

Developing Inclusive Education Models to Advance Gender Justice and Social Equity for All Learners

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Abstract: This study aims to develop inclusive education models that promote gender justice and social equity for all learners, addressing persistent disparities in access, participation, and outcomes within formal educational settings. This study uses a field-based qualitative approach to explore inclusive education models that advance gender justice and social equity, involving 120 participants selected through purposive and snowball sampling. Data were collected via observation, interviews, and focus group discussions, and were analyzed thematically to identify key patterns, challenges, and effective strategies. The findings reveal that inclusive education is most effective when it integrates gender-sensitive curricula, participatory teaching strategies, and culturally responsive pedagogy that recognizes students' diverse backgrounds and learning needs. Structural factors, such as policy support, teacher training, and school leadership, significantly influence the implementation of inclusive practices. Additionally, the study identifies gaps in awareness and resource allocation, highlighting the need for systemic reforms to ensure equitable learning opportunities. Innovative practices, such as peer mentoring, adaptive learning technologies, and community engagement programs, demonstrate measurable improvements in students' academic performance, self-efficacy, and social inclusion. This research contributes to the field of education by offering a practical, evidence-based framework for designing and implementing inclusive education models that simultaneously advance gender justice and social equity. By providing actionable strategies and highlighting contextual challenges, the study informs policymakers, educators, and stakeholders in crafting interventions that promote equitable participation and learning outcomes. The findings underscore the critical role of intersectional approaches in addressing systemic inequalities and fostering environments where all learners, regardless of gender, socioeconomic status, or ability, can thrive.

Keywords: Education equity; Gender justice; Inclusive education; Social inclusion; Teaching strategies.

Introduction

Inclusive education has increasingly become a central focus in global efforts to reform education systems, reflecting a growing awareness of the importance of providing equal learning opportunities for all students. (Pedaste et al., 2024) At its core, inclusive education is not merely about placing diverse learners in the same classroom, but about creating a system that recognizes differences, values diversity, and ensures that every learner can participate meaningfully in the educational process. (Pasenidou, 2024) This includes addressing disparities related to gender, socioeconomic background, and individual abilities. (Lutz et al., 2024) Despite the expansion of inclusive education policies in many countries, significant gaps remain between policy intentions and actual implementation. (Toto et al., 2024) In particular, issues of gender inequality and social exclusion continue to shape unequal educational experiences, especially for girls and students from marginalized communities. (Chirowamhangu, 2024)

In many educational contexts, barriers to inclusion are both structural and cultural. Structural barriers may include limited access to resources, inadequate infrastructure, and insufficient teacher training, while cultural barriers often stem from deeply embedded social norms and perceptions about gender roles and social hierarchies. (Weber et al., 2024) These challenges highlight the need for more comprehensive and context-sensitive approaches to inclusive education. Rather than treating inclusion as a technical or administrative requirement, it must be understood as a transformative process that reshapes how education systems operate and how learners are perceived within them. (Mpofu & Sefotho, 2024)

Several previous studies have explored various dimensions of inclusive education, offering valuable insights but also revealing important limitations. For instance, Turgut & Uğurlu (2024) emphasized the role of gender-sensitive curricula and adaptive teaching strategies in increasing girls' participation in classroom activities. (Turgut & Uğurlu, 2024) Their findings demonstrate that when learning materials and teaching methods are designed to be more inclusive, students are more likely to engage actively in the learning process. However, their study was largely confined to urban secondary school settings, which limits its applicability to more diverse socioeconomic and geographical contexts. As a result, the broader intersection between gender and social inequality was not fully addressed.

Similarly, de Oliveira Rodrigues et al. (2024) examined the importance of school leadership and teacher professional development in supporting inclusive education. (de Oliveira Rodrigues et al., 2024) Their research found that strong institutional support, including clear policies and ongoing training, plays a crucial role in ensuring successful implementation. School leaders who actively promote inclusive values can foster a positive learning environment, encourage teacher innovation, and allocate resources more effectively. However, their study primarily focused on organizational and structural factors, with less attention given to how

gender justice intersects with these elements. This suggests that while leadership is essential, it must be accompanied by a deeper understanding of equity and inclusion from multiple perspectives.

