



INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN DENPASAR CITY JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOLS: A STUDY OF SYSTEMIC BARRIERS AND SCHOOL-BASED IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

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Abstract. This study aims to analyze systemic barriers in the implementation of inclusive education at junior high schools in Denpasar City and to formulate strengthening strategies oriented toward sustainability and educational equity. The research employed a qualitative approach with a case study design conducted in 12 inclusive junior high schools. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, non-participant observation, and document analysis, and analyzed using an interactive model involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that the implementation of inclusive education faces interconnected systemic barriers across three main dimensions: structural, pedagogical, and cultural. Structural barriers include limited operational policies at the school level, the absence of special education teachers, sporadic professional training, high teacher–student ratios, and inaccessible physical infrastructure. Pedagogical barriers are reflected in the limited implementation of differentiated instruction, the absence of systematic Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), and homogeneous teaching practices. Cultural barriers relate to stigma toward students with special needs and a school culture that prioritizes standardized academic achievement. These interconnected barriers create a form of hidden exclusion, where inclusive education operates administratively but not yet substantively. The study recommends strengthening school-level operational policies, providing special education teachers, implementing continuous professional development, improving infrastructure based on universal design principles, and transforming school culture toward valuing diversity as key strategies for achieving equitable and sustainable inclusive education.

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INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is an educational approach aimed at accommodating the diverse learning needs of all students, including children with special needs (CSN), enabling them to learn together within the same environment, namely regular schools (Ríos-Reyes et al., 2025; Ramatea, 2025; Ainscow, 2020; Rangarajan et al., 2025; Taneja-Johansson & Singal, 2025). This approach is grounded in the principle that every child, regardless of physical, intellectual, social, emotional, or other conditions, has an equal right to access quality and equitable education. In this context, schools function not merely as institutions for knowledge transmission but also as spaces that cultivate values of justice, equality, respect for diversity, and active participation among all stakeholders in the educational process.

Ideally, inclusive education does not merely place children with special needs in the same classroom as their peers. Rather, it ensures that the learning system, curriculum, teaching strategies, as well as the physical and social environment of schools are designed to be adaptive and responsive to the needs of all learners. This includes adjustments in instructional materials, delivery methods, learning assessment, as well as comprehensive emotional and social support (Lindner & Schwab, 2025; Sonowal, 2025; Nketsia et al., 2025). The Indonesian government has demonstrated its commitment to promoting inclusive education through various regulations, one of which is the Regulation of the Minister of National Education (Kemendiknas 2009) concerning inclusive education for students with disabilities and those with exceptional intelligence and/or talents. This regulation provides a legal framework for regular schools to accept and serve

students with special needs with adequate systemic support.

However, the implementation of inclusive education in schools faces various complex and interrelated challenges. Many schools remain unprepared to implement it due to limitations in infrastructure and human resources. Many teachers still lack adequate understanding of teaching approaches that are responsive to the diverse learning needs of students, and most teachers have not received specific training on differentiated instruction strategies, flexible assessment techniques, or appropriate psychosocial approaches in dealing with children with special needs (Kimhi & Nir, 2025; Jabri et al., 2019; Sepadi, 2025; Xasanboyev Azizbek Botirali ogli, 2025). As a result, teaching practices often rely on uniform methods that are not adaptive, making it difficult for students with special needs to participate optimally in learning activities. In addition, social stigma toward children with special needs remains a major obstacle in creating a truly inclusive learning environment. There is still a perception that such students should attend special schools rather than regular schools, and teachers, parents, and the wider community have not fully understood the values and objectives of inclusive education (Assyahidah et al., 2024). Consequently, students with special needs frequently experience discrimination, social exclusion from peers, or even bullying, which negatively affects their emotional and social development (Berchiatti et al., 2022; Augustine et al., 2024).

Although studies on inclusive education in Indonesia have grown over the past decade, most research has focused primarily on the normative aspects of policy or the implementation of inclusive education at the elementary school level (Arina et al., 2025; Ramdani et al., 2024; Atika, 2024). Previous studies tend to analyze obstacles in implementing inclusive education separately, such as teacher readiness, limited facilities, or social attitudes toward students with special needs, without examining the interconnections among these dimensions in a comprehensive manner (Junaidi, 2020; Ummah et al., 2023; Rizqianti et al., 2022). Furthermore, research on inclusive education at the junior secondary school (SMP) level remains relatively limited, even though this level has distinct complexities in terms of curriculum demands, students' psychosocial development, and the dynamics of social relationships within schools. Consequently, there remains a research gap in explaining how policies, pedagogical practices, and socio-cultural contexts interact in the implementation of inclusive education at the junior secondary level. Therefore, more systematic, structured, and collaborative efforts from various stakeholders are required to realize inclusive education that goes beyond policy rhetoric and is genuinely implemented in classroom practices.

This study employs an analytical framework that conceptualizes the implementation of inclusive education as a systemic process influenced by the interaction of structural, pedagogical, and cultural factors. These three dimensions are not viewed as separate entities but as interconnected elements that shape the actual conditions of inclusive education in regular schools. The structural dimension refers to policies, regulations, school governance, the availability of human resources, as well as facilities and infrastructure that support inclusive education; this dimension includes the presence of operational policies at the school level, teacher-student ratios, the availability of special education teachers or support staff, professional support services, and access to disability-friendly facilities.

Structural factors determine the extent to which schools possess institutional capacity to implement inclusive education sustainably. The pedagogical dimension relates to classroom learning practices, including teachers' understanding of inclusive education concepts, differentiated instruction strategies, curriculum adaptation, individualized assessment, and classroom management that is responsive to student diversity; this dimension reflects how structural policies and resources are translated into everyday teaching practices. The cultural dimension encompasses values, attitudes, beliefs, and social practices within the school, family, and community environments; this dimension includes teachers', students', and parents' perceptions of children with special needs, the presence of stigma and stereotypes, patterns of social relationships within schools, and school cultures that respect diversity. Cultural factors play a crucial role in determining whether inclusive education is accepted and implemented substantively rather than merely as a formal policy requirement. Within this framework, the



implementation of inclusive education is understood as the outcome of the interaction among these three dimensions, and weakness in one dimension may weaken the others, causing inclusive education to remain at the administrative level without adequate pedagogical and cultural support.

