

# Exploring the Academic and Social Development of Students with Disabilities in Inclusive Education: A Systematic Literature Review

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**Abstract:-** This systematic literature review investigates the benefits and challenges of inclusive education for students with disabilities, particularly emphasizing how being part of regular classrooms affects their academic and social development. It emphasizes the advantages of inclusion and peer interaction while highlighting the importance of collaboration among parents, educators, and advocacy groups. The research examines the impacts of students with disabilities on their academic and social development in inclusive education. In conclusion, the study recommends enhancing inclusive practices through improved peer communication and support systems.

**Keywords:-** Inclusive Education, Students with Disabilities, Academic Development, Social Development Introduction.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education aims to integrate students with disabilities into mainstream classrooms, fostering social, academic, and emotional growth for all learners. This literature review seeks to explore various perspectives and outcomes from existing research regarding the impact of inclusive education on students with disabilities, their peers, and the broader educational environment. A key focus is on how inclusion influences academic success, social interactions, and emotional well-being. The reviewed studies span multiple countries, examining the unique dimensions of inclusive practices across different cultural contexts.

A consistent finding among the studies is the largely positive influence of inclusive education on students with disabilities. Research by Abdullah (2023) and Patel and Vaghrodia (2022) highlights how inclusive settings enhance social connections, self-esteem, and academic performance for students with special needs.

Notable benefits of peer interactions and social integration are supported by findings from Carter et al. (2015) and Krampač et al. (2018), who observed significant boosts in social and communication skills through peer support and friendships. Nevertheless, challenges such as bullying (Abdullah, 2023) and a need for improved communication among peers (Monteverde et al., 2023) signify ongoing areas for development in inclusive practices.

Moreover, the role of teachers is crucial in shaping perceptions of inclusion among students. Research conducted by Alnahdi et al. (2022) and Basmah (2022) indicates that effective inclusive practices by teachers, including relevant training and fostering a supportive classroom atmosphere, lead to positive academic, social, and emotional outcomes for all students. However, obstacles to effective inclusion remain, such as insufficient teacher training, limited resources, and difficulties in modifying curricula to cater to diverse learning needs (Kart & Kart, 2021; Wood, 2019).

This systematic review aims to synthesize these findings, providing a clear understanding of how inclusive education influences the academic and social development of students with disabilities. It will also explore the benefits and challenges associated with inclusion, aiming to inform the global development of effective practices and policies for inclusive education systems. The following vital questions guide this inquiry:

- How do students with disabilities perceive their academic growth in inclusive classroom settings?
- What social effects does inclusion have on students with disabilities, particularly regarding peer relationships and social skills?
- How do peer interactions contribute to the academic and social development of students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms?

## II. METHODOLOGY

The first step toward conducting a systematic literature review on inclusive education for students with disabilities involves formulating relatively simple research questions such as 'How does inclusive education influence students' academic and social development?' and 'What are the benefits and challenges of inclusive education for students with disabilities?'. These questions guide the review in discovering how inclusive education influences students' academic and social development. Then, it searches drastically across relevant academic databases, including ERIC, Google Scholar, and PubMed, using keywords such as 'inclusive education,' 'students with disabilities,' 'academic development,' and 'social development.'

The studies then go through the inclusion/exclusion criteria: publication date, peer-reviewed status, and relevance to the study, ensuring only the most relevant studies come through. Data is extracted from the selected studies, focusing on critical elements such as methodology, sample size, key academic and social development findings, and any interventions or strategies employed in inclusive settings. The extracted data is synthesized into a table that enables comparison of common trends and themes. It will allow the identification of gaps or limitations in the research. Finally, conclusions are drawn based on the overall impact of inclusive education on students with disabilities for academic and socialistic outcomes, as well as recommendations for practice and policy improvements. This ensures a thorough and systematic review of the literature about inclusive education.

