

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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Abstract

Inclusive education in early childhood aims to provide equitable learning opportunities for all children, including those with diverse abilities and backgrounds, within the same educational settings. This approach fosters social integration, respects individual differences, and promotes a culture of acceptance from an early age. Many early childhood education settings face shortages of materials and facilities necessary to support inclusive practices. Large class sizes further exacerbate the difficulty in addressing individual needs effectively. Educators often report a lack of specialized training and professional development in inclusive education strategies. This insufficiency can hinder their ability to implement effective inclusive practices and accommodate the diverse needs of all students. Limited awareness and support from parents regarding inclusive education can pose challenges. Engaging families and fostering a collaborative approach is essential for the success of inclusion initiatives. Inconsistencies in educational policies and a lack of clear guidelines for implementing inclusion can lead to varied practices and hinder the establishment of standardized inclusive environments. Investing in comprehensive training programs enhances teachers' competencies in inclusive education, equipping them with the skills to address diverse learning needs effectively. Building strong relationships among educators, parents, specialists, and the community fosters a supportive network that can address challenges and share resources, promoting a unified approach to inclusion. Establishing clear, consistent policies and frameworks at national and institutional levels provides a structured approach to implementing inclusive education, ensuring accountability and uniformity in practices. Implementing inclusive practices during early childhood can lead to better developmental outcomes, as early intervention has been shown to positively impact cognitive and social development, setting a strong foundation for lifelong learning. Addressing these challenges and leveraging the opportunities requires a concerted effort from policymakers, educators, parents, and

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the community to create an inclusive, supportive, and resource-rich early childhood education environment.

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1. Introduction

Inclusive education in early childhood aims to provide equitable learning opportunities for all children, regardless of their abilities, backgrounds, or learning needs. Fostering a supportive and diverse environment, inclusive education ensures that children with disabilities, language barriers, or socio-economic disadvantages can learn alongside their peers (Mezzanotte, 2022). This approach promotes social integration, encourages mutual respect, and helps children develop empathy and understanding from an early age. Inclusive classrooms use differentiated instruction, adaptive learning materials, and individualized support to cater to the unique needs of each child (Rajak, & Dey 2025). When properly implemented, inclusive education nurtures a sense of belonging, reduces stigma, and enhances the overall learning experience for all students (Bakken, 2024). Beyond benefiting individual learners, inclusive education in early childhood contributes to building a more equitable and inclusive society (Jardinez, & Natividad, 2024). When children grow up in diverse classrooms, they become more accepted of differences and are better prepared to interact with people from various backgrounds in the future (Vadivel, et al 2023). Educators play a crucial role in fostering inclusivity by implementing inclusive teaching strategies, addressing biases, and ensuring that all children receive the necessary support to succeed (Assefa, & Zenebe 2024). However, achieving true inclusivity requires collaboration among teachers, parents, policymakers, and communities to provide adequate resources, training, and infrastructure (Khoyaied, 2023). Prioritising inclusive education from the early years, societies can break down barriers to learning and create opportunities for all children to reach their full potential (Shaeffer, 2019).

Many early childhood education settings struggles with shortages of materials and facilities essential for implementing inclusive practices (Ackah-Jnr & Fluckiger 2023). Limited access to adaptive learning tools, assistive technologies, and diverse educational resources can hinder the ability of educators to effectively accommodate children with varying needs (Oyedokun, 2025). Classrooms often lack sufficient sensory materials, braille books, or communication aids, making it difficult to support children with disabilities (Kana, & Hagos, 2024). Inadequate infrastructure, such as inaccessible classrooms, restrooms, playgrounds, further limits participation for children with physical impairments (Kombe, & Mwakasangula, 2023). These shortages create barriers to inclusive education, preventing all learners from receiving the support they need to thrive.

