

BARRIERS TO ADDRESSING SOCIAL COMMUNICATION NEEDS IN INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS: THE ROLE OF TEACHER PREPAREDNESS AND INTERPROFESSIONAL COLLABORATION

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Abstract

Inclusive education is widely recognized in contemporary educational systems as a mechanism to provide equal learning opportunities for all students, including those with social communication needs. However, despite the advancement of inclusive educational policies, implementation remains imperfect, with many students experiencing learning barriers due to social communication difficulties. This narrative literature review examines challenges in supporting children with social communication disorders, focusing on teacher preparedness and interprofessional collaboration. The review reveals that while teachers generally endorse inclusion principles, they perceive insufficient readiness to support autistic students' social and communicational difficulties. Additionally, professional collaboration is essential yet constrained by multiple barriers. Key findings indicate that teacher training lacks practical application, structural factors hinder inclusion, and gaps exist between policy intentions and classroom practice. The review concludes that developing teacher readiness and strengthening interprofessional collaboration require systemic organizational changes.

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has emerged as a critical global objective over the past several decades. Inclusion represents a transition from excluding students with disabilities to integrating them into mainstream classrooms, emphasizing participation and equity. The Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 2020) asserts that inclusive schools represent the sole solution for combating discrimination and ensuring equal opportunities for diverse students. Ainscow (2020) further argues that inclusive practice extends beyond merely placing students in regular lessons; it constitutes an ongoing process of eliminating educational barriers. Consequently, education systems must implement necessary modifications to provide adequate learning and participation environments for all learner types. The OECD (2025) emphasizes that learning requires support for learners' motivation, skills,

and resources, particularly during critical periods such as early childhood, adolescence, mid-career, and near-retirement.

Various research indicates that many teachers struggle to identify effective approaches for supporting students with social communication needs. Lewis and Stojanovik (2024) found that teachers recognize distinctions in social communication but lack appropriate skills to serve these learners due to insufficient training. Lundqvist (2025) reported that preschool teachers experience inclusion challenges because they must manage complex demands, including facilitating communication, adapting teaching materials and activities, and reducing reliance on separate therapy sessions. Butterworth, Rakap, and Gülboy (2025) discovered that although inclusion can create accommodating environments, it often lacks adequate teaching approaches. These

findings demonstrate that teacher preparedness and professional collaboration play crucial roles in inclusive education for students with social communication needs.

The Need for Social Communication Within Inclusive Education

Social communication skills among diverse learners represent an often-overlooked area of need. This requirement differs from vocabulary, grammatical competence, or syntax because it addresses social language usage issues. Common examples include initiating conversations, interpreting humor, adhering to conversational conventions, comprehending nonverbal cues, reading facial expressions, and understanding vocal tones.

Lewis and Stojanovik (2024) noted that teachers frequently fail to fully understand implications of social communication needs. For instance, reluctance to maintain eye contact or engage in conversation may be misconstrued as disinterest or poor motivation. Similarly, literal instruction-taking or excessive social talk might be interpreted as misbehavior. Such misconceptions can lead to inappropriate teaching strategies and reduced academic expectations, negatively affecting learners' education.

Social communication needs exhibit significant variability between individual cases and contexts. Some students demonstrate excellent vocabulary and grammar yet fail to use language socially. Others communicate proficiently in specific contexts but struggle in group discussions. Lundqvist (2025) emphasized that insufficient qualified staff represents a major impediment to inclusive education, particularly regarding fostering communication skills in preschool settings.

Encouraging communication is essential for providing inclusive education. When social communication challenges are viewed solely as individual child issues, students are likely withdrawn from regular lessons for separate assistance. However, when problems are interpreted as products of interaction between the child and their environment, emphasis shifts toward enhancing classroom communication,

modifying instruction approaches, and educating other children about effective interaction.

Methodology

This narrative review employed a qualitative synthesis approach to examine existing literature on barriers to addressing social communication needs in inclusive classrooms, with particular focus on teacher preparedness and interprofessional collaboration.

Search Strategy: Literature was identified through systematic examination of peer-reviewed journal articles, policy documents, and academic reports published between 2020 and 2025. However, seminal texts such as the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), which play an important role in the history of inclusive education, were included as well. Sources were selected based on relevance to inclusive education, social communication disorders, teacher training, and professional collaboration.