Table 1. Reviewed Literature

No	Authors (APA Citation)	Title	Country	Purpose	Results
1	Abdullah, M. (2023)	The Impact of Bullying in an Inclusive Classroom Among Students with ASD and Peers in Social Development and Academic Performance	UAE	To describe the effectiveness of anti-bullying interventions at schools.	Bullying remains a serious issue, with interventions focusing on self-efficacy, resilience, and reporting being effective. Teachers and parents require training for early identification of bullying.
2	Alnahdi, G. H., Lindner, K. T., & Schwab, S. (2022)	Teachers' Implementation of Inclusive Teaching Practices as a Potential Predictor for Students' Perception of Academic, Social, and Emotional Inclusion	Saudi Arabia	To explore how teachers' inclusive practices affect students' perceptions of inclusion.	Teachers' inclusive practices positively influence students' socio-emotional outcomes, with age and gender also playing roles in these perceptions.
3	Basmah (2022)	Interaction Between Students with and Without Disabilities in an Inclusive School from their Teachers' Perspective	Saudi Arabia	To explore teachers' perspectives on interactions between students with and without disabilities in an inclusive classroom.	Teachers observed generally positive interactions between students with and without disabilities, highlighting the importance of fostering social relationships and support networks.
4	Bhattacharjee, B. (2023)	Inclusive Education: Exploring the Perceptions and Experiences of Students with Disabilities	India	To explore students' perceptions of inclusive education.	Inclusive education fosters positive social interactions, academic growth, and self-esteem among students with disabilities, though ongoing efforts are necessary to ensure support and accessibility.
5	Carter, E. W., Moss, C. K., Asmus, J., Fesperman, E., Cooney, M., Brock, M. E., Lyons, G., Huber, H. B., & Vincent, L. B. (2015)	Promoting Inclusion, Social Connections, and Learning Through Peer Support Arrangements	USA	To examine the effectiveness of peer support arrangements in inclusive classrooms.	Peer support arrangements promote social connections, improve social and communication skills, reduce dependence on paraprofessionals, and enhance personal growth.

6	Cruz, E. (2024)	Assessing the effectiveness of inclusive education programs in promoting academic and social development	Nigeria	Investigate the impacts of inclusive education on academic and social outcomes for students with disabilities.	Inclusion benefits students with high-incidence disabilities, facilitating greater peer contact, though bullying remains a barrier. Thoughtful implementation promotes academic and social development.
7	Erikson, T. W., Moss, C. K., Asmus, J., Fesperman, E., Cooney, M., Brock, M. E., Lyons, G., Huber, H. B., & Vincent, L. B. (2015)	Promoting Inclusion, Social Connections, and Learning Through Peer Support Arrangements	USA	To examine the effectiveness of peer support arrangements in inclusive classrooms	Peer support arrangements promote social connections, improve social and communication skills, reduce dependence on paraprofessionals, and enhance personal growth.
8	Ghaleb Hamad Alnahdi, Katharina-Theresa Lindner, & Schwab, S. (2022)	Teachers' Implementation of Inclusive Teaching Practices as a Potential Predictor for Students' Perception of Academic, Social, and Emotional Inclusion	Saudi Arabia	Explore how teachers' practices affect student perceptions of inclusion.	Teachers' inclusive practices positively influence students' socio-emotional outcomes, with age and gender also influencing perceptions.
9	Krampač, A., Grljušić, A., & Kolak, A. (2018)	Peer relations in inclusive classes	Croatia	To examine the relationship between friendship quality and feelings of loneliness among students.	Positive peer relationships reduce loneliness and bullying while enhancing social competence and empathy, benefiting students with and without disabilities.
10	Monteverde, C., Carullo, A., Dequina, A. J., Fontanilla, S. M., Felix, R. G., Valparaiso, A., Blanco, E., & Raymundo, J. P. (2023)	Social interaction among learners with disabilities (LWD) under the inclusion program	Philippines	To identify social contacts that LWDs engage in as part of the inclusion program and the constraints and causes of restrictions.	Peers try to communicate more effectively with LWDs, but better communication skills are needed to close the relationship gap.
11	Naeemy, M. I., & Yoneda, H. (2024)	Students with Intensive Needs in an Inclusive Education System: A Literature Review	Japan	To investigate the status of students with intensive needs in inclusive education systems.	Students with severe physical, intellectual, developmental, mental, or emotional challenges face significant academic, communication, or behavioral difficulties across domains.
12	Patel, H., & Vaghrodia, S. (2022)	Impact of Inclusion on Social and Academic Development of Children with Special Needs	USA	To review the literature on the impact of inclusion on the academic and social outcomes of children with special needs.	Inclusive education benefits both children with and without special needs by supporting social and academic growth through interactive methods like role-play and group discussions.
13	Kart & Kart (2021)	Academic and Social Effects of Inclusion on Students without Disabilities	Switzerland	To investigate the effects of inclusion for students with special needs and typically developing students.	The effects of inclusion on typically developing students are mixed, with more studies reporting positive or neutral impacts. Negative effects, when present, are generally small and not significant. School-based factors, such as inadequate teacher training, lack of leadership, and low expectations, appear to have a stronger influence on outcomes than

