

Research Paper

Implementation of Inclusive Education at Key Stage 1: Current Practices and Coping Strategies

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Abstract: Many schools in Maldives are transitioning towards the adoption of inclusive education, now mandated by both constitutional provisions and policy directives. This study was conducted within the context of Key Stage 1 at a school in Male', Maldives with the purpose of exploring the implementation of inclusive education, as well as the challenges teachers face in implementing it and ways to overcome these challenges. Purposive sampling was utilised to select six teachers using specific inclusion criteria. Qualitative data was collected through interviews and observations. A semi-structured interview guide was utilised in the interviews. The data from the open-ended questions were analysed for categories, and the interview transcripts were thematically analysed. The findings indicate that current inclusive education strategies include incorporating children with complex learning profiles into mainstream classes alongside their classmates. The challenges teachers face in implementing inclusive education are mainly related to classroom and school factors, such as high student-teacher ratio, lack of resources, and insufficient training. Findings also reveal that teachers are not receiving feedback, and there is no adequate monitoring system in the school. Additional resources and training, as well as more teachers, were identified as some of the ways to improve the implementation of inclusive education in Key Stage 1 at the schools in the Maldives.

Keywords: Inclusive education, implementation, challenges, teachers, strategies.

Suggested citation: Naseer, M. S., & Abdul Muhusin, S. (2024). Implementation of inclusive education at Key Stage 1: Current practices and coping strategies. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Futures in Education and Society*, 3(3), 43–65. <https://doi.org/10.58946/apjfes-3.3.P3>

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Introduction

In educational settings, there is a noticeable increase in the population of students exhibiting complex learning profiles. A significant proportion of these students are enrolled in the school, often following a formal diagnosis or prompted by teacher observations of behavioural patterns. Subsequently, these students receive support from an inclusive support unit known as Dream. Various global policies advocate for inclusive education, exemplified by Article 24 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities regarding Education and the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 1994). The Maldives too has implemented policies promoting inclusive education. From the collective body of such initiatives, it is evident that the advocacy for inclusive education transcends mere adherence to human rights principles, serving as a conduit for enhancing and attaining comprehensive educational standards for all individuals.

In accordance with the Salamanca Declaration, inclusive education encompasses the imperative to strive towards establishing “schools for all” — educational institutions that foster inclusivity, celebrate diversity, facilitate learning, and address individual needs. Inclusive education is delineated as a systematic process aimed at mitigating barriers to learning for diverse learners, both in accessing education and within the learning environment (United Nations Children’s Fund [UNICEF], 1994). McCanky (1996, as cited in Dorji, 2018) characterised inclusive education as an educational framework that embraces all children and identifies impediments hindering their learning. This delineation underscores that inclusive education not only entails the provision of opportunities within the school community, but also involves the reduction of obstacles to ensure equitable access for all students. United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) (2017) underscores that the primary objective of inclusive education is to afford every child a fair opportunity to attend school, acquire knowledge, and cultivate the skills requisite for success.

The Maldives has witnessed a progression towards inclusivity over the years. The inception of Jamaluddin School, the first special education institution, in 1985 marked a significant milestone. Subsequently, an extension was established in Malé after 11 years. In 2003, the student body of Jamaluddin School was bifurcated into two entities: Imadhudhin School, catering to students with hearing impairments, as well as Jamaluddin School and Giyasudhin School, addressing the needs of students with other disabilities such as autism syndrome disorder (ASD). The year 2007 marked the commencement of the inclusion process across the islands, with Thindhoo Aboobakurur School, Sharafudhin School, Komandoo, and Kulhudhufushi being the pioneering islands.

In 2010, the Maldives ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and concurrently enacted the Disability Act, signalling a commitment to an inclusive educational framework. Moreover, in 2012, the Human

Rights Commission conducted the first national inquiry into students with complex learning profiles, followed by the enactment of an Inclusive Education Policy in 2013, which advocated for the establishment of a special education unit in each atoll. The adoption of a new curriculum in 2015 marked a pivotal moment in the educational landscape, with the creation of a single special education teaching position for the entire school in 2016. Subsequently, in 2017, all schools were mandated to adopt inclusive practices. Trained ambassadors were appointed from each school, and a seminar was convened. The culmination of these efforts led to the development of the Inclusive Education Policy in 2020.

Despite the strides made in inclusive education at the school, there exists a paucity of research examining the implementation challenges encountered. While broader studies have explored inclusive education in Maldivian schools, a focused examination of the challenges specific to the school remains absent. Thus, this research endeavours to investigate the implementation of inclusive education at the school, delineating current practices, challenges, and strategies for overcoming impediments encountered at Key Stage 1.

Due to the imperative nature of inclusive education, many schools are transitioning towards its adoption, now mandated by both constitutional provisions and policy directives. The Disability Act of 2010 asserts that individuals with disabilities should not face exclusion from educational opportunities due to their disabilities (2010). Emphasising this stance, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities underlines that inclusive education encompasses not only physical accessibility, but also accessible information, communication, support services, and reasonable accommodations within educational settings (Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities). Article 8 of the Maldives' National Education Act further stipulates that schools must possess adequate resources, services, and qualified educators capable of addressing and understanding the diverse needs and preferences of students, while ensuring physical accessibility for all.