Selection Criteria: Included sources met the following criteria: (1) focused on inclusive education contexts, (2) addressed social communication needs or disorders, (3) examined teacher attitudes, preparedness, or collaboration, and (4) provided empirical data or comprehensive analysis.

Synthesis Approach: Data were synthesized through thematic analysis, organizing findings into categories related to teacher preparedness, structural factors, collaboration barriers, attitudes, leadership support, and policy-practice gaps. This approach enabled identification of interconnected barriers and potential solutions.

Interconnected Nature of Inclusion Barriers

Findings demonstrate that factors hindering inclusion processes exhibit interrelated characteristics. Teacher preparedness, classroom climate, collaboration, and systemic factors are interconnected and collectively impact the inclusion process. This interconnectedness indicates that no singular solution exists for supporting learners' social communication skills.

Teacher Preparedness as a Critical Factor

Teacher preparedness represents one of the most critical determinants of successful inclusion. This factor influences how teachers plan lessons, support learners, interact with specialists, and manage classroom challenges. Most teachers lack necessary knowledge regarding communicative skills development, teaching strategies for diverse learners, and evidence-based interventions. Teacher attitudes and readiness are influenced by training quality, experience, and contextual factors.

Diseth (2025) found that teachers competent in class management, learner interaction, and employing diverse pedagogical methods demonstrate greater inclination toward inclusion. Confident teachers adapt pedagogical styles based on learner-centered beliefs. However, numerous teachers commence their professional journey inadequately prepared, particularly for accommodating communication needs. Selisko, Eckert, and Perels (2024) reported diverse attitudes among student teachers regarding inclusion, with some embracing the concept while others advocate conventional or segregated practices. Consequently, teacher training processes do not equip all teachers equally for inclusive education.

Lewis and Stojanovik (2024) revealed that teacher awareness levels concerning autism positively contributed to attitudes toward learners' conditions, though training hours had no effect on attitudes toward inclusive teaching. Teachers reported training was impractical, focusing on general information rather than specific classroom skills. Participants preferred learning from experienced educators and experts.

Teacher readiness also affects well-being. Teachers instructing students with communication disorders experience anxiety, uncertainty, and diminished self-confidence, potentially resulting in long-term stress and burnout when assistance is unavailable. Ranbir (2024) noted that Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) serve as essential intervention planning instruments but remain effective only when teachers know how to apply them in classroom settings; otherwise, IEPs become mere formalities.

Structural and Classroom Factors Hindering Inclusion

Structural aspects of inclusion in special education include class size, student-to-teacher ratios, resource availability, and specialist personnel access. These aspects significantly affect educators' ability to cater to students with communication problems.

Butterworth et al. (2025) discovered that inclusive classroom quality depends not only on operational elements (educator qualifications, physical arrangements) but also on day-to-day teacher-student interactions. Classrooms operating on inclusiveness principles typically demonstrate good emotional climate and organization. However, instructional aspects—including performance feedback and communication skill support—remain quite poor.

Lundqvist (2025) outlined multiple difficulties for preschool teachers in inclusive environments: helping children develop communication skills, organizing classroom activities, and decreasing demands for additional treatment. Some preschoolers do not use verbal communication, creating difficulties for teachers and proving the mismatch between needs and teacher capabilities. Resource inadequacy represents another critical obstacle. The National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance (2022) stated that inclusion involves accessing various learning activities, removing physical obstacles, and employing diverse pedagogical approaches. Professional development for preschool teachers and collaboration among teachers, parents, and specialists from other fields are required.

Physical classroom characteristics also affect child participation. Lundqvist (2025) noted that adaptation to inclusive education requires modification of classroom facilities, materials, and group organization.

Interprofessional Collaboration Challenges and Benefits

Collaboration between teachers and speech-language therapists plays a pivotal role in assisting children with communication problems in inclusive classes. Each specialist possesses unique competencies that can be effectively utilized

collaboratively to achieve superior results compared to separate work.

Glover et al. (2015) reported that both professionals recognize the necessity for joint activities and see career benefits. Teachers noted that exchanging experience and information with therapists helped accurately identify student needs, whereas therapists believed their educational process involvement was crucial.

Schnepel et al. (2025) indicated that teacher cooperation associates with inclusive education. Teachers satisfied with collaborative practices interact regularly and engage in more productive communication. Ideal collaboration includes information exchange, planning sessions, and developing common goals and roles.