This study aims to identify systemic challenges in the implementation of inclusive education in junior secondary schools in Denpasar City and to formulate strategies and recommendations to strengthen the implementation of inclusive education in a more equitable and sustainable manner. This study contributes to the development of inclusive education research in Indonesia in several important aspects. First, this study expands the scope of inclusive education research at the junior secondary school (SMP) level, which has received relatively less scholarly attention compared to elementary education. Second, this study does not view obstacles to inclusive education implementation as isolated factors; instead, it analyzes the interconnections between structural, pedagogical, and cultural constraints as a systemic whole. Limited teacher readiness, inadequate facilities, and social stigma toward students with special needs interact and reinforce one another, resulting in inclusive education often remaining at the administrative level of student admission without adequate pedagogical support. Third, this study provides contextual insights into the implementation of inclusive education in urban areas, which structurally tend to have better access to policies and resources. Fourth, this study offers practical contributions in the form of strategies to strengthen the implementation of inclusive education with a sustainability perspective, including strengthening operational policies, enhancing teacher competencies, developing flexible curricula, and reinforcing collaboration among schools, families, and communities. Therefore, this research is expected to serve as an empirical reference for policymakers and education practitioners in developing more equitable and context-sensitive inclusive education practices.

RESEARCH METHODS

The study was conducted in 12 junior secondary schools in Denpasar City that implement inclusive education. The research participants consisted of school principals, classroom teachers and subject teachers, special education teachers (if available), parents of students, and students (limited to non-intrusive observation). To obtain comprehensive and valid data, three data collection techniques were employed: in-depth interviews, observation, and document analysis. Each technique was designed to capture different dimensions of inclusive education implementation, ranging from individual perspectives to actual practices and formal documentation.

In-depth interviews were conducted to comprehensively explore the perspectives, understandings, and experiences of informants regarding the implementation of inclusive education in regular schools. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured format, allowing the researcher to follow a set of guiding questions while providing informants with the flexibility to express their experiences and reflections openly. The interview participants included school principals, classroom teachers and subject teachers, special education teachers (if available), and parents of students. Principals were interviewed to obtain data on school policies, institutional commitment, and structural support for inclusive education implementation, while teachers were interviewed to explore inclusive classroom practices, differentiated instructional strategies, and challenges faced in addressing diverse student needs. Special education teachers and parents were interviewed to gain perspectives on the support provided for children with special needs, forms of collaboration between schools and families, and the types of support required to ensure effective inclusive learning. The interview topics included understanding of inclusive education concepts, experiences in implementation, challenges and obstacles encountered, forms of policy and resource support, and expectations and recommendations for the development of inclusive education in regular schools.

While interviews provided subjective accounts from various stakeholders, observation was conducted to obtain empirical data on the actual implementation of inclusive education in the school environment. The observation was non-participatory, meaning the researcher did not engage directly in the learning process but systematically observed classroom and school



activities. The observation focused on classroom learning processes in inclusive settings, interactions between teachers and students including students with special needs, and peer interactions among students. Additionally, observation examined the implementation of differentiated instruction strategies, classroom management practices, inclusive learning environments, and the use of instructional media and assistive tools. At the school environment level, observation also included the availability and condition of disability-friendly facilities, such as accessible classrooms, toilets, ramps, and other supporting infrastructure. Observation was conducted using a structured observation sheet accompanied by field notes to document relevant situations, behaviors, and dynamics related to the research focus.

To complement and strengthen the data obtained from interviews and observations, document analysis was also conducted. This technique aimed to obtain written data reflecting the formal and administrative aspects of inclusive education policies, planning, and implementation within schools. The analyzed documents included school policies related to inclusive education, school vision and mission statements, teaching modules, as well as assessment documents and student progress reports. Additional supporting documents such as meeting minutes, school programs, and documentation of school facilities were also analyzed to provide a comprehensive picture of the schools' readiness and commitment to implementing inclusive education. Document analysis was conducted to identify the alignment between written policies and classroom practices, as well as to assess the extent to which inclusive education principles have been integrated into teaching and learning planning and implementation.

Following data collection, all data were analyzed qualitatively using an interactive analysis model that occurred continuously throughout the data collection process until the completion of the study. The stages of data analysis included data reduction and data display. Data reduction involved selecting, focusing, and organizing data obtained from interviews, observations, and document analysis according to the research focus. The data were coded and categorized into major themes such as school policies, teacher readiness, inclusive learning strategies, infrastructure, professional support, and inclusive school culture. Subsequently, the reduced data were presented in the form of descriptive narratives to identify patterns, trends, and relationships among various aspects of inclusive education implementation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Systemic Barriers to the Implementation of Inclusive Education in Junior Secondary Schools in Denpasar City

The implementation of inclusive education in junior secondary schools (SMP) in Denpasar City has not yet operated optimally, although it has received policy support from both the central and local governments. Normatively, regular schools have been designated as providers of inclusive education and are required to accept students with special needs (CSN). However, in practice, implementation at the school and classroom levels still encounters various structural, pedagogical, and cultural barriers.

a. Structural Barriers

The findings of this study indicate that the implementation of inclusive education in junior secondary schools in Denpasar City cannot be understood through a single type of obstacle in isolation. Instead, it must be viewed through the complex interrelationship between structural, pedagogical, and cultural constraints. These three dimensions influence and reinforce each other, forming systemic challenges in realizing effective inclusive education practices.

1) Limited Technical Regulations and Policy Implementation

From a structural perspective, the findings of this study indicate that the primary obstacle to implementing inclusive education in junior secondary schools in Denpasar City lies in the limited operational policy support at the school level. Although the regulatory framework for inclusive education has been established nationally and reinforced by local government policies, these policies have not yet been fully translated into concrete and sustainable implementation mechanisms at the school level. Most junior secondary schools in Denpasar City do not yet possess technical guidelines for implementing inclusive education. Teachers tend to implement



inclusive practices only at a superficial level, without fully addressing the essence of inclusive education. The absence of technical guidelines results in the unstructured implementation of inclusive education. Teachers lack comprehensive understanding in handling students with special needs, leading to inadequate academic services for these students.

Ideally, each school should develop technical policies and operational guidelines for implementing inclusive education. Such policies serve as references for teachers in conducting inclusive teaching practices, ensuring that all teachers share a common understanding and approach in implementing inclusive learning. The absence of inclusive policies at the school level reflects the lack of institutional readiness to implement inclusive education effectively. School-level policies should function as the operational foundation for inclusive education practices. Without adequate policies and structural support, there is a significant risk of creating an illusion of inclusivity, in which schools formally claim to be inclusive institutions but fail to provide learning environments that genuinely respond to student diversity.