Schools in Maldives strive to embody the principles of inclusive education. Within such a framework, numerous considerations emerge. Research conducted by Nishan (2018) on schools in the Maldives highlights challenges faced by educators in implementing inclusive education, including resource limitations, large class sizes, insufficient teacher training, and a dearth of knowledge in this domain. As noted by Zuha (Personal communication, July 25, 2021), distinct challenges arise in accommodating students with complex learning profiles within the school environment. Given these circumstances, this study aims to examine the implementation of inclusive education at Key Stage 1. It seeks to elucidate prevailing practices, identify challenges encountered in implementation, and propose strategies to overcome these obstacles, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of inclusive education initiatives within the school.

The research aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are the current practices in implementing inclusive education at the school for Key Stage 1?
2. What challenges do teachers face in implementing inclusive education at the school for Key Stage 1?
3. What are the ways to overcome the challenges in implementing inclusive education at the school for Key Stage 1?

This research holds significant value for school management as it serves as a tool to pinpoint and address the challenges faced by teachers in implementing inclusive education. Through the insights gained, the study not only identifies these obstacles but also proposes effective strategies to overcome them (S. Shakir, personal communication, July 27, 2021). Its findings are pivotal as they offer invaluable guidance to all stakeholders involved in education, shedding light on the intricate challenges of inclusive education implementation.

Moreover, the study's revelations highlight critical issues that demand attention from policymakers, potentially influencing the revision of education policies. As noted by Reddy (n. d.), the new knowledge derived from this research holds the potential to enhance the educational practices of teachers and professors, thereby facilitating informed decision-making processes. Furthermore, this research extends its significance beyond its immediate scope, serving as a cornerstone for future investigations. By contributing to the existing knowledge base on inclusive education, it not only enriches the academic discourse but also paves the way for continuous improvement and innovation in educational practices.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the classical liberal theory of equal opportunities as articulated by Sherman and Wood (1982, as cited in Mumbi, 2011), and Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. The classical liberal theory of equal opportunities posits that every individual possesses an inherent capacity from birth. According to this theory, educational systems should be structured to mitigate challenges of any nature—such as those stemming from school-based, socio-economic, sociocultural, and geographical factors—that hinder learners with disabilities from capitalising on their innate talents, as disability does not equate to inability. The liberal approach to equal opportunity primarily stems from the political ideals of classical liberalism and liberal democracy, emphasising the individual's rights to universally applicable standards of justice and citizenship (Jewson & Mason, 1986). This theoretical framework is particularly pertinent to this study as it examines the barriers impeding the implementation of inclusive education.

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory posits that children who exhibit apparent skill deficiencies often demonstrate greater competence when assisted by individuals possessing requisite knowledge. Kurt (2020) elucidated this concept, highlighting the notion of "scaffolding", wherein a more knowledgeable individual provides support to foster a child's cognitive development. According to Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, students lacking specific skills experience growth when aided by a more proficient individual. Vygotsky introduced the concept of the zone of proximal development, distinguishing between tasks a child can accomplish independently and those achievable with the guidance of a knowledgeable adult (Kurt, 2020).

Learning occurs when children engage in tasks suited to their current abilities while being supported by a more knowledgeable person. Students acquire knowledge through various avenues, including collaborative problem-solving activities with peers or mentors, reflecting real-world responsibilities. The sociocultural theory explores not only how adults and peers influence individual learning but also how cultural beliefs and attitudes shape the learning process. In the context of inclusive education implementation, students with diverse learning profiles are integrated into mainstream classrooms, where they receive support from both teachers and peers possessing greater knowledge, facilitating their skill enhancement and cognitive development.

Inclusive Education and its Importance

Inclusive education, defined by McCanky (1996, as cited in Dorji, n.d.), encompasses an educational paradigm that advocates for the openness of the educational system to all children while identifying and addressing barriers that hinder learning. This conceptualisation goes beyond the mere provision of equal opportunities, extending to the proactive identification and mitigation of impediments to inclusive learning environments. Schuelka (2018) emphasised key implementation factors such as school and classroom-level strategies, including school reviews, plans, and comprehensive training to support all educators in fostering inclusive practices.

From an ideological perspective, inclusive education emphasises a future educational landscape where students with diverse learning profiles fully participate in their educational journeys (Booth et al., 2000; Winter, 2006, as cited in Brown, 2016). This forward-looking stance prompts a re-evaluation of current educational practices to align with inclusive ideals. Similarly, Fredrickson and Cline (2009, as cited in Brown, 2016) underscored the necessity for educational settings to adapt resources, pedagogical approaches, and curricular frameworks to cater to the diverse needs of all learners.