					inclusion.
14	Riester-Wood, T. (2015)	Peers Supporting an Inclusive School Climate	USA	To explore peer support in fostering an inclusive school climate.	Peer support strategies like collaborative learning, cross-age support, and peer modeling promote academic success and social skill development. Effective implementation aligns with lesson goals.
15	Rosa, L. R., & Menezes, A. B. (2019)	Educational inclusion and social interaction: A literature review	Brazil	To perform a literature review of Brazilian articles on educational inclusion and social interactions involving children with disabilities.	Interaction between disabled children and peers was rare, with faculty exhibiting distrust in their abilities. The need for empirical intervention studies was highlighted.
16	Sasikala, G., & Swarnakumari, P. (2020)	The Impact of Inclusive Education on Children with Mild Intellectual Disability in Promoting Social Skills and Peer Positive Attitudes in Trichy District	India	To analyze social skills among children with mild intellectual disabilities and the attitudes of peers and parents toward them.	Children with mild intellectual disabilities face challenges in social skills but benefit from inclusive education, which promotes social interaction, growth, and empathy among peers.
17	Zidlicky, M. L. (2022)	Importance of Inclusion for Special Education Students in General Education Classrooms	USA	This literature review aims to inform inclusive education and why it is crucial for all students.	Studies revealed that inclusive classrooms help students with disabilities learn from their peers without disabilities, improving cognition, communication, and motor skills. Teamwork between parents, educators, and officials is essential for success.
18	Wood, T. L. (2019)	Impacts of Inclusion on the Academic and Social-emotional Skills of Students with Special Education Needs	USA	To explore the impacts of inclusion on the academic and social-emotional skills of students with special education needs.	Inclusion provides academic and social-emotional benefits, but its implementation is challenging. Success depends on tailored instruction and support for individual strengths and needs.
19	Worth Paton, T. K. (2017)	Examining Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities in a Higher Education Setting	USA	To examine the lived experiences of postsecondary students with disabilities receiving academic accommodations.	Students report varying experiences with accommodations, with positive peer support and personalized accommodations fostering success. Teacher training on person-centered accommodations is essential.

#### A. Benefits of Inclusive Education

Incorporating inclusive education has many benefits, especially for students with high-incidence disabilities. This allows the student to have more opportunities to interact with their peers, therefore fostering their social and emotional development. It offers more opportunities for these students to interact with their peers, fostering their social and emotional development. Research by Monteverde et al. (2023) and Patel and Vaghordia(2017) shows that students within inclusive environments develop better acceptance and tolerance towards peers with disabilities, thereby contributing towards a more supportive, respectful school climate. Moreover, Zidlicky (2022) maintains that inclusive classrooms enhance learning and development among

children with disabilities. Through such social interaction with peers, students learn from one another—consequently, the social and cognitive development of the latter benefits from it. Inclusive education offers several advantages to students with SEN, including improved access to the general curriculum, enhanced student engagement, better academic and functional skill performance, and positive social and behavioral outcomes (Naeemy & Yoneda, 2024).

Many studies report that inclusive education fosters positive social relationships between students with and without disabilities. For example, teachers in Saudi Arabia observed generally positive interactions, emphasizing the importance of social relationships (Basmah, 2022), while



peer relationships in Croatia reduce loneliness and increase empathy (Krampač et al., 2018). Peer support arrangements in the USA have also improved social connections and communication skills (Carter et al., 2015). Although the effects of inclusion on typically developing children may vary, many research studies suggest that inclusion usually brings about positive outcomes for them. For instance, studies conducted in Switzerland and the USA reveal that typically developing children benefit in social and emotional development, with some reporting improved empathy (Kart & Kart, 2021; Worth Paton, 2017).

### *B. Challenges in Inclusive Education*

While inclusive education offers significant benefits, it also presents challenges that cannot be overlooked. Bullying, for example, has been seen to occur more frequently in inclusive education, given researches held in the UAE and Nigeria. Exclusion makes them even more vulnerable to bullying (Abdullah, 2023; Cruz, 2024). Another major hurdle is the lack of teacher training and preparedness. Teachers often need more professional development to detect and eliminate bullying, accommodate different needs for learning, and support inclusive practices (Abdullah, 2023; Erikson et al., 2015). Similarly, low leadership and high demands from the school administration may affect the success of inclusive practices (Kart & Kart, 2021).