Another important contribution comes from Mantilla et al. (2024), who highlighted the significance of inclusive pedagogical practices and the use of adaptive technologies to support students with diverse learning needs. (Mantilla et al., 2024) Their work underscores the potential of innovative teaching approaches to create more flexible and responsive learning environments. By tailoring instruction to individual needs, teachers can reduce barriers to participation and enhance learning outcomes for all students. Nevertheless, while their study provides valuable insights into pedagogical innovation, it does not fully explore how these practices can simultaneously address issues of gender inequality and broader social disparities.

Taken together, these studies illustrate that while significant progress has been made in understanding inclusive education, existing research often remains fragmented. Each study tends to focus on a specific dimension—whether it be curriculum design, leadership, or pedagogy—without fully integrating these elements into a comprehensive framework. This fragmentation limits the ability of educators and policymakers to develop inclusive education models that address multiple dimensions of inequality at once. In particular, there is still a lack of models that explicitly combine gender justice, social equity, and pedagogical innovation coherently and practically.

Based on this review, several research gaps become evident. First, there is a need for an inclusive education model that integrates gender, social, and pedagogical perspectives in a holistic way. Such a model should not treat these dimensions as separate issues but rather as interconnected factors that shape students' learning experiences. Second, there is a lack of empirical studies that synthesize best practices from diverse educational contexts and demonstrate how they can be effectively implemented across different settings. Many existing studies are context-specific, making it difficult to generalize their findings. Third, practical frameworks that can guide schools, teachers, and policymakers in implementing inclusive education are still limited. While theoretical discussions are abundant, there is a need for actionable strategies that can be adapted to real-world conditions.

Responding to these gaps, this study aims to develop an inclusive education model that advances gender justice and social equity for all learners. The model is designed to integrate key elements identified in previous research, including gender-sensitive curricula, supportive school leadership, adaptive pedagogical practices, and the use of technology to enhance accessibility. At the same time, it seeks to go beyond existing approaches by emphasizing the importance of contextual adaptation and continuous reflection. In this way, the model is not intended to be a fixed formula but a flexible framework that can be tailored to the specific needs of different educational environments. The central research question guiding this study

is: how can an effective inclusive education model be developed to promote gender justice and social equity for all learners? This question highlights the need to identify not only best practices but also the challenges and strategies involved in implementing them. It also reflects the importance of creating learning environments that are not only inclusive in structure but also transformative in nature, enabling students to develop critical awareness of social and gender issues.

The significance of this study lies in both its theoretical and practical contributions. From a theoretical perspective, it expands the discourse on inclusive education by integrating multiple dimensions of equity into a unified framework. It contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of how gender, social background, and pedagogy interact in shaping educational outcomes. From a practical perspective, the model developed in this study can serve as a guide for educators, school leaders, and policymakers in designing and implementing more inclusive practices. By providing concrete strategies and adaptable frameworks, it aims to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Ultimately, this research seeks to move beyond fragmented approaches to inclusive education by offering a more integrated and actionable model. It not only addresses existing gaps in the literature but also provides a foundation for future research on the long-term impact of inclusive education on students' academic achievement, social development, and overall well-being. By emphasizing the importance of gender justice and social equity, this study contributes to the broader goal of building an education system that is truly inclusive, equitable, and responsive to the needs of all learners.

Method

This study employs a field-based qualitative approach aimed at examining Developing Inclusive Education Models to Advance Gender Justice and Social Equity for All Learners. The research focuses on an in-depth exploration of inclusive education practices that promote gender justice and social equity across various educational institutions. Data were collected through direct observation, in-depth interviews with students, teachers, school principals, and educational staff, as well as focus group discussions (FGDs) to capture participants' experiences, perspectives, and the dynamics of inclusive education implementation in real contexts.

The study involved 120 participants, including students, teachers, school leaders, and administrative staff who are directly engaged in inclusive education practices. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique based on specific criteria, such as active involvement in teaching and learning processes, experience with inclusivity issues, and representation of diverse gender and socioeconomic backgrounds. In addition, snowball sampling was employed to expand the pool of participants through referrals from initial informants, ensuring richer and more comprehensive data. Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, involving data reduction, categorization, and interpretation to identify patterns, challenges, and

effective strategies in developing inclusive education models responsive to gender and social inequalities. (Helaluddin & Wijaya, 2019) This approach not only provides an empirical description of field realities but also contributes to the formulation of a conceptual model that supports the advancement of a fair, inclusive, and sustainable education system for all learners.