Central to inclusive education is the appreciation of diversity and the unique contributions each student brings to the learning environment. In a fully inclusive milieu, every student experiences a sense of belonging, with opportunities for active

participation and collaborative decision-making involving students, parents, and educators. Anderson (2018) highlighted that while inclusive education does not mandate a constant presence in mainstream classrooms, it necessitates thoughtful consideration of when students with complex learning profiles may require individualised sessions outside regular class times.

Inclusive education not only accommodates differences but also celebrates them. It fosters a culture of acceptance, respect, and accommodation for various student characteristics encompassing physical, cognitive, academic, social, and emotional dimensions. Occasionally, students may require specialised interventions such as one-on-one sessions or occupational therapy, without compromising the overarching inclusive ethos.

Transitioning to the importance of inclusive education, it serves as a catalyst for societal transformation by ensuring equitable access to high-quality education and challenging discriminatory attitudes (Open Society Foundations, 2019). Inclusive educational settings provide fertile ground for fostering social connections and interactions, laying the foundation for respectful, empathetic relationships among students of diverse backgrounds and abilities.

Moreover, inclusive education yields positive outcomes for both students with complex learning profiles and their peers without disabilities. Evidence from the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (EASNIE) (2018), as cited by Schuelka (2018), underscores the social and academic benefits of inclusive education, including increased enrolment in higher education and improved employment prospects for students with disabilities. Staub & Peck's (1994/1995, as cited in Gunarhadi et al., 2011) research elucidated the neutral to positive impact of inclusion on academic achievement, effective learning time, and social behaviour of students without disabilities, underscoring the broader benefits of inclusive education for all stakeholders.

In conclusion, inclusive education represents a transformative educational philosophy that not only accommodates but also celebrates diversity, fostering environments where all students can thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. Its importance extends beyond the classroom, shaping inclusive societies where respect, understanding, and collaboration serve as cornerstones of societal progress.

Challenges of Inclusive Education

The challenges of inclusive education are pervasive in both our society and within educational institutions. This topic stands out as one of the most pressing issues in contemporary education. According to McConkey and Bradley (2010, as cited in Naseer, 2012), the majority of challenges encountered in inclusive education stem from systemic issues within the educational framework rather than the inherent characteristics of students with complex learning profiles. Within a school

community, teachers, school management, and policymakers must recognise the challenges teachers encounter when implementing inclusive education. In this respect, Schuelka (2018) emphasised the significance of school-level and classroom-level strategies, such as school reviews and plans, comprehensive training for all teachers in inclusive practices, and fostering supportive school leadership to realise an inclusive vision.

Limited Resources and Facilities

Teaching students with complex learning profiles necessitates additional classroom time and learning materials. This can be achieved through resource augmentation or reorganisation of existing resources. Oliver (1996, as cited in Okongo et al., 2015) contended that the educational system has failed to provide adequate teaching and learning materials for learners with special needs, hindering the fulfilment of their rights and obligations. Teachers require sufficient teaching and learning resources to effectively implement inclusive education. Availability of resources and facilities is fundamental for academic achievement, whether for students with or without complex learning profiles. Mumbi (2008) identified a shortage of teaching and learning resources as a barrier to successful inclusive education implementation, echoing findings from similar studies (Okongo et al., 2015). Additionally, Shareefa (2016) recommended that schools should possess materials for conducting differentiated learning activities in classrooms.

Inadequate Teacher Training

Effective teaching of students with complex learning profiles hinges upon adequate teacher training. Teachers, students, and curricula constitute the foundational pillars of the educational system. Efficient education relies on the synergy of these three elements. Teacher training emerges as a major challenge in inclusive education, as highlighted by Scheulka (2018). Eunice et al. (2015) and Nishan (2018) also underscored the importance of training alongside resource availability and teacher-student ratios for successful inclusive education implementation. Inadequate training leads to challenges in addressing the diverse needs of students with complex learning profiles, as revealed by the research findings.

High Teacher-Student Ratios

Maintaining appropriate teacher-student ratios is critical for addressing individual student needs. As such, overcrowded classrooms hinder individualised attention and support, particularly for slow learners and students with special needs. Barrington (2023) emphasised the benefits of smaller classes, enabling teachers to provide more personalised support, thereby enhancing the development of students with

complex learning profiles. Mumbi (2008) also identified high teacher-student ratios as a barrier to successful inclusive education, leading to insufficient attention and support for students with special needs and exacerbating behavioural issues within the classroom.

Lack of Flexible Curricula

A curriculum tailored to meet the diverse needs of students with complex learning profiles is essential for inclusive education. The curriculum should be adaptable to accommodate diverse abilities and interests, as advocated in the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (1994). Mishra et al. (2019) stressed the importance of considering age appropriateness, cultural relevance, and individual learning needs when designing curricula. Similarly, Tomlinson and Imbeau (2023) argued for curriculum differentiation to accommodate variations in learners' abilities and circumstances. Additionally, DiYES International School (2023) highlighted the importance of including everyday survival skills in the curriculum, along with the flexibility to accommodate varying learning paces. Nel (2018) also identified understanding inclusivity and addressing curriculum inflexibility as key issues in inclusive education.