2) Limited Human Resources

Limited human resources represent one of the most prominent barriers to implementing inclusive education at the junior secondary school level in Denpasar City. This constraint is evident in the absence of special education teachers or special assistant teachers in most schools responsible for supporting students with special needs. As a result, responsibility for inclusive services is largely placed on subject teachers, who generally do not have specialized educational backgrounds in special education (Ianni et al., 2025; Jeremy et al., 2025). Teacher training programs related to inclusive education tend to be sporadic, resulting in limited understanding among teachers regarding the needs of students with special needs. Consequently, teachers' interpretations of inclusive education vary significantly, creating inconsistencies in classroom practices.

Under such conditions, teachers' understanding of inclusive education is reduced to individual practice rather than being institutionalized as a systemic approach within schools. This situation indicates that inclusive policies have not yet functioned as an enabling structure that supports teachers in implementing adaptive and equitable teaching practices. Sporadic training programs often serve merely as formal obligations rather than long-term professional competency development. As a result, classroom practices remain suboptimal, with teachers relying primarily on personal interpretations rather than evidence-based pedagogical approaches. This situation also creates the impression that inclusive education is implemented primarily to fulfill administrative requirements rather than as a genuine commitment to inclusive pedagogy. Consequently, teachers tend to interpret inclusive education merely as an institutional obligation to admit students with special needs, without a deep understanding of differentiated instruction strategies, curriculum adaptation, or responsive assessment practices (Shala & Ramosaj, 2025; Ahmed et al., 2021). From a structural perspective, this condition reflects a gap between policy design and implementation realities at the school level.

Several studies have shown that teachers often experience difficulties in teaching students with special needs because they feel they lack sufficient competence and professional capacity (Codina & Robinson, 2024; Holmqvist & Lelinge, 2020; Kimhi & Nir, 2025; Tuerah, 2025). Without continuous professional training, teachers may unintentionally engage in discriminatory practices or fail to provide adequate support tailored to students' needs. Limited understanding also affects the accuracy of pedagogical interventions. Students with dyslexia, for instance, require multisensory reading approaches such as the Orton–Gillingham method, which integrates visual, auditory, and kinesthetic stimulation (Fujita, 2024; Stevens et al., 2021). However, many teachers still rely on conventional phonics or repetitive reading drills without appropriate modifications, which can negatively affect students' confidence and learning motivation. Without proper training, teachers not only struggle to adapt instruction but also lack sensitivity in creating safe and supportive learning environments.

3) Inaccessible Physical Facilities

The findings indicate that all junior secondary schools implementing inclusive education in Denpasar City still lack adequate physical facilities to support students with disabilities.



Schools generally do not provide ramps that meet accessibility standards for wheelchair users, making access to classrooms, libraries, laboratories, and administrative offices dependent on conventional staircases. This condition not only limits mobility but also poses safety risks for students with physical impairments. In addition, the absence of elevators in multi-story school buildings creates serious barriers for students with physical disabilities. In several schools, classrooms are located on the second or third floors, making it difficult for students with mobility limitations to independently access learning spaces.

The lack of guiding blocks (tactile paving) also indicates that the needs of students with visual impairments have not been sufficiently considered in school infrastructure planning. Without tactile guidance systems, students with visual impairments or low vision lack adequate orientation and mobility support within the school environment. Schools also generally lack accessible toilets that meet disability accessibility standards, including adequate space for movement, handrails, wide doors, and wheelchair-friendly designs. The absence of accessible sanitation facilities can lead to dependence on others and negatively affect students' confidence and dignity.

These findings highlight the gap between inclusive education policies and their practical implementation at the school level, particularly in the structural dimension. Inclusive education is not merely about admitting students with special needs into regular schools; it also requires ensuring physical accessibility, full participation, and safe learning environments for all students. Without adequate infrastructure support, the principles of equity and equality in inclusive education cannot be realized substantively (Maulana, 2023; Navas-Bonilla et al., 2025; Page et al., 2024; Rose et al., 2021). Conceptually, these infrastructural limitations indicate that inclusive education in junior secondary schools in Denpasar City remains largely administrative rather than transformative. Stronger policy commitments, dedicated budget allocations, and infrastructure planning based on universal design principles—such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Universal Design for Infrastructure—are needed to ensure that schools become genuinely inclusive learning spaces for all students.

4) Teacher–Student Ratio

Inclusive education fundamentally aims to ensure equitable educational services by providing equal learning opportunities for all students without discrimination, including children with special needs. This principle requires adjustments in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of learning processes so that each student receives services appropriate to their characteristics, potential, and learning needs. However, in practice, inclusive learning implementation in junior secondary schools in Denpasar City faces significant challenges related to relatively high teacher–student ratios. On average, the ratio is approximately 1:30, meaning that one teacher is responsible for around thirty students in a single classroom. While such a ratio may be considered acceptable in regular classrooms, it becomes a serious challenge in inclusive classrooms characterized by diverse learning needs. High ratios limit the time and individual attention teachers can provide, particularly to students with special needs who require more intensive guidance.

Teachers experience difficulties in conducting diagnostic assessments, monitoring individual learning progress, and providing appropriate interventions. As a result, teaching practices tend to remain classical and uniform, preventing the specific needs of students with special needs from being adequately addressed (Juldiz, 2025; Venketsamy, 2023). This situation also affects the implementation of differentiated instruction. Differentiated learning requires teachers to adjust content, processes, products, and learning environments according to students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles. However, due to large class sizes and limited time, teachers often rely on general instructional methods designed for the majority of students. Consequently, differentiation strategies—such as modifying materials, varying teaching methods, and adapting assessments—cannot be implemented optimally. This reality demonstrates a gap between the normative goals of inclusive education and classroom practices. When individual student needs are not adequately accommodated, the principle of substantive equity in inclusive education cannot be fully realized. Thus, high teacher–student ratios can be viewed as both



pedagogical and structural barriers to the implementation of inclusive education. Strategic policies are needed, including increasing the number of teachers, providing special education support staff, reducing class sizes in inclusive classrooms, and strengthening teachers' competencies in implementing differentiated instruction.

b. Pedagogical Barriers

Pedagogical barriers that emerge in classrooms are not isolated phenomena but rather direct consequences of weaknesses at the structural level. In other words, instructional problems in classrooms reflect systemic limitations in the design and support of inclusive education.