Monteverde et al. (2023) study in one of the regions, like the Philippines, revealed while peers may attempt to communicate with students with disabilities, they lack the necessary communication skills to bridge the relationship gap effectively, leading to limited social integration. Students with severe physical, intellectual, or emotional challenges face significant academic, communication, and behavioral difficulties within inclusive settings, which may require more tailored support (Naeemy & Yoneda, 2024). In some contexts, particularly in Brazil, students with disabilities experience limited interaction with peers, and teachers often display distrust in their abilities, which hinders the effectiveness of inclusive education (Rosa & Menezes, 2019).

### *C. Students with Disabilities' Perception of Their Academic Development in Inclusive Classroom Settings*

Students with disabilities often perceive their academic growth in inclusive classroom settings in positive and challenging ways. On one hand, many report experiencing significant social and academic benefits. Inclusive classrooms, where they interact with their non-disabled peers, provide meaningful relationships and growth opportunities. For instance, studies have shown that these interactions foster friendships and a stronger sense of belonging.

Peer support arrangements, such as collaborative learning and peer modeling, have been particularly effective in helping students with disabilities engage more actively in their education. These strategies allow students with

disabilities to improve their social and communication skills, reduce reliance on additional support, and become more involved in classroom activities. Moreover, the acceptance and encouragement from peers and teachers help create a supportive environment that enhances their academic motivation and confidence (Carter et al., 2015; Krampač & Kolak, 2018).

However, despite these positive experiences, students with disabilities also encounter challenges that can hinder their academic growth. For example, deaf students in some inclusive classrooms report feeling dissatisfied with the teaching methodologies used, especially when teachers lack the skills to communicate effectively in sign language. The absence of knowledgeable interpreters further compounds the issue, making it difficult for these students to access the curriculum fully. Similarly, students with mild intellectual disabilities often struggle with developing social skills at the same pace as their non-disabled peers, which can lead to feelings of isolation or frustration. These students need more proactive involvement from teachers to promote social interactions and inclusion (Abdullah, 2023; Sasikala & Swarnakumari, 2020).

While the inclusive classroom setting offers many benefits, students' experiences with disabilities can vary widely depending on the level of support and adaptation provided. Effective inclusion requires ongoing teacher training, appropriate teaching strategies, and continuous efforts to foster an environment where all students can thrive, both

### *D. Social Impacts of Inclusion on Students with Disabilities, particularly regarding Peer Relationships and Social Skills*

Inclusion has a significant positive impact on the social development of students with disabilities, especially regarding their peer relationships and social skills. For example, Carter et al. (2015) found that peer support arrangements in inclusive classrooms help promote social connections and improve social and communication skills. This leads to better social interactions with peers. Basmah (2022) highlighted that teacher observed generally positive interactions between students with and without disabilities, and Krampač et al. (2018) found that positive peer relationships reduce loneliness and enhance social competence. Sasikala and Swarnakumari (2020) also noted that inclusive education helps students with mild intellectual disabilities improve social skills and fosters positive attitudes toward them from their peers. However, it is important to recognize that some students with disabilities may still face challenges in social interactions, and better communication skills among peers are needed to close the relationship gap (Monteverde et al., 2023). The study in the Philippines by Monteverde et al. (2023) reports that peers tend to communicate more effectively with learners with disabilities (LWDs) once they understand the best way to interact.

Moreover, the social interactions fostered by educational inclusion initiatives and the overall school experiences of impaired students are vitally important. The frequency and quality of social contact between children with or without impairments can indicate the level of educational inclusion in a given institution or, worded differently, the degree to which handicapped children are included in a specific context (Dias et al., 2016; Santo & Santos, 2016).

It is important to understand how children with and without disabilities interact in general education and which interventions effectively promote these interactions. Moreover, students with disabilities can build friendships when given the right skills, so excluding students from groups does not support their academic or social development (Holt et al., 2017). Additionally, in the research conducted by Lal (2005), interaction with peers is another dimension of children's social development that becomes increasingly important for a school-going child with autism. Strain (18) found play organizers (e.g. initiating play ideas, sharing, affection, helping others, etc.) and response to peer social bids as skills that influence the development of peer interaction.

