

Effectiveness of Inclusive Learning Method in Improving Social Skills of Children with Special Needs in Elementary Schools



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KEY WORDS

Inclusive Learning, Children with Special Needs, Social Skills, Elementary Education, Qualitative Research.

ABSTRACT

Inclusive education has emerged as a fundamental approach in ensuring equal learning opportunities for children with special needs (CSN). This study examines the effectiveness of inclusive learning methods in enhancing the social skills of CSN in elementary schools. Using a qualitative research design with a literature review approach (library research), this study synthesizes findings from various academic sources, including journal articles, books, and research reports. The analysis reveals that inclusive learning fosters an interactive and supportive environment where CSN can develop essential social skills such as communication, cooperation, and emotional regulation. Key strategies identified include peer-assisted learning, cooperative learning models, and teacher-facilitated social interactions. Furthermore, the study highlights the role of teachers in implementing adaptive teaching strategies and promoting positive peer relationships, which significantly contribute to the social development of CSN. Despite its effectiveness, challenges such as lack of teacher training, inadequate resources, and attitudinal barriers still hinder the successful implementation of inclusive education. Addressing these challenges requires continuous professional development, policy support, and collaborative efforts among educators, parents, and policymakers. The findings suggest that well-implemented inclusive learning methods can significantly improve the social integration and overall well-being of CSN in elementary schools. Future research should focus on empirical studies that measure the long-term social and academic impacts of inclusive education.

1. INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has become a global priority, aiming to provide equitable learning opportunities for all students, including children with special needs (CSN). Inclusive learning fosters social integration and enhances the development of interpersonal skills among students, promoting a sense of belonging and acceptance (Garg & Sharma, 2020). Studies indicate that children with disabilities who

participate in inclusive classrooms exhibit significant improvements in their communication, cooperation, and emotional regulation skills (Kart & Kart, 2021). However, despite these benefits, the implementation of inclusive education remains challenging due to inadequate teacher training, lack of resources, and societal attitudes toward disability (Majoko, 2019). This research seeks to explore the effectiveness of inclusive learning methods in enhancing the social skills of CSN in elementary



schools.

Existing studies have extensively analyzed the benefits of inclusive education on academic performance, yet limited research has focused on its impact on social skill development among children with special needs (Yan, Deng, & Ma, 2021). Additionally, while studies emphasize the importance of teacher training and peer interactions, there is a lack of qualitative research that synthesizes literature to provide a comprehensive understanding of effective inclusive learning methods (Sansi, Nalbant, & Ozer, 2021). This study aims to fill this gap by analyzing various inclusive strategies and their effectiveness in improving social skills.

With the increasing number of children with disabilities enrolled in mainstream schools, there is an urgent need for research that informs educational policies and teaching practices (Kefallinou, Symeonidou, & Meijer, 2020). Inclusive education not only benefits CSN but also fosters empathy and cooperation among typically developing students (Molina Roldán, Marauri, & Aubert, 2021). Understanding effective strategies can help educators create an inclusive learning environment that supports both academic and social development.

Previous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of peer-assisted learning, cooperative learning models, and teacher-facilitated interactions in improving the social skills of CSN (Khaleel, Alhosani, & Duyar, 2021). For example, a study by Ozerk, Ozerk, and Silveira-Zaldivar (2021) found that children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) showed significant social improvements when engaged in structured inclusive activities. Similarly, Avramidis, Toulia, and Tsihouridis (2019) highlighted the role of peer tutoring in fostering communication and teamwork among CSN. Despite these findings, more research is needed to compare different inclusive methods and their effectiveness in diverse educational settings.

This study contributes to the existing literature by providing a qualitative synthesis of various

inclusive learning methods and their impact on the social development of CSN. Unlike previous research, which primarily focuses on specific disabilities or teaching methods, this study offers a holistic perspective on inclusive practices across different contexts. By utilizing a library research approach, it consolidates findings from multiple studies to present evidence-based recommendations for educators.

The primary objective of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of inclusive learning methods in enhancing the social skills of CSN in elementary schools. Specific objectives include:

1. Identifying key inclusive strategies that promote social interaction among CSN.
2. Analyzing the role of teachers, peers, and instructional techniques in fostering social development.
3. Assessing the challenges faced in implementing inclusive education and proposing solutions.

This study provides valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers. By identifying effective inclusive strategies, it helps teachers design learning environments that facilitate social interaction and integration. Additionally, the findings support policymakers in developing inclusive education frameworks that prioritize social development alongside academic achievement. Future research can build on these insights by conducting empirical studies to validate the effectiveness of proposed methods.

Inclusive learning refers to teaching strategies designed to accommodate students with diverse needs within the same educational setting. Methods such as peer-assisted learning, differentiated instruction, and cooperative learning have been shown to enhance engagement and interaction among students (Fernandes, Jardim, & Lopes, 2021). Effective inclusive teaching also involves creating a supportive classroom environment where students feel valued and respected.