Beyond physical resources, a lack of properly trained staff and professional development opportunities exacerbates the challenge of fostering inclusive environments (Debasu, & Yitayew 2024). Many educators do not have access to training on differentiated instruction, inclusive pedagogies, or strategies to address diverse learning needs (Onyishi,

& Sefotho, 2020). Without these critical skills, teachers may struggle to implement inclusive practices effectively, leading to unintentional exclusion of some children (DeMatthews, 2021). Limited funding and policy support often result in overcrowded classrooms and insufficient individualized attention (Vakili, et al 2024). Addressing these challenges requires increased investment in early childhood education, improved resource allocation, and stronger collaboration between policymakers, educators, and communities to ensure that all children, regardless of ability or background, have access to quality and inclusive learning experiences. The challenges of inclusive education and leveraging its opportunities require a collaborative approach among policymakers, educators, parents, and the broader community (Ruhela, 2024). Policymakers must prioritize inclusive education by developing policies that allocate sufficient funding, ensure accessible infrastructure, and mandate teacher training on inclusive pedagogies (Khoyaled, 2023). Schools and early childhood centers need resources such as assistive technologies, adaptive learning materials, and specialized support services to accommodate children with diverse needs (Abubakar, et al 2024). Establishing clear guidelines and frameworks for inclusive practices can help ensure that every child receives equitable learning opportunities within the same educational settings (Cerna, et al 2021).

Educators play a crucial role in implementing inclusive education by fostering a welcoming and supportive learning environment (Irshad, Amir, & Rafaqat, 2024). Professional development programs should equip teachers with strategies to accommodate diverse learners, such as differentiated instruction, universal design for learning (UDL), and social-emotional learning techniques (Morgan 2023). Collaboration among teachers, special education specialists, and support staff is essential to address individual learning needs effectively (Paulsrud, & Nilholm 2023). Promoting inclusive classroom cultures where children respect and value diversity helps create a positive and engaging learning experience for all students (Guberina, 2023). Parental involvement and community engagement are equally important in ensuring the success of inclusive education (Bindhani, & Gopinath, 2024). Parents should be encouraged to actively participate in their children's learning journey by working closely with educators to identify and address specific needs (Eden, 2024). Community organizations and local businesses can contribute by providing resources, mentorship programs, and advocacy for inclusive education initiatives (O'Brien, & Cooney 2025). A strong partnership among all stakeholders can help remove barriers, create awareness, and promote a culture of inclusion that benefits not only children with diverse abilities and backgrounds but also society as a whole (Eden et al 2024).

Implementing inclusive practices during early childhood fosters better developmental outcomes by ensuring that all children receive the support they need to thrive (Soukakou, Dionne, & Palikara 2024). Early intervention is crucial in addressing developmental delays, learning disabilities, and social-emotional challenges, as it helps children build essential skills at a young age (Blewitt, et al 2021). Children who receive early support in inclusive settings develop stronger cognitive abilities, language skills, and problem-solving capabilities (Arzaqi, Rahayu, & Hendriawan, 2024). Providing diverse learning experiences

and individualized instruction, inclusive education helps children reach their full potential, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds (Kaur& Bhatia, 2024). Inclusive early childhood education significantly enhances social and emotional growth (Sakti, Endraswara, & Rohman 2024). Children of different abilities and backgrounds learn together, they develop empathy, cooperation, and strong communication skills (Khatijah, Windarti, & Iswatiningsih 2025). Inclusive classrooms promote peer interactions, fostering friendships and reducing stigma around differences (2019). This positive social environment encourages children to be more accepting, confident, and emotionally resilient. (Simanjuntak, & Sulastri, 2023). Inclusive practices help children develop a sense of belonging, which is essential for their overall well-being and future success in school and society (Boyle, et al 2023). The long-term benefits of early inclusive education extend into adulthood, as children who experience inclusive learning environments are more likely to become independent, socially responsible, and successful individuals (Horne-Shuttleworth, Somma& Wlodarczyk, 2024). Providing equal opportunities for learning and participation, inclusive practices set a strong foundation for lifelong learning and active citizenship (Kersh, et al 2021). Fostering inclusivity from an early age helps break down societal barriers and creates a more equitable future where diversity is celebrated (Pradhan, & Naik, 2024). Therefore, investing in inclusive early childhood education is not just beneficial for individual children but also for building stronger, more inclusive communities (Rad et al 2022).