Strategies to Address Challenges

When educators encounter challenges in implementing inclusive education, various approaches can be employed to overcome these obstacles. According to Nishan (2008), schools should prioritise learner-centred teaching techniques and the development of learning materials tailored to meet the needs of all children, facilitating effective inclusion. These materials can be integrated into regular school settings. Furthermore, governmental support through financial resources is imperative, and teachers should actively participate in decision-making processes related to the implementation of inclusive education, thus contributing to the attainment of its objectives (Chaula, 2014).

A robust policy framework for inclusive education should be established across all domains to fully accommodate students with diverse learning profiles. In the absence of such policies, there exists inconsistency in the allocation of funds for inclusive education. Hence, governments should formulate a viable educational strategy catering to students both with and without complex learning profiles. Additionally, existing policies must be refined to address the needs of students with diverse learning profiles effectively (Mumbi, 2008). Further, Dorji (2018) suggested that collaboration among teachers, parents, and students on a regular basis is essential for policy execution, with curriculum revisions aimed at enhancing the adaptability and flexibility of the current inclusive education curricula. This will enable teachers to employ suitable teaching methodologies to meet the diverse needs of students without compromising educational outcomes.

A critical issue in inclusive education is the inadequate training of teachers. Eunice et al. (2015) advocated for mandatory in-service training for all teachers on special educational needs. For newly appointed teachers, specialised training units focusing on special educational needs, including sign language and Braille literacy, should be developed to equip them with the necessary skills for integrated classrooms. Enhancing teacher training is crucial, particularly through in-service programs for classroom teachers, alongside the establishment and upgrading of colleges dedicated to providing quality teacher education in the field of special educational needs (Mumbi, 2011). Nishan (2018) also suggested that incorporating opportunities for pre-service and in-service teachers to observe inclusive education classrooms as part of their training will offer practical experiences to enhance their teaching practices.

At the pre-primary and primary school levels, educators should possess awareness of various disabilities and inclusive education practices (Hegarty & Mithur, 2002). Mumbi (2008) further emphasised the importance of raising public awareness about the challenges faced by students with diverse learning profiles among all stakeholders, particularly teachers and parents, to effectively implement inclusive education.

Methodology

Research Design

The research design adopted to investigate the implementation of inclusive education in the school's Key Stage 1 was qualitative research. This approach was chosen due to its congruence with the study's objective of exploring participants' experiences and beliefs concerning inclusive education, including the identification of challenges and potential pedagogical solutions (Talukder et al., 2022). Qualitative research offers a comprehensive framework for examining complex issues through methods such as interviews, observations, and focus group discussions (Hennink et al., 2011; Rahman & Lee, 2022). By embracing this methodological paradigm, researchers can delve deeply into participants' perspectives, perceptions, and experiences, thereby yielding robust and nuanced insights into the studied phenomenon (Denzin, 1989 as cited in Rahman, 2020).

Participants

This study was conducted at a school situated in Male, the capital of Maldives. This school stands as a testament to the country's commitment to inclusive education. Established in 1944 as the nation's first girls' secondary school, it expanded its offerings to encompass primary education in 2011, becoming a co-educational institution. Currently, the school accommodates students from grades 1 to 10, with a total enrolment of 2,336 students in the academic year 2021–2022, including over 200 students with complex learning profiles. Notably, in Key Stage 1, comprising

grades 1 to 3, more than 780 students are enrolled, including over 70 students with complex learning profiles. The school has emerged as a trailblazer in inclusive education, catering to a diverse range of students with complex learning profiles, including those with autism spectrum disorders. The establishment of an inclusive support unit in 2014, staffed initially with one special educational needs teacher, has evolved to accommodate 20 such teachers, facilitating sessions for students with complex learning profiles. In a news article interview, a prominent staff member from the school's inclusive support unit emphasised the institution's commitment to enhancing inclusive education, fostering a positive learning environment for all students. The school's inclusive education policy categorises students with complex learning profiles into three programs: school readiness, special education, and mainstream education. These programs cater to the varying needs of students, with tailored interventions aimed at facilitating their academic and social development.

The school, historically catering primarily to students with autism spectrum disorder, global developmental delay, and learning disabilities, has observed an expansion in its student body to include individuals with physical, hearing, and visual impairments. Previously constrained by limited human resources to address complex learning profiles, the school now serves over 200 such students, with teachers striving to uphold inclusive educational practices. Despite concerted efforts, teachers at the school acknowledge the hurdles inherent in implementing inclusive education.

The study participants comprised six teachers from the school's Key Stage 1. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants based on specific criteria, including the presence of at least one student with a complex learning profile in the teacher's class and a teaching duration of at least half a semester. Purposive sampling enables researchers to deliberately select participants who possess characteristics relevant to the research inquiry, thereby ensuring the acquisition of data pertinent to the study's focal point (Alchemer, 2021; Benoot et al., 2016). This methodological approach aligns with the study's overarching objective of elucidating participants' perspectives and experiences regarding inclusive education.