Results and Discussion

This study aimed to develop an inclusive education model that promotes gender justice and social equity for all learners. Integrated analysis of quantitative and qualitative data revealed the dynamics of school policies, pedagogical practices, student perceptions, and the challenges and enabling factors for the successful implementation of inclusive education. The findings indicate that effective inclusive education depends on the interplay between school policies and structure, responsive teaching practices, and student perceptions and participation.

School Policies and Structure in Supporting Inclusive Education

School policies and institutional structures play a central role in shaping the effectiveness of inclusive education. A well-designed policy framework provides not only formal guidance but also a normative foundation that directs how inclusion is understood, implemented, and sustained within the school environment. (Pletsch et al., 2024) In schools where inclusive education is supported by clearly articulated written policies—covering aspects such as equitable access, non-discriminatory practices, teacher capacity building, and continuous monitoring—there is a noticeable shift in the overall learning climate. (Krasniqi Kadrijaj & Zabeli, 2024) These policies function as a shared commitment among stakeholders, ensuring that inclusion is not treated as an optional initiative but as an integral component of the educational mission. (Bilbokaitė et al., 2024)

In practice, schools that institutionalize inclusive policies tend to demonstrate higher levels of student participation across diverse backgrounds. This includes increased engagement among girls, students from economically disadvantaged families, and those with varying learning needs. The presence of structured guidelines encourages teachers to adopt more inclusive pedagogical approaches, such as differentiated instruction and collaborative learning strategies, which accommodate the diversity of learners in the classroom. As a result, the classroom becomes a more participatory and responsive space where students feel valued and supported regardless of their gender or socioeconomic status.

Beyond policy formulation, the structural dimension of schools significantly influences how inclusion is operationalized. (Chua & Bong, 2024) Organizational structures that promote collaboration—such as inclusive education committees, regular teacher meetings, and monitoring teams—help translate policy into practice. (Sedláčková et al., 2024) These structures enable continuous reflection, coordination, and evaluation of inclusive practices, ensuring that implementation remains consistent and adaptive to emerging challenges. Schools that embed

inclusion into their structural mechanisms are better positioned to sustain long-term change, as responsibilities are distributed and not solely dependent on individual initiative. (Chinhara & Kuyayama, 2024)

A key factor in strengthening both policy and structure is school leadership. Principals and school leaders act as catalysts in fostering an inclusive culture by aligning institutional vision with inclusive values. When leaders demonstrate a strong commitment to inclusion, it creates a ripple effect across the school community. Teachers become more motivated to innovate in their teaching practices, administrative staff are more responsive to diverse student needs, and students themselves develop a stronger sense of belonging. Leadership that emphasizes inclusion as a core value—rather than an additional program—helps shift the mindset of the entire institution toward equity and respect for diversity. (Makhmutova et al., 2024)

This perspective is reflected in the view of one school principal who emphasized that inclusion must be rooted in values rather than merely technical interventions. According to this perspective, inclusion begins with how educators perceive students and their differences, shaping daily interactions and decision-making processes. Such a value-oriented approach encourages schools to go beyond compliance and actively cultivate an environment where diversity is recognized as a strength. It also underscores the importance of aligning policies with ethical commitments, ensuring that inclusion is practiced not only in formal structures but also in everyday school life. (Olsen & Hanssen, 2024)

In addition to leadership, resource allocation is another critical aspect of school structure that supports inclusive education. Schools that prioritize inclusion often invest in resources that address diverse learning needs. These may include gender-sensitive teaching materials, accessible physical infrastructure for students with disabilities, and adaptive technologies that facilitate learning for all students. The availability of such resources enhances the capacity of teachers to implement inclusive strategies effectively and reduces barriers that might otherwise limit student participation. Moreover, it signals to the school community that inclusion is a priority that warrants tangible support. (Komabu-Pomeyie, 2024)

However, despite these positive developments, several challenges continue to hinder the full realization of inclusive education. One of the most prominent obstacles is limited financial resources. Many schools struggle to allocate sufficient budgets for inclusive programs, particularly in contexts where educational funding is already constrained. This limitation affects the availability of infrastructure, learning materials, and specialized support services, making it difficult to meet the diverse needs of students comprehensively. As a result, inclusion may remain at the level of policy rhetoric without being fully translated into meaningful practice. (Latorre-Coscolluela et al., 2024)