1) Uniform Teaching Strategies for All Students

The absence of technical guidelines for implementing inclusive education at the school level, the lack of translation of inclusive policies into standard operating procedures (SOPs), and the absence of minimum service standards for students with special needs represent structural barriers that directly contribute to pedagogical challenges. From a pedagogical perspective, teachers lack clear references for designing and implementing inclusive learning. Without operational guidelines, the implementation of inclusive education depends largely on individual teachers' interpretations. As a result, teaching strategies tend to be uniform for all students without considering differences in student characteristics, readiness, and learning needs.

This homogeneous teaching pattern contradicts the fundamental principles of inclusive education, which emphasize adaptation, flexibility, and responsiveness to diversity. Conceptually, inclusive education requires teachers to develop Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). IEPs function as pedagogical instruments to identify students' specific needs, establish realistic learning goals, and design appropriate instructional strategies, methods, and evaluation systems based on each student's learning profile. However, in the absence of technical policies requiring systematic IEP development, such practices are rarely implemented consistently. Teachers often design instruction based solely on the general curriculum without adequate modifications for students with special needs (Debbağ, 2017; Karaca, 2022).

This condition indicates that inclusive education risks being reduced to a normative discourse—formally acknowledged but not substantively implemented in classroom practices. Schools may formally declare themselves inclusive institutions, yet fail to establish pedagogical mechanisms that enable meaningful differentiation and adaptation in teaching practices. Furthermore, the absence of technical regulations at the school level leads to varying interpretations among teachers regarding the meaning and implementation of inclusive education. Without a shared institutional framework, each teacher develops their own understanding based on personal experiences, educational background, and prior training. This variation results in inconsistent approaches to supporting students with special needs within the same school. Some teachers may attempt to adapt instruction, while others continue to rely on conventional approaches. Consequently, educational services become inconsistent and dependent on individual teachers rather than institutional systems.

From a structural perspective, this situation indicates that inclusive policies have not yet functioned as a regulatory framework capable of aligning the vision, perceptions, and practices of all school stakeholders. School-level policies should serve as operational foundations regulating procedures for identifying students with special needs, developing individualized learning programs, establishing collaborative mechanisms among teachers, implementing evaluation systems, and defining minimum service standards. Without such foundations, inclusive education implementation remains fragmented and poorly coordinated. Therefore, strengthening school-level regulations and technical policies is a crucial prerequisite for reducing pedagogical barriers. When schools establish clear SOPs, measurable service standards, and structured monitoring and evaluation systems, teachers will share a common understanding and reference framework for implementing inclusive learning. Through such mechanisms, inclusive education can move beyond symbolic commitments and become a genuine pedagogical practice that responds to the diverse needs of all learners.



2) Inclusive Services Are Assigned to Subject Teachers

The absence of Special Education Teachers (SETs) constitutes a structural barrier that significantly affects pedagogical practices in inclusive education. Conceptually, SETs play a strategic role as facilitators, consultants, and collaborators for subject teachers in addressing the needs of students with special educational needs (SEN). Their presence is not merely to assist students but also to serve as a source of professional expertise that enables general teachers to understand students' characteristics, needs, and appropriate intervention strategies (Wadria et al., 2025; Rezkia et al., 2023; Yuliana & Sukinah, 2025). In an ideal inclusive education setting, SETs are responsible for conducting comprehensive individual needs assessments, identifying learning barriers, and formulating appropriate pedagogical recommendations. They also support teachers in developing Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), which serve as the foundation for adaptive and responsive instructional planning. Through such collaboration, curriculum modifications, instructional adjustments, and assessment adaptations can be systematically designed and implemented.

However, in the absence of SETs, all responsibilities related to inclusive services are shifted to subject teachers, who generally lack formal training in special education. This condition imposes a substantial additional pedagogical burden. Teachers are required to manage heterogeneous classrooms with diverse learning needs without adequate professional support. Consequently, instructional practices tend to be uniform, with the same methods applied to all students without sufficient differentiation. Moreover, the lack of SETs makes it difficult for teachers to accurately identify the specific characteristics and needs of students with SEN. Without proper assessment, teachers may misapply intervention strategies or fail to provide necessary modifications altogether. In some cases, uncertainty in determining appropriate instructional approaches reduces the effectiveness of teaching and negatively impacts students' participation and learning outcomes. Furthermore, the absence of SETs eliminates the collaborative dimension that should underpin inclusive education. Ideally, inclusive learning is based on team teaching and a collaborative support system, where subject teachers and SETs jointly design, implement, and evaluate the learning process. Such collaboration fosters adaptive, reflective, and student-centered instruction. Without this support, teachers tend to work individually and reactively rather than within a systematic and well-planned framework.

Thus, the absence of SETs is not merely a matter of staff shortage but a structural issue that directly weakens the quality of pedagogical practices in inclusive education. This limitation ultimately constrains schools' capacity to provide learning experiences that are genuinely responsive to student diversity. In addition, sporadic and non-sustainable training represents another structural barrier that directly affects the quality of pedagogical practices in inclusive education. Ideally, teacher competence development in inclusive settings should be systematic, tiered, and continuous. However, when training is conducted only incidentally such as through one-off seminars or workshops without follow up its impact on classroom practices remains limited.

Such sporadic training is often not based on teachers' actual needs in the field. The materials tend to be general and theoretical, without considering the realities of heterogeneous classrooms and the specific challenges teachers face in handling students with SEN. Furthermore, these training programs are rarely accompanied by supervision, mentoring, or sustained assistance that would enable teachers to reflect on and improve their practices continuously. As a result, the acquired knowledge is not internalized into practical pedagogical competence (Donath et al., 2023; Geletu, 2026; Maras et al., 2025; Petersson-Bloom & Leifler, 2023). In practice, this condition results in teachers' limited ability to implement differentiated instruction. Although teachers may conceptually understand the need to adapt content, processes, and assessment in inclusive education, they often lack the practical skills to design instruction that is truly responsive to individual student needs. Difficulties arise when teachers are required to develop alternative assessments, modify tasks, manage heterogeneous classroom dynamics, or create safe and supportive learning environments.

Pedagogically, these limitations lead to the persistence of conventional teaching practices



that are oriented toward the majority of students. Instructional strategies tend to be uniform, with standardized assessment criteria applied to all students without adequate adaptation. In such contexts, students with SEN are often expected to adjust to the existing system, rather than the system adapting to their needs. This contradicts the fundamental principle of inclusive education, which requires the education system to respond to learner diversity. The absence of a structured system for long-term professional development or Continuous Professional Development (CPD) further reinforces these pedagogical barriers. Teacher competence development should be designed as a continuous, systematic, and needs-based process. Without long-term planning, competence development becomes fragmented, inconsistent, and difficult to evaluate in terms of effectiveness.