2. Literature Review

Early childhood (EC) inclusive education has gained international recognition as a fundamental right for all children, including those with special needs or impairments. By removing barriers and fostering situations where all children may thrive, inclusive education, which is based on the principles of equity and social justice, aims to establish equal learning and development opportunities (UNESCO, 1994; DEC/NAEYC, 2009). However, the actual implementation of inclusive education in EC contexts faces significant obstacles, including teacher preparedness, a lack of resources, and systemic problems, even with strong theoretical and policy support (Balık & Özgün, 2024; Angwaomaodoko, 2023). Using empirical research and theoretical frameworks to identify gaps and offer useful recommendations, this literature review carefully examines the opportunities and problems associated with inclusive education in EC.

2.1 Theoretical Foundations of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is grounded in the social model of disability, positing that societal attitudes and structures, rather than individual disabilities, constitute the primary barriers to engagement (Gable, 2013; Llewellyn & Hogan, 2000). This model adheres to the principles of inclusive education, emphasising accessibility, participation, and systemic support (DEC/NAEYC, 2009). The Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2006) advocate for

inclusive education as a global standard, urging nations to adapt their educational systems to accommodate diverse learners.

Inclusive education in early childhood is crucial as it lays the foundation for lifelong learning and social integration (Smith, 2006). Research indicates that children exposed to inclusive environments early in life exhibit enhanced social, emotional, and academic skills (Lawrence et al., 2016; Movahedazarhouli, 2021). Implementing these theoretical concepts in practice is frequently inconsistent, particularly in low-resource contexts (Eleweke & Rodda, 2002; Angwaomaodoko, 2023).

2.2. Challenges in Implementing Inclusive Education

2.2.1. Teacher Preparedness and Attitudes

A continual difficulty in early childhood inclusive education is the inadequate training of educators. Studies reveal that numerous preschool educators possess a fundamental comprehension of inclusion yet lack the requisite knowledge and skills to adequately address various needs (Balık & Özgün, 2024; Pamuk & Bal, 2019). In Turkey, educators sometimes conflate inclusive education with special education, leading to practices that segregate rather than integrate students with disabilities (Balık & Özgün, 2024). In Nigeria, a notable 74% of questioned educators were uninformed about inclusive education, indicating a substantial knowledge deficit (Angwaomaodoko, 2023).

Moreover, the attitudes of educators are essential. Some educators advocate for inclusion, while others express reservations due to apprehensions of insufficient training or excessive workloads (Woolfson & Brady, 2009; Tuzcuoğlu & Aydın, 2023). Nigerian educators voiced discontent with the inclusion of challenged children in their classrooms, attributing their displeasure to a deficiency of patience and inadequate remuneration for the additional effort necessitated (Angwaomaodoko, 2023).

2.3 Constraints on Resources and Infrastructure

Inadequate resources, such as instructional materials, assistive technologies, and accessible infrastructure, pose significant barriers to inclusion (Ünal & Aladağ, 2020; Angwaomaodoko, 2023). In Turkey, overcrowded classrooms and a lack of resources constrain instructors' ability to offer personalised assistance (Balık & Özgün, 2024). Similarly, Nigerian schools sometimes lack ramps, specialised educational resources, and adequately educated personnel, resulting in the isolation of students with disabilities (Angwaomaodoko, 2023).

2.4. Systemic and Policy-Related Obstacles

Disjointed policies and inadequate inter-agency cooperation hinder inclusive education. In Turkey, discrepancies between national policies and local execution result in inequalities in service provision (Balık & Özgün, 2024). In Nigeria, notwithstanding progressive legislation such as the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities Act (2019), enforcement is inadequate, and financial support for inclusive initiatives is lacking (Angwaomaodoko, 2023).

2.5. Attitudes of Parents and Society

Families with children who have impairments often face societal bias and misconceptions that may hinder their support for inclusive education (Brydges & Mkandawire, 2018). Research in Nigeria indicates contrasting parental perspectives, with some rejecting inclusive education due to fears of victimisation or inadequate resources, while others advocate for it after witnessing enhancements in their children's academic and social abilities (Angwaomaodoko, 2023). Conversely, Turkish research highlights parental obstructive attitudes and insufficient teamwork as major impediments to inclusion initiatives (Balık & Özgün, 2024).