Data Collection

Data collection for this study utilised two primary instruments: interviews and observations. Semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with each participant, employing a flexible question format to effectively explore the study's objectives. Semi-structured interviews are particularly well-suited for eliciting rich insights from key informants regarding their personal experiences, attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, n.d.). Prior to commencing interviews, requisite permissions were obtained from the school administration, and participants were duly informed and provided with flexible scheduling options to facilitate their participation. Informed consent was obtained from all

participants prior to conducting the interviews, which were subsequently recorded for transcription and analysis. Additionally, observation sessions were conducted with two teachers to corroborate claims made during interviews. These observations were complemented by an observation checklist to systematically capture additional insights into classroom practices (Chaula, 2014).

Validity and Reliability of Instruments

The study employed content validity to ensure the instrument accurately measured its intended constructs. Expert input was sought to refine interview questions, enhancing the instrument's alignment with research objectives. Additionally, member checking was conducted, involving participants reviewing interview transcripts to validate the accuracy of data collection and interpretation.

To establish reliability, data was meticulously recorded in a table format, facilitating comprehensive evaluation of the data collection process and ensuring consistency in results interpretation. Data triangulation, through both interviews and observations, further bolstered reliability by corroborating findings. Additionally, existing literature in the field was reviewed, providing a contextual framework to support the credibility and robustness of the research outcomes.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process began with thorough reading of transcripts to identify emerging themes, concepts, and participant-expressed issues. These were organised into a table, following Srivastava and Thomson's (2009) methodology, to potentially develop a conceptual framework. Significant statements were then indexed and coded within the transcripts, later organised into a thematic table. Subsequent analysis involved identifying participant experiences and viewpoints, leading to the refinement of broader categories and key dimensions within the data.

Research Findings

Participants' Profiles

Six teachers participated in the current research. Teacher A, in her 5th year of teaching, handles 33 students in Key Stage 1, including 4 with complex learning profiles. Teacher B, teaching since 2014, has 30 students, including 2 with complex profiles. Teacher C, also in her 5th year, manages 31 students, with 4 having complex profiles. Teacher D, in her 5th year, has 32 students, including 1 with a complex profile, with ongoing testing for another. Teacher E, a language teacher with 6 years of experience, consistently encounters students with complex profiles. Teacher F, in her fourth year, initially had 30 students, now 28, with 2 having complex profiles, encountering them yearly.

Current Inclusive Practices at Key Stage 1

In the context of current inclusive practices at Key Stage 1, the emerging themes and subthemes are depicted in Figure 1.

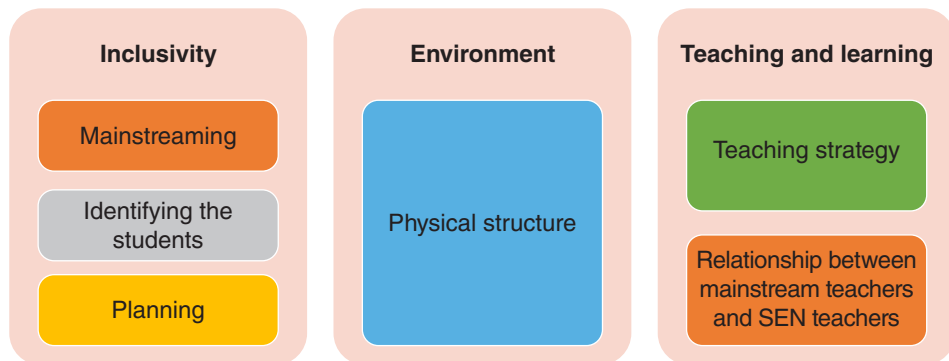


Figure 1. Emerging themes and subthemes in inclusive practices at Key Stage 1

Inclusivity

Within this context, three subthemes emerged, elucidating the processes of mainstreaming, identification, and planning for teaching students with complex learning profiles.

Mainstreaming. Mainstreaming emerged as a prominent theme emphasised by all participants. Observations revealed that students with complex learning profiles are integrated into mainstream classes alongside their peers.

One of the teachers highlighted:

Compared to other schools, in the school, students with complex learning profiles are being catered to in mainstream classes with other students, which is one of the noteworthy aspects.

(Teacher A)

Another teacher stated:

Students with complex learning profiles are taught alongside their peers in mainstream classes. This integration provides them with opportunities to socialize with others and subsequently enhances their behavior. Thus, this aspect of the school deserves recognition.

(Teacher D)

Identifying the students. Identifying students with complex learning profiles and providing them with the necessary help and support without neglecting

them is indicative of inclusive education. Two teachers outlined the procedure for identifying these students. The following are excerpts from their interviews:

If there are any suspected cases, class teachers will observe and fill out a form, which will then be shared with the specialized 'dream' teachers. (Teacher B)

If there are suspected students whose situations are unknown to teachers or lack documentation from parents regarding their inclusion status, teachers will fill out a form and observe the students. (Teacher F)

Planning. Prior to teaching students with complex learning profiles, effective planning is crucial to ensure their inclusion and improve teaching effectiveness. All the teachers emphasised the development of Individual Curriculum Plans (ICP) for students with complex learning profiles. One of the participants stated this:

ICPs are formulated. Previously, Individual Education Plans (IEP) were used, but now they have been replaced with ICPs, a practice also adopted at the school. In ICPs, goals are aligned with the national curriculum, facilitating easy monitoring of student progress. (Teacher A)

Another teacher also highlighted that individual curriculum planning (ICP) is aligned with the curriculum. Goals are derived from different key stages based on the student's level. It is not mandatory to select goals from the student's current key stage; goals can also be selected from other key stages if applicable.