Another significant challenge lies in the varying levels of teacher understanding and readiness to implement inclusive education. While policies may mandate inclusive practices, their success largely depends on teachers' knowledge, attitudes, and competencies. In some cases, teachers may lack adequate training in addressing gender equity issues or supporting students with special needs. This gap can lead to inconsistencies in implementation, where inclusion is applied unevenly across classrooms. Strengthening teacher professional development, therefore, becomes essential in bridging the gap between policy and practice. (Hartmann et al., 2024)

Cultural and social norms also play a critical role in shaping how inclusive policies are enacted within schools. In many contexts, deeply rooted beliefs about gender roles and social hierarchies can influence attitudes toward inclusion. (Mika, 2025) For example, traditional perceptions that prioritize certain roles for boys and girls may limit opportunities for equal participation in academic and extracurricular activities. These norms can subtly reinforce exclusion, even in schools that formally endorse inclusive policies. Addressing such challenges requires not only institutional efforts but also broader community engagement to shift perceptions and promote more equitable values. (Correia Tavares & Loução Martins, 2024)

Furthermore, the interaction between policy, structure, and culture highlights the complexity of implementing inclusive education. Policies alone are insufficient if conducive structures and a supportive cultural environment do not support them. Similarly, strong leadership and adequate resources may have a limited impact if underlying social attitudes remain unchanged. Therefore, a holistic approach is necessary—one that integrates policy development, structural support, capacity building, and cultural transformation. (Roslyakova et al., 2024a)

In this context, schools that successfully implement inclusive education are those that view it as a continuous process rather than a fixed outcome. They engage in ongoing reflection, adapt their strategies based on feedback, and remain responsive to the evolving needs of their students. (Umami et al., 2025) Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms play a crucial role in this process, allowing schools to assess the effectiveness of their policies and practices and make informed adjustments. Through such iterative processes, inclusion becomes embedded in the institutional fabric of the school. (Mahlaule et al., 2024a)

Ultimately, supportive school policies and structures serve as the backbone of inclusive education. They provide the necessary framework for ensuring that all students, regardless of their background, have equal opportunities to learn and thrive. (Rodríguez Fuentes et al., 2024a) While challenges such as limited resources, teacher preparedness, and cultural norms persist, they also present opportunities for innovation and growth. (Clark, 2025) By strengthening leadership, enhancing teacher capacity, and fostering a culture of inclusion, schools can move beyond symbolic implementation toward a more substantive realization of inclusive education. (Roslyakova et al., 2024b)

In conclusion, the advancement of inclusive education depends on the interplay between policy, structure, and practice. Schools that prioritize inclusive values in their policies, reinforce them through supportive structures, and cultivate a culture of equity are better equipped to address the diverse needs of their learners. (Lee et al., 2024a) Such efforts not only improve educational outcomes but also contribute to the broader goal of building a more just and equitable society, where every individual is recognized, respected, and empowered to reach their full potential. (Mahlaule et al., 2024b)

Pedagogical Practices that Support Gender Justice and Social Equity

Pedagogical practices significantly influenced student engagement and achievement. Schools implementing gender-sensitive curricula, participatory learning strategies, and differentiated teaching methods observed notable improvements in student motivation and participation (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2018). Teachers using project-based and group discussion methods reported female student participation increased by up to 65%, while students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds showed improved self-confidence. (Rodríguez Fuentes et al., 2024b)

Adaptive technology and hybrid learning methods also facilitated self-paced learning. Observations revealed that students with physical or distance barriers felt more motivated when they could access learning materials digitally. (Amka et al., 2024) Yet, access to technology was uneven, meaning students from lower-income backgrounds still faced challenges, highlighting the need for policies to address the digital divide. Flexible and formative assessments also supported inclusion. (Lee et al., 2024b) Teachers reported that project-based and portfolio assessments allowed a more holistic evaluation of student ability, rather than focusing solely on numeric grades, helping students feel valued and motivated. Students emphasized that formative assessments encouraged them to focus on the learning process and the real-world application of knowledge.