2.6. Professional Advancement and Instruction

Targeted training initiatives for early childhood educators can bridge knowledge deficiencies and foster affirmative perspectives on inclusion (Forlin, 2013; Movahedazarhouligh, 2021). Strategies like co-teaching, involving collaboration between general and special educators, and itinerant assistance, where specialists offer advice across several classes, have been helpful in enhancing inclusive practices (Chitiyo & Brinda, 2018; Barton & Smith, 2015).

2.7. Community and Familial Involvement

Forging alliances with families and communities is essential for attaining sustained inclusion (Movahedazarhouligh, 2021). Programs that involve parents in goal setting and decision-making, such as Individualised Education Program (IEP) meetings, generally report enhanced satisfaction and improved outcomes (Winterman & Rosas, 2014).

2.8. Investment in Policy and Infrastructure

Improving policy frameworks and allocating targeted financing can assist in surmounting systemic obstacles. Turkey's PIKTES project has enhanced educational access for Syrian refugee children, exemplifying the advantages of coordinated actions (İli, 2022). Similarly, if implemented successfully, Nigeria's inclusive education policies might profoundly transform its early childhood educational framework (Angwaomaodoko, 2023).

2.9. Utilising Technology

Innovative educational technology and adaptable resources possess considerable promise for enhancing personalised instruction and eliminating learning obstacles (Daniela & Lytras, 2019). Despite restricted adoption in various educational systems, innovative strategies such as online professional development programs and adaptable digital learning environments offer feasible, scalable possibilities for deployment.

2.10. Prospective Pathways for Inclusive Education in Early Childhood Education

Notwithstanding the obstacles, inclusive education in early childhood (EC) possesses the capacity to be revolutionary. The success, however, hinges on rectifying deficiencies in teacher preparation, resource allocation, and policy execution. Cross-cultural research from Turkey and Nigeria indicates that contextual elements, including socioeconomic

position and cultural attitudes, ought to inform localised strategies (Balık & Özgün, 2024; Angwaomaodoko, 2023). Future study ought to explore novel inclusion methods, including community-based initiatives and technology-integrated classrooms. Furthermore, longitudinal studies are essential to assess the enduring impacts of inclusive education on children's developmental trajectories. Inclusive education in early life is both a moral imperative and an essential educational necessity. Despite challenges such as inadequately prepared educators, resource deficiencies, and institutional disparities, several potentials for improvement exist through professional development, community engagement, and policy reform. By adopting a critical, context-sensitive approach, stakeholders may transform the notion of inclusive education from a theoretical ideal into a concrete reality for all children.

3. Methodology

This study uses a structured comparative literature analysis to assess inclusive early childhood education (ECE) challenges and opportunities across countries. Qualitative meta-synthesis (Erwin et al., 2011) helps evaluate research papers, policy documents, and conceptual models to find persistent patterns and variations. Conceptual articles on complicated themes like Inclusive Early Childhood Education benefit from the qualitative, non-empirical approach. This method lets researchers explore stakeholders' subjective experiences, beliefs, and attitudes, revealing IECE's difficulties and potential.

Qualitative research highlights context and significance in non-numerical data to understand human behaviour and social processes. Interviews, focus groups, and thematic analysis help explore participants' perspectives (Creswell, 2013). This method is especially useful in education, where experience and interaction details greatly affect outcomes. Qualitative research is exploratory, making it perfect for conceptual frameworks that seek IECE themes and patterns. This helps researchers understand how inclusive practises are viewed and adopted across environments (Cohen et al., 2018).