We will assess the student's level and determine if goals can be derived from the current curriculum or grade level. If no suitable outcomes are found, goals from other key stages will be considered. For instance, if the student is in grade 1, we will explore outcomes from the foundation level. If no relevant outcomes are found, we will tailor outcomes to match the student's level and create a separate ICP. (Teacher D)

Environmental Considerations

Within this thematic framework, emphasis is placed on the physical infrastructure of both the school environment and individual classrooms.

Structural Features. It became apparent through the discourse of several educators that the school boasts elevators for accessibility purposes, alongside the provision of a Special Educational Needs (SEN) department known as the "Dream Class." This specialised unit serves as an inclusive support system, catering to students with complex learning profiles through pull-out sessions and offering pedagogical

assistance to teachers. In substantiation of this observation, educators articulated the following:

The presence of a SEN department within the school signifies a commendable level of institutional support. (Teacher E)

Our school's provision of elevators ensures facile access for students with ambulatory challenges and those reliant on wheelchairs, facilitating seamless navigation to their respective classrooms. (Teacher B)

Furthermore, one educator underscored the provision of televisions across all classrooms:

The ubiquitous availability of televisions across classroom settings underscores the school's commitment to facilitating diverse modes of instructional delivery. (Teacher D)

Teaching and Learning

Within this thematic framework, attention is directed towards the various teaching strategies employed by educators to accommodate students with complex learning profiles, alongside the collaborative relationship between mainstream and special education teachers.

Teaching Strategies. Educators employed a diverse array of teaching strategies in the classroom, encompassing differentiated instruction and effective classroom management techniques. Observational findings revealed the utilisation of strategies such as visual aids, PowerPoint presentations, and tiered questioning, fostering an inclusive learning environment conducive to equal student participation.

These approaches were elucidated by the educators:

We tailor assignments according to individual student levels, ensuring that tasks are aligned with their abilities rather than following a standardized curriculum. We emphasise oral instructions for students with reading disabilities and actively promote cooperative learning activities whenever feasible. Additionally, we adhere to a structured routine for students with complex learning profiles, which includes reiterated instructions and the provision of concise, intermittent activities to facilitate breaks during sessions. Furthermore, we consistently offer positive reinforcement, which has proven to be effective. (Teacher B)

We implement visual timetables, anger and behavior management charts, and employ social stories as instructional tools. These aids are instrumental in delivering curriculum-based lessons effectively. Furthermore, we employ timeout strategies for students experiencing seating issues and leverage various teaching aids. (Teacher A)

Another educator articulated their approach to differentiated instruction:

I adopt a differentiated instruction approach, wherein I provide a range of activities tailored to different proficiency levels, allowing students to select tasks aligned with learning outcomes and indicators. This fosters self-confidence among students with diverse learning needs and encourages active engagement. (Teacher C)

Additionally, pull-out sessions were conducted at the school, with seating arrangements personalised to ensure individualised attention from teachers, as underscored by the following educators:

We conduct pull-out sessions to provide additional support for students to prepare them for mainstream classes. Moreover, we adjust seating arrangements to ensure students receive adequate attention from teachers, strategically placing them in prominent positions within the classroom. (Teacher B)

Inclusive instructional strategies such as the buddy system have proven effective. Pairing high-achieving students with those with complex learning profiles fosters a supportive environment conducive to skill enhancement. This approach was observed during physical education classes, where students with complex learning profiles were paired with peers. (Teacher C)

Furthermore, the efficacy of the buddy system was corroborated by another educator:

I find the buddy system particularly effective, as I pair students who excel academically with those facing learning complexities. This fosters a sense of belonging and facilitates the development of social connections. (Teacher D)

Relationship between Mainstream Teachers and Special Educational Needs (SEN) Teachers. The relationship between mainstream teachers and Special Educational Needs (SEN) teachers is characterised by collaboration and mutual support, as observed through shared resources and assistance provided to one

another. In the context of inclusive education, a positive rapport between SEN and mainstream teachers is essential for effective implementation. Teachers reported effective communication channels regarding students’ progress and required assistance. Additionally, SEN teachers were noted for their helpfulness and guidance in catering to students’ needs, with support extending from both within the SEN department and from leading teachers. This collaboration underscores the supportive nature of the SEN department in facilitating inclusive practices within educational settings.