Social skills encompass communication, cooperation, problem-solving, and emotional

regulation. These skills are essential for building relationships and participating effectively in society (Sansi et al., 2021). Inclusive education provides opportunities for CSN to develop these skills by interacting with their peers in structured and natural settings (Majoko, 2019).

CSN in elementary schools include students with physical, cognitive, emotional, and developmental disabilities. Their learning experiences vary based on the level of support they receive from teachers, peers, and the school community (Molina Roldán et al., 2021). Inclusive education aims to address their unique learning needs while fostering their overall development.

2. METHOD

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach using a literature review (library research) methodology to explore the effectiveness of inclusive learning methods in improving social skills among children with special needs (CSN) in elementary schools. Qualitative research is suitable for examining complex social interactions and educational practices, as it allows for an in-depth analysis of existing theories and findings (Nassaji, 2020). By synthesizing data from various scholarly sources, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of inclusive education strategies.

Type of Research

This study is a qualitative research employing literature review as its primary methodology. Literature reviews systematically analyze and synthesize previous research to develop theoretical insights, identify patterns, and evaluate the effectiveness of educational practices (Lindner & Schwab, 2020). The study focuses on qualitative data, such as case studies,

conceptual frameworks, and thematic analyses of inclusive education.

Data Sources

The primary data sources for this study include peer-reviewed journal articles, books, reports, and academic conference proceedings published within the last five years. These sources were retrieved from academic databases such as Google Scholar, Taylor & Francis, Springer, and SAGE Journals (Malmqvist et al., 2019). The selection criteria for literature include relevance to inclusive learning, empirical studies on social skill development, and theoretical frameworks supporting the implementation of inclusive education (Nilholm, 2021).

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through document analysis, which involves reviewing and categorizing information from selected scholarly sources. This method ensures a comprehensive understanding of previous findings and theoretical developments in inclusive education (Moriña, 2019). The literature search was conducted using specific keywords such as *inclusive education*, *social skills development*, *children with special needs*, *qualitative research in education*, and *peer-assisted learning strategies* to ensure the selection of relevant studies (Dube, 2020).

Data Analysis Method

The study employs thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes related to the effectiveness of inclusive learning methods in enhancing social skills among CSN. Thematic analysis allows researchers to systematically categorize qualitative data and extract key insights from the reviewed literature (Widana & Sumandya, 2023). The analysis follows a structured approach:

1. Familiarization with Data – Reviewing



the collected literature and summarizing key findings.

2. Coding – Identifying recurring themes such as teacher strategies, peer interactions, and classroom adaptations.
3. Theme Development – Grouping similar concepts to understand relationships between inclusive methods and social skills development.
4. Interpretation – Analyzing findings within the broader educational and policy context to draw meaningful conclusions (Schwab & Lindner, 2020).

By adopting this approach, the study provides a systematic and evidence-based perspective on how inclusive education can enhance social skills

in elementary school students with special needs. The findings contribute to educational policy recommendations and best practices in teaching strategies for inclusive classrooms.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The table below presents ten selected articles from Google Scholar, published in the last five years, relevant to the effectiveness of inclusive learning methods in improving the social skills of children with special needs in elementary schools. These articles were carefully screened from multiple sources to ensure their relevance to the research topic.

Table 1 Literature Review

No.	Author(s) & Year	Title	Methodology	Key Findings
1	Garg & Sharma (2020)	Impact of artificial intelligence in special need education to promote inclusive pedagogy	Review Study	AI-based adaptive learning enhances social skill acquisition.
2	Özerk et al. (2021)	Developing social skills and social competence in children with autism	Case Study	Teacher-mediated interventions significantly improve peer interactions.
3	Yan, Deng, & Ma (2021)	Teachers' perceptions of students with special educational needs in inclusive schools	Survey-Based	Teachers recognize the need for structured inclusive learning to foster social skills.
4	Majoko (2019)	Teacher key competencies for inclusive education	Qualitative Research	Teacher competency is critical for fostering an inclusive and socially engaging environment.
5	Sansi, Nalbant, & Ozer (2021)	Effects of an inclusive physical activity program	Experimental Study	Inclusive physical activities improve motor and social skills in children with special needs.
6	Fernandes, Jardim, & Lopes (2021)	The soft skills of special education teachers	Thematic Analysis	Soft skills of teachers play a vital role in the success of inclusive learning environments.
7	Kefallinou, Symeonidou, & Meijer (2020)	Understanding the value of inclusive education	Systematic Review	Inclusive education enhances emotional intelligence and social adaptation.
8	Khaleel, Alhosani, & Duyar (2021)	The role of school principals in promoting	Mixed-Methods Study	Administrative support and policies enhance inclusive

		inclusive schools		education effectiveness.
9	Molina Roldán, Marauri, & Aubert (2021)	How inclusive interactive learning environments benefit students	Empirical Research	Collaborative and cooperative learning strategies improve social skill development.
10	Avramidis, Toulia, & Tsihouridis (2019)	Teachers' attitudes towards inclusion and peer tutoring	Longitudinal Study	Peer tutoring positively influences social skill growth in inclusive classrooms.