Qualitative techniques help better understand the challenges of implementing inclusive policies by examining the lived experiences of teachers, parents, and children. This contextual richness is essential for identifying IECE barriers and facilitators (Flick, 2018). The non-empirical aspect of qualitative research allows for freedom in data collecting and processing. Researchers can tailor their methodology to their topic, which is useful for studying complex issues like early childhood education inclusion (Charmaz, 2006). Theory Development: Qualitative methods effectively create frameworks and models. They enable the combination of literature and empirical data, improving IECE dynamics understanding and informing future research and practice (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.1. IECE Challenges and Opportunities

A qualitative, non-empirical technique helps researchers identify IECE difficulties such as insufficient training in inclusive practices can impair instructors' abilities to help different learners (Smith & Jones, 2020), policy gaps in regional policy implementation with inconsistencies that hinder inclusion (Johnson, 2021). Conversely, this method illuminates

opportunities like collaborative practices. On the other hand, qualitative studies emphasise the value of educator, family, and community collaboration for inclusive environments (Miller, 2019). According to Thompson & Williams (2022), educators discuss innovative ideas that promote diversity and offer practical insights to others in the industry.

The study uses peer-reviewed academic publications, international organisation reports (UNESCO, UNICEF), and policy frameworks to address diversity, equity, and inclusion in ECE. Three key documents underpinned the conceptual analysis:

“The Challenges and Opportunities of Inclusive Early Childhood Education”,

“Creating Inclusive Environments and Meeting Individual Needs in Early Years Settings”

“Building Inclusive Early Learning Environments for Children with disabilities”.

Purposive sampling was used to include varied views and situations from the Global North and South in the literature. The review focused on topics, conceptual frameworks, and research and practice gaps. A thematic content analysis identified inclusion hurdles such teacher training, attitudes, curricular limits, and resource availability, as well as promising practices and enabling situations. This methodological technique helps synthesise, theory-inform, and analyse early childhood education inclusion. It helps propose a conceptual framework that places inclusive behaviours in socio-cultural, institutional, and pedagogical contexts.

4. Findings

The examination of inclusive early childhood education (IECE) presents a complex landscape characterised by significant challenges and potential opportunities. This section presents a summary of key findings regarding educators' perspectives, practices, and the broader socio-political context affecting IECE.

4.1. Educators' Perspectives and Methods

Teachers often exhibit a limited understanding of inclusive education, revealing a gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. Numerous educators acknowledge the importance of inclusion; however, they often struggle to implement it effectively due to insufficient training and resources (Akbulut et al., 2021). A significant proportion of educators lack comprehensive training in inclusive practices, which restricts their capacity to modify curricula and instructional strategies to meet diverse student needs (Pamuk & Bal, 2019). Moreover, although educators generally endorse the objectives of inclusive education, their perceptions regarding the abilities of children with disabilities often result in exclusionary practices. Some educators may perceive children with impairments as challenging to teach, leading to their marginalisation in the classroom (Woolfson & Brady, 2009). These findings align with evidence suggesting the necessity for focused professional development to enhance teachers' confidence and competence in inclusive environments (Forlin, 2013).

4.2. Implementation Challenges

The challenges associated with integrating IE are diverse. Significant barriers consist of insufficient resources. Numerous early childhood facilities do not possess the necessary materials and infrastructure to effectively implement inclusive education. This encompasses physical accommodations, instructional materials, and suitable classroom environments (Köse et al., 2023). There is Insufficient Training. Educators often express a sense of inadequacy in meeting the needs of children with disabilities, attributed to a deficiency in both pre-service and in-service training (De Boer and Simpson, 2009). This professional incompetence may result in adverse perceptions of inclusiveness.

Society has negative perceptions of disability, and this influences teachers' attitudes, leading to resistance against inclusive practices. The stigma within the community related to impairments often intensifies the difficulties faced by educators (Symes & Humphrey, 2010). Parental involvement is essential for the success of inclusive education. Many educators encounter difficulties in effectively engaging parents, particularly when parents hold preconceived notions about impairments (Dunn, 2008).

4.3. Prospects for Advancement

Notwithstanding these limitations, there are several opportunities to enhance IE in early childhood environments. The establishment of inclusive education policies at both national and international levels, exemplified by the Salamanca Statement and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, provides a foundational basis for the promotion of inclusive practices (UNESCO, 1994; UN, 2006).