Without a structured professional development system, schools lack clear standards for inclusive teaching competencies. Consequently, there are no clear indicators to assess teachers' abilities in developing IEPs, implementing differentiated instruction, conducting adaptive assessments, or managing heterogeneous classrooms. This lack of clarity results in inclusive practices being highly dependent on individual teacher initiative rather than on an institutionalized system. Moreover, the absence of long-term professional development hinders the establishment of a professional learning community within schools. Inclusive education requires collaboration, experience sharing, and collective learning among teachers. Without a culture of professional learning, pedagogical innovation is unlikely to develop, and teaching practices tend to stagnate.

3) The Implementation of Participatory and Collaborative Learning Strategies Is Not Optimal

Physical facilities are a structural component that directly influences the implementation of learning processes in inclusive education. An accessible learning environment is not merely supportive but a fundamental prerequisite for enabling all students, including those with SEN, to participate actively, independently, and with dignity (Cleveland et al., 2025; Sedláčková et al., 2025; Pasenidou, 2026). Based on observations and interviews, accessibility-supporting facilities remain inadequate. Schools lack proper ramps for wheelchair users, do not provide elevators in multi-story buildings, lack guiding blocks for visually impaired students, and do not have disability-friendly toilets that meet accessibility standards. In addition, most school buildings have not adopted the principles of universal design, which enable all individuals to use facilities without requiring additional adaptation.

The absence of accessible physical facilities has direct implications for the learning process. Students with mobility impairments face difficulties accessing classrooms, laboratories, libraries, or other learning spaces, particularly those located on upper floors. These barriers may result in delays, dependence on assistance, or even absence from certain activities, thereby limiting participation in learning. For students with visual impairments, the lack of guiding blocks hinders orientation and mobility within the school environment. This condition not only restricts independence but also affects students' sense of safety and confidence. Similarly, the absence of accessible toilets impacts students' comfort and dignity, which in turn influences their psychological readiness to engage in learning activities.

Pedagogically, these physical barriers limit the implementation of participatory and collaborative learning strategies. Teachers may design project-based activities, group discussions, or outdoor learning experiences; however, limited accessibility prevents equal participation among students. Thus, structural barriers related to inaccessible facilities directly constrain teachers' pedagogical flexibility in implementing active and interactive inclusive learning. This condition reflects a gap between administrative commitment to inclusive education and the readiness of supporting infrastructure. Inclusive education is not merely about admitting students with special needs into regular schools, but about providing an environment that enables full participation. Without accessible facilities based on universal design principles, the principle of equity in inclusive education cannot be substantively realized.

4) Learning Tends to Be Conducted in a Classical (Whole-Class) Manner

A high teacher–student ratio is a structural factor that significantly affects the effectiveness of learning implementation, particularly in inclusive education contexts. In large classrooms,



teachers are required to manage complex learning dynamics within limited time, which restricts their ability to provide individualized attention (Frost et al., 2025; Venketsamy, 2023). In inclusive education, individualized attention is not optional but essential. Each student has unique characteristics, learning styles, academic readiness, and support needs. For students with SEN, more intensive guidance is often required to ensure they can understand the material, participate in classroom activities, and achieve learning objectives. However, when one teacher is responsible for a large number of students, personal interaction becomes highly limited. Teachers tend to prioritize overall classroom management to maintain order.

This condition hinders the optimal implementation of differentiated instruction. Differentiated learning requires teachers to adapt content, processes, and products based on students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles. This process requires time for initial assessment, designing varied activities, and providing individualized feedback. In high-ratio classrooms, opportunities for differentiation are limited due to time constraints. As a result, learning tends to be conducted in a classical and uniform manner. Materials, methods, and assessments are delivered using the same approach for all students without adequate modification. In such situations, students with specific learning needs or different learning places are at risk of not receiving appropriate support. Some students may fall behind, while others may feel insufficiently challenged. Thus, a high teacher–student ratio is not merely an administrative issue but one that directly impacts pedagogical quality. When individual learning needs are not optimally accommodated, the principles of equity and responsiveness in inclusive education become difficult to achieve. Therefore, establishing a more proportional class ratio is a crucial prerequisite for enabling teachers to implement differentiated instruction effectively and ensuring that every student receives appropriate educational support.

c. Cultural Constraints

Structural and pedagogical constraints in the implementation of inclusive education cannot be separated from cultural factors that develop within schools and the broader community. The findings of this study indicate that stigma and negative perceptions toward students with special educational needs (SEN) remain prevalent among teachers, peers, and parents. In many cases, students with SEN are still perceived as individuals who may hinder the effectiveness of classroom learning processes, particularly at the junior secondary school level, where academic demands and competition for achievement are increasingly intensified. Such cultural constructions weaken institutional commitment to developing inclusive educational practices that are adaptive, responsive, and equitable for all learners (Yang et al., 2024; Hallett & Hallett, 2025; Müller & Aelenei, 2026).

Negative stigma and stereotypes toward students with SEN continue to be among the most significant barriers to the realization of effective inclusive education in both formal school settings and society at large (Haft et al., 2023; Krämer & Zimmermann, 2025; Wüthrich et al., 2024). Furthermore, school cultures that are not fully inclusive tend to reinforce the pedagogical challenges faced by teachers in the classroom. In environments that emphasize uniform academic expectations, learning success is often measured through standardized cognitive achievements, such as examination scores and class rankings. This condition encourages teachers to maintain homogeneous, curriculum-oriented instructional approaches, thereby limiting opportunities for differentiated instruction.

Teachers operating within such school cultures tend to perceive instructional adaptations for students with SEN as an additional burden that may interfere with the overall academic targets of the class. Consequently, pedagogical innovation such as modifying instructional materials, diversifying teaching strategies, or adapting assessment methods does not develop optimally. These findings align with the view that inclusive pedagogical practices are highly dependent on school cultures that value diversity as a resource rather than a constraint (da Cruz et al., 2024). Resistance to inclusive education in this context does not always manifest in explicit rejection or overt discriminatory attitudes. Instead, it is often embedded in everyday teaching practices that implicitly overlook the diverse learning needs of students. When instruction is designed based on the assumption that all students possess similar abilities, learning paces, and learning styles,



students with SEN are structurally marginalized, even though they are formally admitted into regular schools.

