaching practices on the stated parameters. The inclusive teaching-learning process demands high dedication and motivation among the teachers. It provides the teachers with an opportunity to excel in their best capacities.

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Riassunto

Le deliberazioni in classe in un ambiente inclusivo sono impegnative ma gratificanti. Insegnare a studenti con esigenze diverse sotto lo stesso tetto offre agli insegnanti l'opportunità di tirare fuori il meglio di sé e di aiutare gli studenti a raggiungere un livello ottimale di apprendimento. Lo scopo di questo studio è stato quello di condurre una rigorosa analisi delle pratiche di insegnamento-apprendimento inclusivo diffuse nei vari Paesi per comprendere e presentare i modi migliori utili a condurre una classe inclusiva. Per raggiungere tale obiettivo i ricercatori hanno scelto di seguire un metodo sistematico di revisione documentale della letteratura correlata disponibile. Come risultato della conduzione di tale analisi di rassegna sistematica, sono emersi alcuni temi ricorrenti nelle pratiche inclusive. Lo studio ha identificato cinque categorie di buone pratiche didattiche emerse dalla rassegna adottate dai professionisti dell'educazione inclusiva in tutto il mondo. I risultati dell'analisi condotta mostrano come l'uso delle TIC, l'apprendimento individualizzato, varie tecniche di gestione della classe, la collaborazione e gli adattamenti del curriculum rappresentino i modi migliori per promuovere l'inclusione.

Parole chiave: Educazione inclusiva; Inclusione; Insegnanti; Pratiche di insegnamento-apprendimento; Rassegna sistematica.

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