Community support through NGOs and organisations plays a crucial role in raising awareness and advocating for children with disabilities, fostering a more inclusive educational environment and enhancing acceptance and support (Ainscow, 2020). Initiatives for professional development: Targeted continuous professional development for early childhood educators can enhance the adoption of inclusive practices. Training programs emphasising practical inclusion methods are particularly beneficial (Forlin, 2013). Collaboration among educators, special education professionals, and families fosters a supportive environment for children with disabilities and encourages collective accountability for their educational outcomes. The findings indicate that significant challenges hinder the effective implementation of inclusive education in early childhood settings; however, there are numerous opportunities to enhance practices and outcomes for all children. Establishing an inclusive educational environment necessitates the identification and resolution of obstacles via comprehensive training, community engagement, and supportive policies.

5. Discussion

IECE is an innovative approach that incorporates all students, irrespective of their abilities or disabilities, into conventional education. Nonetheless, achieving complete inclusion is challenging and may impede inclusive practices. This discourse integrates novel insights regarding educator perspectives, structural barriers and potential for inclusive education.

5.1. Educator Perception and Comprehension

The comprehension of inclusive practices by educators is essential for the efficacy of IECE. Research indicates that numerous preschool educators comprehend inclusion nevertheless lack the proficiency for its implementation (Akbulut et al., 2021). Balik and Özgün (2024) discovered that educators frequently conflate inclusive education with special education, impeding their ability to wholly adopt the principle of inclusion for all students. This understanding deficit underscores the necessity for specialised professional development to assist educators in grasping inclusive approaches and customising education for varied learners.

5.2. Systemic Challenges

Inclusive education encounters numerous systemic barriers. Inadequate money and training constitute significant challenges. Inadequate preparation during their studies and ongoing professional development results in numerous instructors feeling ill-equipped to engage with impaired students (Pamuk & Bal, 2019; Cologon, 2014). Numerous educational institutions lack the infrastructure to support impaired students, hence perpetuating discrimination (Köse et al., 2023). The absence of adequate instructional resources and skilled personnel hinders teachers' ability to cater to diverse student needs (Dunn, 2008).

Societal perceptions of disability influence children's inclusive experiences. Symes & Humphrey (2010) discovered that negative perceptions and stigma associated with impairments can lead educators and families to resist, so impacting educational inclusion. Teachers' apprehension regarding interactions with special needs students may hinder their full integration into classrooms (Woolfson & Brady, 2009).

5.3. Prospects for Enhancement

IECE possesses numerous potential enhancements despite the challenges. National and international policies advocate for inclusive education and transformation (UNESCO, 1994; UN, 2006). The Nigerian government's inclusive education plans underscore the integration of impaired children into normal schools (Angwaomaodoko, 2023). Such policies can catalyse educational reform and foster inclusivity. Inclusive education necessitates the engagement of families and communities. Researchers emphasise the necessity of educator-family collaborations to assist children with disabilities (Wolf, 2020). Effective parental communication and engagement can enhance these children's educational experiences, addressing their needs both at home and at school.

In rural areas especially, limited budgets and weak infrastructure create even bigger obstacles. Schools often lack basic teaching tools, proper buildings, and enough support to carry out lessons successfully (Gasva, Mutanana, & Goronga, 2019; Ngwenya, 2020). This makes it difficult for teachers to use effective methods or keep learners. The situation becomes more serious when practical subjects like science are involved. Poor infrastructure and a lack of equipment not only limit what can be taught, but also raise safety concerns during hands-on lessons (Chuene & Teane, 2024). Many schools

don't have enough textbooks, internet access, or functioning laboratories, which adds to the already heavy burden faced by schools in poor communities (Mncube, Ajani, Ngema, & Mkhasibe, 2023; Malaikosa & Sahayu, 2019).

6. Recommendations

6.1. Parameters of Inclusion and Exclusion in Early Childhood Education

Inclusive early childhood education (ECE) seeks to provide equitable access and participation for all children, including those with disabilities or from marginalised groups, as specified in international frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (United Nations, 2006). Exclusionary practices continue to exist worldwide, compromising these commitments. Exclusion in early childhood education is evident through both overt actions, such as expulsion and suspension, and covert mechanisms, including "soft expulsion" (e.g., repeated early pick-ups or discouraging enrolment) (Zinsser et al., 2022; Cologon, 2014). These practices have a disproportionate impact on children with disabilities, Black and Hispanic students, and boys, thereby perpetuating systemic inequities (Zinsser et al., 2022; Ackah-Jnr & Udah, 2021).