Thus, a non-inclusive school culture functions as a mechanism of hidden exclusion, in which the absence of differentiated instruction is not perceived as a form of rejection, but rather as a normal and acceptable pedagogical practice. This condition suggests that strengthening inclusive education cannot rely solely on enhancing teachers' technical competencies, but must also involve a transformation of school culture that redefines perspectives on diversity, learning success, and the broader purposes of education. The interconnection between structural, pedagogical, and cultural constraints is closely linked to local socio-cultural dynamics that shape how school communities perceive diversity and difference. Cultural values emphasizing social harmony and order hold an ambivalent position in the practice of inclusive education. On one hand, values of togetherness and social solidarity can serve as cultural capital that supports the acceptance of students with SEN as integral members of the school community. These values can foster supportive social relationships, collective responsibility, and empathy among students.

On the other hand, a strong orientation toward harmony and order may also give rise to subtle and often unconscious forms of exclusion. The drive to maintain uniformity in behavior, learning pace, and classroom order frequently establishes implicit norms of normality that serve as benchmarks in the learning process. Students who are unable to conform to these norms whether due to cognitive, emotional, or social differences are at risk of being perceived as sources of disruption. In this context, differences are not openly rejected but are managed through one-sided adaptation mechanisms that marginalize students with SEN. The value of order embedded in school culture also shapes teachers' pedagogical practices. Teachers tend to adopt instructional strategies that prioritize classroom control, time efficiency, and uniform curriculum achievement. Differentiated instruction, which inherently accommodates variations in learning pace and style, is often perceived as a threat to classroom stability and curriculum coverage. Thus, the cultural dimension not only shapes individual teacher attitudes but also constructs a pedagogical logic that prioritizes uniformity over diversity.

From the perspective of inclusive education theory, this condition indicates that local culture functions as a mediating structure that bridges policy and classroom practice. School culture, rooted in specific social values, can either strengthen or weaken the implementation of inclusive policies, depending on how these values are interpreted and operationalized in everyday practice. This aligns with the view that school culture constitutes a fundamental foundation for the development of inclusive policies and practices. Therefore, the cultural dimension in the implementation of inclusive education in junior secondary schools in Denpasar cannot be understood as an external factor to the education system, but rather as an integral part of the social structure that shapes power relations, norms, and pedagogical practices within schools. The success of inclusive education is highly dependent on cultural values and the ability of schools to manage the dialectic between local culture and inclusive principles in a reflective and contextual manner.

The constraints in implementing inclusive education in junior secondary schools in Denpasar are interrelated and cannot be addressed through partial interventions. Efforts to improve teacher competence, for instance, will not be effective without adequate structural support and transformation toward a more inclusive school culture. Therefore, strengthening inclusive education requires a holistic approach that integrates school policy reform, the development of adaptive pedagogical practices, and cultural transformation within schools and communities toward valuing student diversity. These findings are consistent with the conceptual framework of inclusive education proposed by [Ainscow \(2020\)](#) through the Index for Inclusion, which conceptualizes inclusive education as the result of the interaction among three key dimensions: inclusive cultures, inclusive policies, and inclusive practices. Within this framework, inclusive education is not merely understood as technical adjustments in teaching, but as a comprehensive transformation of the education system.

The structural constraints identified in this study such as limited resources, the absence of special education teachers, and the lack of optimal operational policy support at the school level



reflect weaknesses in the dimension of inclusive policies. According to [Ainscow \(2020\)](#), inclusive policies that are not supported by clear implementation mechanisms tend to produce inclusion practices that are symbolic and administrative in nature. This condition is evident in the implementation of inclusive education in Denpasar, where students with SEN are formally admitted but adequate support systems for their learning success remain insufficient.

Furthermore, the pedagogical constraints experienced by teachers including limited competence in differentiated instruction, curriculum adaptation, and responsive assessment are directly related to the dimension of inclusive practices. Inclusive pedagogical practices require teachers to manage diversity as a learning resource rather than as a problem. However, the findings indicate that pedagogical practices in junior secondary schools remain dominated by homogeneous approaches, which reinforce implicit exclusion of students with SEN. Finally, the cultural constraints manifested in social stigma, negative perceptions toward students with SEN, and uniform academic expectations reflect weaknesses in the dimension of inclusive culture within schools. An inclusive school culture is a fundamental foundation for the success of inclusive policies and practices. Without a culture that values diversity, inclusive policies lose their transformative power, and innovative pedagogical practices are unlikely to develop sustainably.

B. Strategies to Enhance the Effectiveness of Inclusive Education Implementation in Regular Schools

The implementation of school-based inclusive education requires a shift in orientation from a centralized policy approach toward strengthening the institutional capacity of schools. In the context of junior secondary schools in Denpasar, implementation strategies need to position schools as spaces of social praxis that possess pedagogical autonomy, moral responsibility, and adaptive capacity to respond to student diversity. Inclusive education should not be understood as an additional program, but rather as a framework that underpins all aspects of school management. Therefore, strategies for implementing inclusive education in junior secondary schools in Denpasar must be designed based on systemic barriers identified at the school level, including structural, pedagogical, and cultural constraints. A school-based approach is crucial, as it enables educational institutions to act as primary agents in translating inclusive policies into contextualized and sustainable practices. Based on the findings regarding the challenges of implementing inclusive education in junior secondary schools in Denpasar, several strategies can be proposed to enhance its effectiveness.

1) Strengthening Inclusive School Leadership as a Driver of Vision and Practice

The predominantly normative nature of inclusive education policies, which have not yet been fully operationalized at the school level, necessitates the strengthening of inclusive school leadership as a fundamental prerequisite for sustainable implementation. From the perspective of the sociology of educational organizations, the school principal occupies a strategic position as a key actor who bridges macro-level policies and micro-level classroom practices. When inclusive policies are not translated into the school's vision, organizational structures, and operational procedures, inclusive education risks remaining at a symbolic and administrative level ([Ainscow, 2020](#)).

In the context of inclusive education, the role of the school principal extends beyond that of a policy administrator. Principals must function as both instructional leaders and moral leaders who shape the value orientation and practices of the school. Inclusive leadership requires principals to actively construct a shared vision of diversity, articulate inclusivity as a core institutional value, and ensure that this vision is internalized within the school's organizational culture. Through such leadership, inclusive education is not perceived as an additional program, but as a guiding framework that permeates all educational processes ([Lambrecht et al., 2022](#); [Leithwood, 2021](#); [Moya et al., 2020](#); [Solberg et al., 2021](#)). Inclusive leadership plays a critical role in ensuring that inclusive policies are translated into school program planning, decision-making processes, and resource allocation that prioritize student diversity. Principals hold strategic authority in organizing the distribution of teacher responsibilities, fostering cross-role collaboration, and prioritizing teachers' professional development in inclusive instructional



practices. Schools characterized by strong inclusive leadership are more likely to develop differentiated instructional practices and to create supportive school climates for students with special educational needs.