The literature consistently highlights that inclusive teaching strategies, such as peer-assisted learning and structured social interaction activities, play a significant role in improving the social skills of children with special needs (Özerk et al., 2021; Avramidis et al., 2019). These methods create opportunities for children to engage in cooperative tasks, enhancing their ability to communicate and work collaboratively.

Several studies emphasize the role of teachers in fostering an inclusive learning environment. Majoko (2019) and Fernandes et al. (2021) found that teachers with strong soft skills, such as empathy, communication, and adaptability, contribute to better social integration among students with special needs. These findings suggest that teacher training programs should focus on enhancing these skills to improve inclusivity in classrooms.

Physical activity-based programs were found to be particularly effective in promoting social skills development among children with special needs. Sansi et al. (2021) demonstrated that inclusive sports and physical education sessions led to improved social interactions and motor skills. Similarly, interactive learning environments, as explored by Molina Roldán et al. (2021), foster positive social engagement and peer cooperation.

Khaleel et al. (2021) and Kefallinou et al. (2020) stress the importance of administrative support

in the successful implementation of inclusive education. School principals play a key role in ensuring the availability of resources, training teachers, and creating policies that support inclusion. Schools that prioritize inclusion as part of their institutional framework tend to see better social outcomes for children with special needs.

Garg and Sharma (2020) explored the potential of artificial intelligence (AI) in inclusive education, highlighting that AI-based tools can personalize learning experiences and facilitate communication for students with disabilities. These technologies have the potential to bridge gaps in traditional teaching approaches and provide tailored support for social skill development.

Studies such as those by Avramidis et al. (2019) and Yan et al. (2021) reinforce the positive impact of peer tutoring and cooperative learning strategies. These methods encourage interaction between children with special needs and their typically developing peers, creating an environment where social skills can be practiced and refined in a natural setting.

The findings from the reviewed literature highlight the effectiveness of inclusive learning methods in improving the social skills of children with special needs (CSN) in elementary schools. The studies collectively emphasize that structured learning environments, teacher competencies, peer interactions, and

administrative support are key determinants in fostering social development among CSN. These insights align with the Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), which suggests that individuals acquire social behaviors through observation, imitation, and interaction with others. When applied in inclusive classrooms, this theory reinforces the importance of collaborative learning and guided peer interactions in shaping the social skills of children with special needs.

One of the most significant findings is the role of teachers in ensuring the success of inclusive education (Majoko, 2019; Fernandes et al., 2021). Educators who possess strong soft skills, such as patience, adaptability, and effective communication, are better equipped to facilitate meaningful social interactions among students with diverse abilities. In contrast, teachers lacking adequate training in inclusive education may struggle to implement strategies that encourage peer engagement, leading to the marginalization of CSN in mainstream classrooms. This finding highlights the urgent need for teacher training programs that focus on inclusive pedagogies, differentiated instruction, and social-emotional learning.

Another crucial aspect is the positive impact of peer-assisted learning and cooperative learning strategies (Avramidis et al., 2019; Özerk et al., 2021). When children with special needs engage in structured group activities with typically developing peers, they develop communication skills, teamwork, and self-confidence. These findings support Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978), which posits that cognitive and social development occurs through interaction with more knowledgeable peers or mentors. Schools that encourage peer tutoring, buddy systems, and group-based learning are more likely to foster an inclusive and socially engaging

environment for all students.

Moreover, physical activity-based programs have been identified as effective in improving both social and motor skills in CSN (Sansi et al., 2021). Inclusive sports activities provide a natural setting for social interactions, where children learn to communicate, collaborate, and regulate emotions through shared physical experiences. This aligns with contemporary educational practices that integrate movement-based learning strategies to enhance cognitive and social development. However, the challenge remains in ensuring equal access to such activities, particularly in schools with limited resources, trained personnel, or infrastructure to accommodate children with varying physical and cognitive abilities.

Administrative and policy support for inclusive education is another critical factor that determines the success of inclusive learning models (Khaleel et al., 2021; Kefallinou et al., 2020). Schools with proactive leadership and strong policy frameworks are better equipped to implement inclusive strategies effectively. This is particularly relevant in developing countries, where many schools lack the financial and institutional support necessary to sustain inclusive programs. Policymakers must prioritize funding, resource allocation, and continuous professional development to ensure that inclusive education is not merely an ideal but a practical reality.