However, collaboration implementation presents difficulties. Glover et al. (2015) identified barriers including time scarcity and insufficient speech-language therapist numbers. Participants reported inability to find adequate time for lesson discussion and planning. Organizational barriers exist since teachers and therapists operate within various systems.

Insufficient collaboration produces negative student consequences. Glover et al. (2015) reported that children often waited considerable time for intervention services while teachers and therapists experienced frustration due to insufficient funding and staff lack. Solving these problems requires teacher-therapist collaboration inside classrooms during educational activities.

Teacher Attitudes, Beliefs, and Emotions

Teacher attitudes toward inclusive education significantly predict implementation success. Diseth (2025) found direct correlation between positive inclusion attitudes and self-efficacy plus optimism regarding students' difficulties, skills, and achievements. Teachers with positive inclusion attitudes demonstrate high self-efficacy and focus on identifying student skills and abilities rather than problems. Teachers believing in their competence for class management, student motivation, and applying diverse teaching techniques were more likely to promote inclusive education.

Attitude variation exists among teachers. Selisko et al. (2024) reported significant differences in student teachers' inclusion attitudes. Some approved inclusive education concepts and flexible teaching approaches, while others preferred traditional methods and lacked enthusiasm for integrating students with disabilities into regular programs. Thus, teacher attitudes reflect pedagogical philosophy.

Attitude dependency on teacher experiences is notable. Positive inclusive teaching experiences enhance positive attitudes, whereas negative experiences without adequate support generate frustration and hostility. Attitudes are dynamic, evolving based on support types and teaching experiences.

Emotional aspects of inclusion teaching cannot be ignored. Lewis and Stojanovik (2024) found many teachers struggled with self-confidence due to insufficient preparation for assisting socially disadvantaged children. Teachers believed lack of experience resulted from general professional training paying little attention to autism. Practical methods preference over formal sessions became apparent.

Constant stress and uncertainty may impact teachers' personal well-being. Without adequate support, teachers may suffer burnout or fail to employ inclusive approaches. Conversely, adequate preparation and encouragement enable teacher motivation. Both professional and psychological aspects must be considered when addressing inclusion.

Leadership and Organizational Support Roles

Leadership plays significant importance in inclusion processes. School leaders (principals, administrators) greatly influence school climate, resource allocation, decision-making processes, and other inclusion-enabling issues. Leader attitudes toward inclusive values determine whether these values are respected and whether inclusion practices are effectively used.

Balikci et al. (2025) found most administrators believe in inclusion significance and support it. However, they experience difficulties related to insufficient training, resource lack, and inability to accommodate student diversity through existing

structures. Administrator roles vary: some adopt proactive leadership directing teacher activities toward greater inclusiveness, while others play passive roles dealing with management issues rather than promoting inclusion.

Effective leaders create learning and growth opportunities for teachers. Those offering training attendance chances, promoting reflection, and helping teachers gain new skills contribute to effective inclusion. Leaders can also influence collaborative school climate development by fostering teacher-specialist cooperation, including speech-language therapists.

Leadership impacts teacher collaboration. Schnepel et al. (2025) found positive inclusion attitudes lead to greater collaboration satisfaction, resulting in more collaboration and effective inclusion. Fostering teacher collaboration requires leaders to create joint planning opportunities, clarify roles, and foster communication.

Institutional support entails leadership plus resource provision and supportive structures. With sufficient staffing, equipment, and specialist services, educators better attend to diverse student needs. Leadership and institutional support foster environments where inclusive education is practiced more successfully and sustained over time.

Gaps Between Policy and Practice

Despite numerous supportive international inclusive education policies, the intention-practice gap remains noticeable. This demonstrates educational reform implementation challenges due to multiple aspects requiring consideration in educational processes and changes.

Ainscow (2020) states that improving inclusion and equity requires broad changes demanding efforts from teachers and school administrators. Five core components facilitate policy-to-practice implementation: (1) achieving coherent inclusion and equity vision; (2) collecting evidence on existing practices' impact on children's presence, participation, and achievements; (3) supporting teachers in inclusive practice work; (4) leading education departments with strong inclusion and equity beliefs; and (5) developing inclusive policies

informed by all affected parties, including children.

The OECD (2025) highlights that policy support requires effective assistance, particularly regarding teacher preparation, training, and equitable resource allocation. The report reveals policies concentrate more on resources and structures rather than motivation and attitudes.