In this context, strengthening inclusive leadership also serves as an institutional mechanism to reduce reliance on individual teacher initiatives in implementing inclusive education. When school principals consistently position inclusivity as an institutional priority, the responsibility for inclusive education shifts from individual practice to collective school commitment. Inclusive education must therefore be institutionalized within the school system. Inclusive education is no longer understood merely as an administrative obligation to admit students with special educational needs, but as a fundamental principle guiding the provision of education. Inclusivity becomes an integral part of the school's identity, reflected in internal policies, pedagogical practices, and social interactions among educational stakeholders. Thus, strengthening inclusive school leadership functions as an enabling structure that allows inclusive policies to move beyond normative discourse toward adaptive, equitable, and sustainable practices at the school level.

2) Developing School Governance Responsive to Diversity through the Establishment of Inclusion Teams and Clear Role Distribution

Findings indicating that the implementation of inclusive education relies heavily on individual teacher initiative suggest weaknesses in school governance in responding systematically to student diversity. In many cases, inclusive practices emerge only when teachers possess personal sensitivity, specific experiences, or a strong moral commitment toward students with special educational needs (SEN). This pattern indicates that inclusive education has not yet been institutionalized as a school-wide system, but instead remains dependent on individual capacity and willingness. From the perspective of educational organizational theory, such conditions risk creating inequalities in service provision and inconsistencies in inclusive practices across classrooms and among teachers (Larsen et al., 2025).

The development of school governance that is responsive to diversity thus becomes a key strategy for addressing this issue. Responsive governance extends beyond the distribution of administrative tasks; it encompasses the structuring of professional relationships, communication flows, and decision-making mechanisms that explicitly recognize student diversity as a central variable in educational provision. This strategy can be operationalized through the establishment of structured internal coordination mechanisms, such as teacher collaboration forums, cross-functional meetings, and internal referral systems that enable teachers to share responsibilities and expertise in addressing diverse learning needs. Clear role distribution among subject teachers, homeroom teachers, educational staff, and school management is a critical component of inclusive governance. Such clarity helps prevent situations in which the responsibility for inclusive education is concentrated in one or two individuals, while simultaneously strengthening collective accountability at the institutional level. Empirical evidence suggests that schools implementing collaborative, team-based professional practices are more likely to develop adaptive and sustainable instructional approaches compared to those relying primarily on individual teacher efforts (Paju et al., 2022; Razalli et al., 2020).

Within the framework of the Index for Inclusion, this strategy reflects the strengthening of the inclusive policies dimension, which functions as a bridge between inclusive culture and classroom practices (Ainscow, 2020). When school governance is designed inclusively, internal policies are no longer reactive or ad hoc; rather, they become systematic instruments that support teachers in managing heterogeneous classrooms. Consequently, inclusive practices do not emerge sporadically but are integrated into the routine operations of the school. The practical implications of developing governance responsive to diversity include the establishment of a more consistent, coordinated, and sustainable system for implementing inclusive education. Teachers are no longer working in isolation when addressing the challenges of inclusive classrooms but are embedded within professional networks that provide mutual support. At the same time, schools develop institutional capacity to ensure that the learning rights of students with special educational needs are not contingent upon incidental factors but are guaranteed through structured systems and collective practices.



3) Strengthening Inclusive Pedagogical Practices in the Classroom

Teachers' limited competence in managing heterogeneous classrooms indicates that the primary challenge of inclusive education lies not merely in teachers' attitudes or commitment, but in the pedagogical capacity available to respond to the complexity of diversity within the classroom. Inclusive classrooms require a paradigm shift from uniform instruction toward approaches that recognize differences as a normal and inherent condition of the learning process. Without mastery of inclusive pedagogy, teachers tend to reproduce conventional teaching practices that indirectly position students with special educational needs (SEN) at the margins (Black-Hawkins & Florian, 2012; Brennan et al., 2021; Graham et al., 2025; Haug, 2017; Lin et al., 2026).

Strengthening inclusive pedagogical practices in the classroom therefore becomes a central strategy for bridging this gap. This strategy focuses on enhancing teachers' capacity to design and implement differentiated instruction that allows variation in learning objectives, processes, materials, and forms of student engagement. Differentiation is not understood as preferential treatment for specific groups, but as a pedagogical approach that provides multiple learning pathways, enabling each student to achieve learning objectives according to their individual capacities and learning pace. In this context, teachers function as designers of flexible learning experiences rather than mere transmitters of linear content. In addition to differentiated instruction, curriculum adaptation constitutes a crucial component of inclusive pedagogical practice. Such adaptation does not necessarily imply simplification of content; rather, it involves adjusting modes of delivery, emphasizing essential competencies, and employing multiple representations of knowledge to ensure accessibility for students with diverse learning profiles. Research indicates that curriculum flexibility enables teachers to maintain the engagement of students with SEN within regular classroom activities without segregating them from their peer learning community (Black-Hawkins & Florian, 2012).

Flexible and responsive assessment is also an integral element of strengthening inclusive pedagogy. In heterogeneous classrooms, assessment cannot be standardized into a single form or uniform performance benchmark. Teachers need to develop assessment practices that are oriented toward learning processes and individual progress, rather than solely toward standardized end results. Within this framework, assessment functions as a pedagogical reflection tool that enables teachers to continuously adjust instructional strategies while also recognizing students' individual development (Black & Wiliam, 2009). The practical implications of strengthening inclusive pedagogical practices include the creation of more participatory and meaningful learning processes for all students. Learners with diverse needs remain actively engaged in classroom activities without being compelled to conform to uniform learning rhythms. At the same time, students without special needs also benefit from richer, more collaborative, and responsive learning environments. Thus, inclusive classrooms not only serve as spaces of adaptation for students with SEN, but also as sites of pedagogical transformation that enhance the overall quality of teaching and learning.

4) Student-Centered Learning Orientation

The persistence of homogeneous, majority-oriented instructional approaches reflects a traditional educational paradigm that emphasizes uniform achievement, standardized benchmarks, and teacher-centered authority over knowledge. In the context of contemporary education—particularly inclusive education—such a paradigm is no longer adequate to address the diverse realities of learners, including differences in cognitive abilities, socio-cultural backgrounds, learning styles, psychological conditions, and special educational needs (Hajisoteriou & Sorkos, 2023; Jelas, 2010; Sepadi, 2025).