Challenges Faced by Teachers in Implementing Inclusive Education at Key Stage 1

The investigation focused on the challenges encountered by teachers in implementing inclusive education at the school, specifically within Key Stage 1. This inquiry represents a critical aspect of the study, aiming to comprehend the difficulties faced by educators during the data collection phase. Through interviews and observational methods, a comprehensive understanding of these challenges was attained. These challenges are categorised into two overarching themes: classroom factors and school factors, delineating the multifaceted nature of impediments encountered within the educational setting, as illustrated in Figure 2.

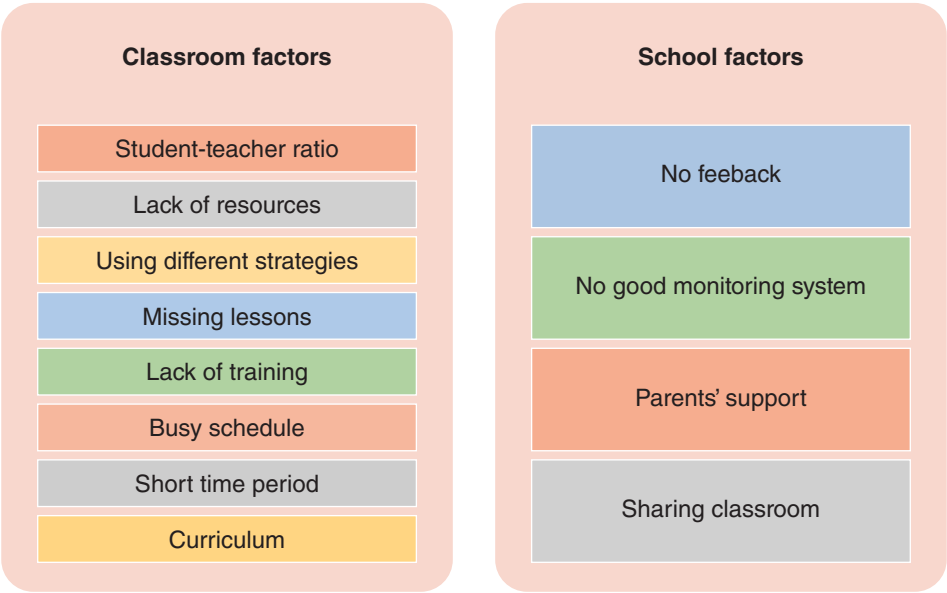


Figure 2. Challenges in implementing inclusive education at Key Stage 1

Classroom Factors

Student-Teacher Ratio. Teachers encounter challenges due to the high student-teacher ratio, particularly when catering to students with complex learning profiles alongside the rest of the class. Comments from teachers highlight difficulties in managing time effectively.

Resources. Insufficient teaching materials hinder effective lesson delivery, posing a significant challenge for inclusive education implementation. Teachers expressed concerns about the inability to cater to students' diverse interests due to resource limitations.

Different Teaching Strategies. Teachers employed various instructional strategies to accommodate students with complex learning profiles, acknowledging the need for personalised approaches. However, the diversity of student needs presents a challenge in selecting the most effective strategies.

Missing Lessons. Additional tasks assigned to students with complex learning profiles often result in missed subject periods, impacting their learning experience. Teachers noted the disruption caused by these extra tasks.

Training. Teachers expressed a lack of adequate training in inclusive education, highlighting the necessity for targeted professional development sessions to equip them with necessary skills.

Schedule. Teachers faced difficulties in adequately preparing for lessons due to their hectic schedules, including involvement in extracurricular activities, impacting their ability to support students with complex learning profiles effectively.

Time. Limited time within subject sessions presents challenges in catering to the diverse needs of students, particularly those with complex learning profiles. Teachers emphasised the struggle to provide individual assistance within constrained timeframes.

Curriculum. The rigidity of the curriculum poses challenges in adapting teaching methods to meet the diverse needs of students. Teachers highlighted the difficulties in aligning curriculum goals with the abilities of students with varying learning profiles.

School Factors

Feedback. Teachers expressed concerns over the absence of feedback on their teaching practices, which hampers their ability to gauge effectiveness and make necessary adjustments. Individualised feedback would be beneficial in ensuring that students are adequately catered to.

Monitoring System. A deficiency in the school's monitoring system contributes to challenges in assessing teacher performance and student learning outcomes. Teachers emphasised the need for more frequent and detailed monitoring to stay on track with instructional goals.

Parental Support. Limited parental involvement poses a barrier to implementing inclusive education, as collaboration between teachers and parents is essential for student success. While some parents are supportive, others may not actively engage, presenting challenges for teachers.

Sharing Classrooms. The sharing of classrooms between sessions presents logistical challenges, particularly in maintaining teaching materials and personal belongings. Damage or loss of shared resources negatively impacts both teachers and students, highlighting the need for better organisational strategies or dedicated classroom spaces.

Ways to Address Challenges in Implementing Inclusive Education at Key Stage 1

Educational Organisation and Management

Review Policy. Teachers advocated for policy review at the ministry level to address challenges related to student-teacher ratios and class periods. A re-evaluation of policies could provide better support for inclusive education.