Lundqvist (2025) demonstrates this problem through Sweden's preschool inclusion emphasis. Despite policy emphasis, staff implementing strategies faced multiple challenges including difficulty promoting child communication, peer relations, and minimizing separate support service use. Policy and strategy availability alone cannot ensure implementation success. Additional educator support for translating educational concepts into practice becomes essential.

Discussion

From the findings above, it can be observed that the factors hindering the inclusion process have an interrelated nature. The preparedness of the teacher, classroom climate, collaboration, and other system factors are interconnected and impact the inclusion process. This fact means that there is not a singular solution to the problem of supporting learners' social communication skills because the factors are interconnected.

Teacher preparedness appears to be one of the critical factors determining successful inclusion processes. This factor determines how a teacher plans lessons, supports learners, interacts with specialists, and deals with challenges emerging during lessons. Most of the teachers lack necessary knowledge concerning communicative skills development, teaching and working with diverse learners, among others. The attitude and readiness of a teacher are influenced by training, experience, and other factors.

Collaboration between professionals constitutes another significant dimension. Cooperation with other experts, for example, speech-language pathologists, provides teachers with additional insights into the characteristics of their students and allows applying necessary techniques during classes. At the same time, it contributes to students' usage of their communication skills

outside the classroom setting. However, the problem of ineffective cooperation is caused by lack of time and role confusion, as well as the difference between health and education sectors. Effective change implies not only allocating enough time for planning and working together but also developing a new perception of collaboration that will view it as an essential element of teaching.

As far as system level factors go, it is worth mentioning leadership support, resource availability, and policy implementation. To overcome problems associated with this category of obstacles, it is critical to commit to implementing inclusive strategies and allocating sufficient funds for supporting teachers.

Scope of Studies

This narrative review highlights the main issues facing the development of practices that address the social communication needs of children within an inclusive educational setting, emphasizing the issue of teacher readiness and interprofessional collaboration. In this regard, this review discusses how teacher knowledge, teacher attitude, emotional experience, and structural and institutional issues influence inclusion. This review is based on empirical literature, systematic reviews, and policy-related reports, rather than intervention effectiveness.

Limitations

Several limitations constrain this review's scope:

Geographical limitations: Most empirical studies focus on European contexts, particularly Sweden, with limited representation from Asian, African, or South American regions.

Methodological diversity: The review includes both empirical studies and policy documents, but systematic reviews dominate recent literature, potentially limiting primary data representation.

Specific focus: The review concentrates on social communication needs, particularly autism, potentially overlooking other communication disorders or disability types.

Collaboration scope: Focus primarily on teacher-speech-language therapist collaboration, with limited examination of other professional

partnerships (psychologists, occupational therapists, parents).

Generalizability

Findings may be most applicable to:

- Early childhood and preschool inclusive education settings
- Contexts with similar policy frameworks to Salamanca Statement countries
- Educational systems attempting to integrate students with autism and social communication disorders
- Settings where interprofessional collaboration between education and health sectors is attempted

Conclusion

Facilitating social communication needs of students in inclusive classrooms requires addressing multiple interconnected factors. This review demonstrates that inclusion extends beyond mainstream classroom placement and positive attitudes. Effective inclusive processes require teachers to possess knowledge, skills, experience, and specialist support.

Schools must ensure all necessary conditions including resources, administrative support, and professional development. Greater alignment between policy and classroom practice is essential for providing necessary teacher support.

The review identifies teacher readiness and interprofessional collaboration as priority development areas. Teacher training enhancement, professional development investment, and collaboration mechanism creation between teachers and speech-language pathologists are vital components. However, organizational-level changes are necessary for achieving these improvements.

Communication issues cannot be overlooked as they are fundamental to ensuring learning and participation. Inclusive classrooms recognize communication significance for establishing relationships and self-expression. Systemic changes addressing teacher preparedness, collaboration barriers, structural factors, and policy-practice gaps will enable more effective

inclusive education for students with social communication needs.

Future research should examine:

- Longitudinal effects of enhanced teacher training on inclusion outcomes
- Innovative collaboration models between education and health sectors
- Cultural variations in inclusion implementation across geographical contexts
- Technology-assisted interventions for supporting social communication in inclusive settings
- Administrator training effectiveness for promoting inclusive leadership

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