The findings also reveal the growing role of artificial intelligence (AI) and technology in inclusive education (Garg & Sharma, 2020). AI-powered learning tools can personalize educational experiences, provide assistive communication devices, and offer adaptive learning pathways for CSN. However, while AI

presents promising opportunities, its implementation remains uneven, particularly in low-income communities where access to technology is limited. This digital divide raises ethical concerns about educational equity, emphasizing the need for government initiatives and public-private partnerships to expand technological accessibility in inclusive education settings.

Despite these positive developments, challenges persist in the real-world implementation of inclusive education. Many schools continue to struggle with attitudinal barriers, where teachers, parents, and even students hold misconceptions about the abilities of children with special needs. This stigma often leads to social exclusion, preventing CSN from fully benefiting from inclusive learning environments. The findings suggest that beyond structural and instructional changes, there must be a cultural shift in perceptions of disability and inclusion. Awareness campaigns, community engagement programs, and inclusive education advocacy efforts are essential in breaking down deep-seated prejudices.

The reviewed literature also underscores the importance of emotional intelligence and mental health support in inclusive classrooms (Molina Roldán et al., 2021). Children with special needs often experience higher levels of anxiety, frustration, and social isolation, which can hinder their ability to engage in classroom activities. Schools must integrate mental health services, counseling, and social-emotional learning curricula to address these psychological barriers. This approach aligns with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943), which suggests that children must feel emotionally secure and socially accepted before they can achieve higher levels of learning and self-actualization.

From a global perspective, the findings resonate with international frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which emphasize inclusive and equitable education for all children. However, the practical realization of these global goals remains highly inconsistent across different regions. Developed countries have made substantial progress in policy implementation, whereas many low-income nations continue to face systemic challenges in adopting inclusive education models. This discrepancy calls for greater international collaboration, knowledge-sharing platforms, and cross-border research initiatives to bridge the gap in inclusive education practices.

As a final reflection, while inclusive education has made significant strides, its success largely depends on the commitment of educators, policymakers, and communities. The reviewed studies provide compelling evidence that when implemented effectively, inclusive learning methods can transform not only the academic experience of CSN but also their long-term social and emotional well-being. Moving forward, research should focus on longitudinal studies that track the long-term effects of inclusive education, exploring how early interventions impact social integration, higher education, and employment outcomes for individuals with special needs. This knowledge will be invaluable in refining existing inclusive education policies and ensuring that no child is left behind.

In summary, the literature underscores that inclusive education is not just an educational model, but a fundamental human right. The effectiveness of inclusive learning in improving the social skills of CSN is supported by various

empirical studies and theoretical frameworks. However, challenges related to teacher preparedness, resource limitations, policy implementation, and societal attitudes must be addressed for inclusion to become a universal standard rather than an exception. The evidence suggests that with collective effort and ongoing research, inclusive education can continue to evolve, ensuring that every child, regardless of ability, has the opportunity to develop the social, emotional, and cognitive skills necessary for a fulfilling life.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings from this literature review emphasize that inclusive learning methods play a crucial role in improving the social skills of children with special needs (CSN) in elementary schools. Various strategies, including peer-assisted learning, cooperative learning, teacher interventions, and inclusive physical activities, have proven to be effective in fostering communication, collaboration, and emotional regulation among CSN. Furthermore, the role of teachers and school administrators is vital in ensuring that inclusive education is successfully implemented. Studies highlight that teacher training, soft skills development, and policy support significantly enhance the effectiveness of inclusive practices. These insights align with key educational theories such as Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978), which emphasize the importance of interaction in learning and development.

Despite the positive outcomes of inclusive education, several challenges remain, including a lack of trained teachers, limited resources, societal stigma, and inconsistent policy implementation across different regions. While AI and technology offer new opportunities to

support inclusive learning, unequal access to digital tools continues to be a barrier, particularly in developing regions. Moreover, mental health and emotional well-being must be given more attention, as many CSN struggle with anxiety, social isolation, and self-esteem issues. Addressing these issues requires a holistic approach, integrating policy reforms, professional development programs, technological advancements, and community engagement to create a truly inclusive educational environment.

Future research should focus on longitudinal studies that measure the long-term impact of inclusive education on the social, academic, and professional lives of CSN. More empirical studies are needed to compare different inclusive teaching strategies across diverse cultural and socioeconomic contexts to determine which methods are most effective. Additionally, research on the impact of digital learning tools and AI-driven adaptive learning platforms in inclusive classrooms can provide valuable insights into how technology can bridge existing educational gaps. Policymakers and educators would also benefit from studies examining how parental involvement and community-based interventions contribute to the success of inclusive education. Ultimately, future research should aim to develop scalable and sustainable inclusive education models that can be adapted to various educational settings worldwide, ensuring equitable learning opportunities for all children, regardless of ability or background.

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