#### *E. Role of Peer Interactions Play in the Academic and Social Development of Students with Disabilities in Inclusive Classrooms*

Peer interactions are crucial in the academic and social development of students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. Positive peer relationships contribute to a range of academic and social benefits. For example, Patel and Vaghrodia (2022) noted that inclusive education promotes academic and social growth through interactive methods like group discussions and role-play, which rely on peer collaboration. Peer support arrangements, such as those explored by Carter et al. (2015), also help reduce dependence on paraprofessionals, promote social connections, and enhance personal growth. Furthermore, Krampač et al. (2018) emphasized that friendships in inclusive classrooms help reduce loneliness and bullying, promoting a sense of belonging and improving social competence and empathy for students with and without disabilities. However, Monteverde et al. (2023) indicated that despite efforts, communication barriers can still exist, requiring further improvement in peer communication skills to strengthen these interactions.

### **III. LIMITATIONS**

Though extensive, the literature on inclusive education is marked by several limitations that impact the generalizability and depth of the findings. One key limitation is the geographical and cultural context in which studies are conducted. Research from countries like the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and India may not fully apply to other regions with different educational systems, societal attitudes, and resource availability. Additionally, many studies rely on small sample sizes, particularly those focused on specific disabilities or educational settings, which reduces the generalizability of the

results to broader populations. Furthermore, the studies exhibit methodological diversity, with some using qualitative approaches, others quantitative, and still others mixed methods, making it difficult to draw consistent conclusions across different research designs.

Another limitation is the inconsistent definitions and inclusion measures, which vary widely across studies. Some focus on social integration, others on academic achievement, and some on emotional outcomes, leading to a fragmented understanding of what constitutes successful inclusion. While some studies highlight positive impacts on students with disabilities, others reveal persistent challenges such as bullying and inadequate teacher training, suggesting that the implementation of inclusive practices may not always be effective. Moreover, most studies emphasize short-term outcomes, leaving a gap in our understanding of the long-term effects of inclusion on academic and social outcomes. Lastly, many studies focus on specific types of disabilities or students in particular educational stages, such as higher education or students with intellectual disabilities, which limits the broader applicability of the findings. These limitations underscore the need for more comprehensive, longitudinal research with consistent definitions and diverse populations to capture the complexity of inclusive education.

### **IV. CONCLUSION**

This systematic literature review reveals that when implemented effectively, inclusive education can provide significant academic and social benefits for students with disabilities and their typically developing peers. Across the studies reviewed, several key themes emerge regarding the impact of inclusion on academic development, social skills, peer relationships, and the roles of teachers and peers in fostering an inclusive environment.

Inclusive education supports the academic growth of students with disabilities, enhancing their cognitive, communication, and motor skills. Successful inclusion is contingent upon adopting individualized teaching practices and support tailored to each student's needs. Effective instructional strategies and collaborative learning opportunities allow students with disabilities to learn alongside their peers without disabilities, improving academic outcomes. It is clear and vital in creating a more equitable and supportive learning environment for all students.

Inclusion fosters the development of social skills among students with disabilities. Peer support arrangements promote positive social connections, improve communication skills, and reduce social isolation and bullying. However, challenges remain in ensuring that students with disabilities fully engage with their peers, particularly when communication barriers persist. Anti-bullying interventions

and strategies to improve peer communication are essential to addressing these challenges.

Teachers play a critical role in facilitating inclusive classrooms. Implementing inclusive teaching practices directly influences students' perceptions of academic, social, and emotional inclusion. Teacher training and professional development are pivotal in equipping educators with the skills and knowledge to support students with diverse needs. A key factor for success is the ability of teachers to tailor their approaches to meet the individualized needs of students with disabilities, fostering an inclusive climate that benefits all students.

Peer support strategies, such as collaborative learning and cross-age support, are instrumental in promoting a positive school climate where students with and without disabilities can learn and interact in a supportive, non-discriminatory environment. Peer relationships reduce loneliness and social exclusion and increase student empathy and understanding.

Despite the positive outcomes of inclusion, several barriers remain. Students with intensive needs face significant academic, social, and behavioral challenges that hinder their full participation in inclusive classrooms. Additionally, bullying continues to be a pervasive issue, particularly for students with disabilities and requires targeted interventions to promote resilience and self-efficacy. Communication barriers between students with disabilities and their peers also limit the potential for meaningful social interactions, highlighting the need for better communication skills and more inclusive practices.

The benefits of inclusive education extend beyond students with disabilities. Typically developing students also experience positive academic and social outcomes, such as enhanced empathy and improved social competence. While some studies report small negative effects, these are generally outweighed by the overall benefits of inclusion, particularly when the classroom environment is conducive to the needs of all students.

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