Exclusionary parameters frequently stem from structural and attitudinal barriers. In Ghana, teacher opposition to inclusive practices, influenced by views of disability as a deficit, insufficient training, and limited resources, results in the isolation or referral of children to segregated environments (Ackah-Jnr & Udah, 2021). Australia's dual system of mainstream and segregated schools facilitates exclusion by presenting it as a "solution" for children considered unable to achieve standardised outcomes, in violation of CRPD obligations (Cologon, 2014). Systemic divides indicate a cultural acceptance of exclusion when children are categorised as "other," thereby reinforcing stigmatisation (Cologon, 2014; Zinsser et al., 2022).

The qualities of teachers and their professional development play a crucial role in promoting inclusion. Highly skilled educators who utilise differentiated teaching methods and engage with families are essential for creating inclusive environments (Ackah-Jnr & Udah, 2021). In contrast, the stress experienced by teachers, along with implicit biases and restricted access to mental health resources, is associated with increased exclusion rates, especially in home- and center-based care (Zinsser et al., 2022). Ecological factors, including program type and administrative policies, influence exclusion dynamics. For instance, school-based pre-K programs with structured support systems exhibit lower expulsion rates compared to home-based settings (Zinsser et al., 2022).

Mitigating exclusion necessitates the dismantling of systemic barriers. The abolition of segregated schooling in Italy in 1977 illustrates that the unification of educational systems can diminish exclusion by enforcing accountability for inclusive practices (Cologon, 2014). Interventions such as the Pyramid Model and mental health consultation demonstrate potential in mitigating behavioural challenges without the need for exclusion (Zinsser et al., 2022). Sustainable change requires the enforcement of policies, the training of

teachers, and the implementation of culturally responsive frameworks that prioritise children's rights above standardised outcomes (Ackah-Jnr & Udah, 2021; Cologon, 2014).

6.2. The Classroom Environment as a Foundation for Inclusion

Educators consistently recognised physical learning environments as a crucial element in the effective implementation of inclusive practices. Observations indicated that optimal learning environments necessitate:

6.2.1 Structural Modifications

Decreased student-teacher ratios are needed to enhance individualised attention. Intentionally designed physical environments to support diverse learning requirements. In terms of Material Requirements, one needs specialised educational resources that are made available, such as adaptive equipment and learning aids. Current classroom configurations frequently establish unintended obstacles. Limited resources undermine the effectiveness of differentiated instruction. (Balık & Özgün, 2024).

6.2.3. Implications for Teaching

The study indicates that physical space directly affects educational accessibility. Especially in Environmental adaptations that should align with curricular changes. Investment in infrastructure is essential for inclusion. These findings establish classroom design as a critical element of inclusive education, emphasising the necessity for comprehensive strategies that consider both physical and instructional dimensions of learning environments.

7. Implications for Policy and Practice

7.1. Policy Implications

Governments must legislate compulsory inclusive education training for all early childhood educators, ensuring coverage during both pre-service and in-service phases. Policies should provide sustainable funding mechanisms to support continuous, hands-on professional development focused on practical classroom strategies (Forlin, 2013). Educators should engage in ongoing learning communities where inclusive practices are modelled, refined, and contextualised.

Institutions must adopt reflective professional learning models, where teachers regularly evaluate their practice through peer feedback and inclusion-focused mentorship. National and local education budgets should prioritize funding for physical accessibility modifications (e.g., ramps, sensory-friendly spaces) and adaptive teaching materials (Köse et al., 2023). Policies must ensure equity in resource distribution, especially to underfunded and rural early childhood centers. Educators should be trained to use and adapt inclusive resources effectively, including assistive technologies and differentiated materials. Administrators should conduct regular audits of classroom environments to assess and improve inclusivity in learning spaces. National education strategies should be aligned with international inclusion commitments such as the Salamanca Statement and

the UNCRPD (UNESCO, 1994; UN, 2006). Implementation of monitoring systems and accountability structures is essential to evaluate progress and compliance.