Reduce Students in Class. Teachers emphasised the need to decrease class sizes to facilitate better attention to students with complex learning profiles. Reducing student numbers would enhance the effectiveness of classroom management and individualised instruction.

Create More Learning Resources. Teachers highlighted the importance of adequate resources, both material and human, for effective inclusive education. Collaboration among teachers to create teaching materials and utilisation of media in classrooms could improve student learning experiences.

Provide More Training. Teachers expressed a need for additional training to better cater to students with complex learning profiles. Professional development sessions should focus on strategies for addressing diverse student needs and improving teaching practices.

Organise Awareness Programs. Teachers suggested implementing awareness programs for both students and parents to foster acceptance and understanding of students with complex learning profiles. Increased awareness can promote inclusivity within the classroom environment.

Monitor Student Distribution. Teachers proposed a systematic approach to student distribution based on individual learning needs. Streamlining student placement can optimise classroom dynamics and facilitate effective teaching strategies.

Teacher's Contribution

Adopt Effective Teaching Strategies. Teachers emphasised the importance of employing diverse teaching strategies tailored to individual students' needs. Continuous research and adaptation of innovative teaching methods are encouraged.

Cultivate a Positive Attitude. Teachers stressed the significance of maintaining a positive attitude towards inclusive education. A positive mindset is essential for creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment.

Develop Good Teacher Relationships. Collaboration and cooperation between Special Education Needs (SEN) teachers and mainstream teachers are essential for accommodating students with complex learning profiles. Building strong relationships among teachers enhances the effectiveness of inclusive practices.

All in all, participants reported that by addressing these organisational, managerial, and individual factors, the school can better support teachers in overcoming challenges and effectively implementing inclusive education at Key Stage 1.

Discussion

The investigation into the implementation of inclusive education at the school, particularly focusing on Key Stage 1, sheds light on both the existing practices and the challenges encountered by educators. Current practices are delineated into three main categories: Inclusivity, Environment, as well as Teaching and Learning. Inclusivity entails the integration of students with complex learning profiles into mainstream classrooms, guided by individualised curriculum plans aligned with national standards (Krischner et al., 2015). Notably, the identification process occurs within the classroom, emphasising a proactive approach to support provision (Francisco et al., 2020). Furthermore, the physical environment of the school is conducive to inclusivity, boasting facilities such as inclusive support units and accessibility features (Ministry of Education Ethiopia, 2012). Teaching methods are diverse, catering to the varied needs and modalities of learners, with collaboration between mainstream and SEN teachers facilitating differentiated instruction (Chaula, 2014; Landever, 2010).

Despite the commendable efforts in implementing inclusive education, teachers encounter multifaceted challenges in their daily practices. These challenges are broadly categorised into classroom and school factors. In the classroom, issues such as large class sizes hinder individualised attention and support for students with complex learning profiles, while resource constraints limit instructional possibilities (Oni, 2013; Nishan, 2018). Additionally, the diverse needs of students necessitate varied teaching strategies, posing a significant challenge for educators in meeting the unique requirements of each learner (Kokani, 2021). School-related challenges encompass insufficient feedback mechanisms for teachers and ineffective monitoring systems, as well as a lack of parental involvement impacting student progress (Higgins, 2020; Ndungu et al., 2015; Gentry, 2011).

To address these challenges and enhance the effectiveness of inclusive education, concerted efforts are required at both the organisational and individual levels. Strategies

such as reducing class sizes, increasing resource allocations, and providing frequent training for teachers are paramount (Barrington, 2023; Chase, 2018; Maheshwari & Shapurkar, 2015). Moreover, awareness programs aimed at fostering acceptance and understanding of differences among students can contribute to a more inclusive environment (Abugaliyeva, 2018). Lastly, fostering positive attitudes among teachers and promoting collaboration can strengthen the implementation of inclusive education, ultimately benefiting all students (Krischler & Cate, 2019; Vogel, 2016).

Conclusion and Recommendations for Future Study

In conclusion, the study sheds light on the challenges and strategies associated with implementing inclusive education at Key Stage 1 in schools. Despite resource limitations and organisational shortcomings, the findings highlight valuable recommendations for improving inclusive practices, including enhanced resource provision, targeted professional development, and robust monitoring systems. While acknowledging limitations such as sample size constraints and data collection methods, the study underscores the importance of continued research to further explore inclusive education dynamics across various school settings and key stages. By addressing these challenges and embracing proactive strategies, schools with similar institutions can foster more inclusive learning environments, promoting the holistic development and academic success of all students.

Recommendations for future studies include focusing on longitudinal research to track the long-term effectiveness of inclusive education strategies, comparative studies across different key stages to modify interventions effectively and exploring the role of parental involvement in enhancing inclusive education. Additionally, examining teachers' attitudes and beliefs towards inclusion, improving resource allocation, evaluating professional development programs, and investigating technological integration can provide deeper insights and practical solutions. Research in diverse contexts is also crucial to adapt inclusive education practices. Addressing these areas will significantly enhance the understanding and implementation of inclusive education, ultimately improving educational outcomes for all students.

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