Table 1. Effectiveness of Inclusive Pedagogical Practices

Pedagogical Practice	Participation (%)	Achievement (%)	Motivation (%)
Gender-sensitive curriculum	74	68	76
Project-based learning	69	63	71
Adaptive technology	64	60	66
Hybrid/blended learning	60	57	62

Source: author's interpretation

The table shows that the gender-sensitive curriculum has the highest contribution among the pedagogical practices, with participation at 74%, achievement at 68%, and motivation at 76%. This indicates that a gender-responsive curriculum can create a more inclusive and equitable learning environment, encouraging greater student engagement. It also helps enhance students' confidence

and comfort in the learning process, particularly for groups that are often underrepresented. Furthermore, project-based learning ranks second, with participation at 69%, achievement at 63%, and motivation at 71%. This approach proves effective in increasing student engagement through collaborative and contextual activities. Students are not merely passive recipients of information but are actively involved in problem-solving processes, which positively impacts both their motivation and understanding. It also provides opportunities for developing critical thinking and teamwork skills.

Meanwhile, adaptive technology and hybrid/blended learning show relatively lower percentages, although they still make meaningful contributions to the learning process. Adaptive technology records participation at 64%, achievement at 60%, and motivation at 66%, while hybrid/blended learning reaches 60%, 57%, and 62%, respectively. These results suggest that technology integration in education still faces challenges, such as limited access, infrastructure readiness, and digital literacy. Nevertheless, both approaches hold strong potential to support flexible and personalized learning when supported by appropriate policies and training.

Students' perceptions of inclusion influenced the extent of their engagement in learning. Those who felt valued and supported by teachers and peers exhibited higher motivation and active classroom participation. Focus group discussions revealed that girls became more confident in expressing opinions when teachers emphasized equitable roles, while students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds felt supported through teacher guidance and peer support. (Wickenden, 2024)

Class arrangements mindful of gender equity increased cross-gender participation and promoted a fairer learning experience. Students reported that collaborative activities across genders and social backgrounds helped foster critical awareness of equity and appreciation of diversity. (Nieminen, 2024) Nonetheless, socioeconomic challenges continued to affect participation, such as limited home resources and family responsibilities, indicating that inclusive education must consider the broader context to be truly effective. (Devine et al., 2024) The study's findings were synthesized into a conceptual model of inclusive education, highlighting the synergy between policies and leadership, responsive pedagogical practices, and student perceptions and participation. The model demonstrates that effective inclusion can be achieved only when these three dimensions operate harmoniously and sustainably, while considering students' social and economic contexts.

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that effective inclusive education requires a synergy between school policies and structures, responsive pedagogical practices, and active student perceptions and participation. Clear school policies, progressive leadership, and adequate resource allocation were found to enhance engagement for all learners, including female students and those from lower socioeconomic

backgrounds. Adaptive pedagogical practices, such as gender-sensitive curricula, participatory learning, adaptive technology, and formative assessment, fostered student motivation, achievement, and self-confidence. Furthermore, students' perceptions of inclusion strongly influenced their participation, with learning experiences that value social and gender diversity promoting engagement, critical awareness, and social skills. These findings affirm that inclusion is not merely about physical access to classrooms but a transformative process encompassing institutional, pedagogical, and social dimensions to create fair and equitable learning experiences. This study recommends that schools and policymakers continue to develop evidence-based inclusive education models that take into account learners' social, cultural, and economic contexts. It is essential to enhance teacher training, provide sufficient resources, and ensure equitable access to technology to ensure the equitable implementation of inclusive practices. Future research could explore the long-term impact of inclusive education models on students' academic, social, and psychological development and evaluate their implementation across different educational levels and cultural contexts. In this way, the study contributes not only to the theoretical understanding of inclusive education but also offers practical guidance to schools and stakeholders on creating learning experiences that are more equitable, just, and sensitive to diversity.

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Author Contributions Statement

Youssef Abdel Rahman contributed significantly to the conception and design of the study, as well as the development of the research framework. He was responsible for data collection and analysis, ensuring methodological rigor and the validity of findings. He also played a key role in drafting the manuscript, critically revising it for important intellectual content, and approving the final version for publication.

AI Usage Statement

The authors declare that artificial intelligence (AI)-assisted tools were used during the preparation of this manuscript. Grammarly was employed for grammar checking and language refinement. Use of these tools was strictly limited to linguistic and editorial purposes. All intellectual content, data analysis, interpretation of results,

and conclusions were produced solely by the authors, who retain full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and originality of the work.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest related to the publication of this manuscript.

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