7.2 Practice Implications

Educators must be informed of their legal and ethical obligations concerning inclusion. Schools should create internal review processes to assess the consistency and quality of inclusive practices. Governments and education ministries should launch nationwide awareness campaigns to challenge stigma and promote positive attitudes toward disabilities (Symes & Humphrey, 2010). Policies should promote multi-sector partnerships among schools, NGOs, and advocacy organizations (Ainscow, 2020). Schools should host community forums and inclusion awareness events to foster dialogue and understanding. Educators can involve community leaders to co-create inclusive narratives that reflect cultural values and promote acceptance.

Government should create policies that mandate parental involvement in educational planning, emphasizing culturally appropriate engagement strategies (Dunn, 2008). Introduce incentives and frameworks for schools to facilitate consistent parent-educator collaboration. Educators should use clear, culturally sensitive communication to build trust and facilitate shared decision-making with parents. Schools should offer flexible involvement opportunities, such as home visits, workshops, and interactive learning days. Teachers must be skilled in adapting curricula using Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to meet diverse student needs.

Inclusion should be evident in play-based learning, daily routines, and inclusive assessment practices that accommodate all learners. Professional development must challenge ableist assumptions, replacing them with strength-based, child-centered approaches (Woolfson & Brady, 2009). Reflection sessions and guided discussions can support educators in recognizing and unlearning unconscious biases. Peer networks should be established, and communities of practice where inclusive strategies are exchanged evaluated. Leadership training should focus on inclusive school management and fostering a culture of collective responsibility. Inclusion must be embedded in the vision, policies, and practices of early childhood institutions. Teachers need training in cultural competence and family engagement strategies. Schools should create regular and meaningful platforms for parents to be active participants in the educational process.

The transformation of Inclusive Early Childhood Education (IECE) requires comprehensive policy reform and practical shifts in educational practice. While barriers such as undertraining, inadequate infrastructure, and societal stigma persist, these can be addressed through policy-driven investments in training and infrastructure, strong inclusive frameworks and accountability measures, educator empowerment through practical pedagogy and reflective practice, community and parental collaboration. By proactively addressing both structural and attitudinal challenges, education systems can ensure that inclusion becomes the norm, not the exception thereby safeguarding the right of every child to learn, participate, and thrive.

8. CONCLUSION

The investigation of inclusive early childhood education (IECE) uncovers a significant convergence of difficulties and opportunities that educators, policymakers, and communities must address. This study emphasises the necessity of cultivating an inclusive educational environment that addresses the varied needs of all children, especially those with impairments. Notwithstanding the increasing acknowledgement of the importance of inclusivity, substantial obstacles persist, such as poor teacher training, limited resources, and adverse societal views towards disability. Educators frequently articulate a wish to adopt inclusive practices; however, they see limitations due to insufficient assistance and a lack of comprehension regarding the effective adaptation of their pedagogical approaches (Akbulut et al., 2021; Balık & Özgün, 2024). Furthermore, the physical infrastructure of numerous educational institutions does not adequately accommodate the demands of all learners, hence exacerbating the challenges of establishing genuinely inclusive environments (Köse et al., 2023).

Nonetheless, the findings underscore significant opportunities for enhancing inclusive education. Policy frameworks, including the Salamanca Statement and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, establish a robust basis for advancing inclusive practices (UNESCO, 1994; UN, 2006). The participation of families and community stakeholders is crucial in establishing a supporting network that fosters inclusion and acceptance (Wolf, 2020). To fully actualise the promise of IECE, stakeholders must prioritise extensive professional development for educators, enhance school infrastructure, and cultivate collaborative partnerships with families and communities. These measures are essential for improving the educational experiences of children with disabilities and for fostering a more inclusive society that appreciates diversity. The report advocates for a renewed dedication to inclusive education to ensure that every child may flourish in early childhood environments, establishing a robust foundation for their future learning and development. By tackling the recognised challenges and utilising existing opportunities, we may provide educational settings in which all children feel esteemed, included, and empowered to thrive.

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