The reorientation toward student-centered learning fundamentally reconceptualizes learners as active agents in the educational process, thereby shifting the instructional paradigm from teacher-directed transmission to learner-driven construction of knowledge. Within this framework, the role of the educator is transformed into that of a facilitator, mediator, and designer of learning experiences that are meticulously responsive to the differentiated needs of individual



students. Consequently, instruction is no longer calibrated to an idealized "average" learner; rather, it is structured with deliberate flexibility to ensure that every student is afforded meaningful and equitable access to learning opportunities that are aligned with their unique potential, prior knowledge, and developmental characteristics. From a pedagogical standpoint, this reorientation can be operationalized through several interrelated strategies. First, differentiated instruction serves as a foundational approach, wherein teachers systematically adapt content, processes, products, and learning environments to accommodate student diversity; instructional materials may be presented through multiple modalities—visual, auditory, and kinesthetic—tasks can be scaffolded at varying levels of complexity, and learning outcomes may be demonstrated through a range of formative expressions, including oral presentations, project-based artifacts, portfolios, and visual representations. Second, authentic assessment is employed to broaden evaluative practices beyond conventional standardized written examinations; it encompasses systematic observation, self-reflective journaling, performance-based tasks, and cumulative portfolios, with assessment functioning primarily as a diagnostic and formative instrument to enhance the learning trajectory rather than as a mere mechanism for summative selection or ranking. Third, the cultivation of inclusive and collaborative learning environments transforms classrooms into dynamic learning communities that explicitly value and leverage diversity; student interaction is deliberately fostered through heterogeneous group configurations, peer-tutoring arrangements, and project-based collaborative inquiry, thereby enabling learners to develop mutual understanding, intercultural competence, and essential collaborative skills. Fourth, the strengthening of student self-regulation and agency is pursued by affording learners meaningful opportunities to establish personal learning goals, engage in ongoing metacognitive reflection upon their learning processes, and exercise informed decision-making regarding the strategies most congruent with their individual cognitive and affective needs—thereby nurturing autonomous, self-directed learners who are equipped to navigate their educational journeys with intentionality and resilience. Collectively, these strategies constitute a coherent pedagogical framework that not only acknowledges but actively responds to learner variability, while simultaneously fostering deeper engagement, intrinsic motivation, and sustainable academic growth.

The further implication of this reorientation is the need to redefine the meaning of learning success. Success should no longer be narrowly understood as the attainment of standardized academic scores that meet specific cognitive benchmarks; rather, it should be conceptualized as holistic development encompassing multiple dimensions. These include the cognitive dimension, reflected in the enhancement of conceptual understanding and critical thinking skills; the social dimension, involving the ability to collaborate, demonstrate empathy, and communicate effectively; the emotional dimension, including self-confidence, resilience, and emotional regulation; and the functional dimension, referring to the ability to apply knowledge in real-life contexts. Accordingly, every learner is afforded the opportunity to achieve success in accordance with their individual capacities and developmental progress. Success is therefore not measured by uniformity of outcomes, but by individual growth and the meaningfulness of the learning experience for each student.

5) Designing the School Physical Environment as an Inclusive Space

Barriers related to the school's physical environment that is not yet fully accessible represent a structural challenge in the implementation of inclusive education. A physical environment that is not designed based on accessibility principles has the potential to create environmental barriers that limit students' mobility, participation, and independence, particularly for students with special educational needs. From the perspective of educational ecology, the physical space of the school is not merely a container for learning activities, but an integral component of the system that shapes interaction patterns, learning experiences, and students' socio-emotional development.

Therefore, a strategic effort is required to optimize the school's physical environment as an inclusive space designed systematically and grounded in the principles of universal design. This principle emphasizes that learning environments should be accessible and usable by all



individuals without requiring special or discriminatory adaptations. Accordingly, the approach should move beyond reactive modifications toward a reconstruction of facility planning that is oriented toward diversity from the design stage.

Operationally, these pedagogical strategies must be complemented by deliberate institutional measures that address the physical and environmental dimensions of accessibility. First, a comprehensive accessibility audit should be conducted to identify structural barriers across all key school domains, including entrances, corridors, classrooms, sanitation facilities, libraries, laboratories, and playgrounds; this audit ought to be grounded in measurable indicators to yield an objective and systematic mapping of infrastructural needs. Second, adjustments to basic infrastructure must be undertaken with careful consideration of mobility, safety, and comfort, encompassing the provision of ramps, handrails, accessible door widths, disability-friendly toilets, and flexible classroom configurations as concrete interventions to reduce physical impediments; moreover, attention to lighting, ventilation, and room acoustics is essential to accommodate students with specific sensory requirements. Third, informational and sensory accessibility should be enhanced through the deployment of clear visual signage, universal symbols, adequate audio systems, and the integration of multimodal learning media, insofar as a physical environment that is responsive to diverse sensory needs can substantially increase student engagement and participation. Fourth, inclusive safety considerations must be systematically embedded within the school management framework, particularly through the design of accessible evacuation routes and emergency procedures that explicitly account for the varied physical conditions and capabilities of all learners. Collectively, these infrastructural and environmental measures serve to reinforce the pedagogical reorientation toward student-centered learning, ensuring that the educational setting—in both its instructional and physical dimensions—is genuinely inclusive, equitable, and conducive to the holistic development of every student.

The implications of optimizing the physical environment are multidimensional. At the individual level, it creates conditions that enable students with special needs to develop independence and a sense of belonging within the learning space. At the social level, it fosters more equitable interactions, as structural barriers that separate students based on physical conditions or specific needs are minimized. At the institutional level, the school demonstrates a normative commitment to the principles of equity and non-discrimination in education (Cleveland et al., 2025; Pal, 2025; Tancredi et al., 2025).

Thus, transforming the school's physical environment into an inclusive space is not merely a matter of architectural or technical adjustment, but a concrete manifestation of an educational paradigm that values diversity. An accessible physical environment constitutes a fundamental prerequisite for ensuring the full and equitable participation of all students in the learning process.

6) Strengthening a Supportive and Non-Discriminatory Social Environment

Findings indicating that the school's social environment still contains forms of hidden exclusion suggest that barriers to inclusion are not solely structural and physical, but also cultural and relational. Hidden exclusion may manifest in the form of stereotypes, labeling, low expectations toward students with special educational needs, the marginalization of their participation in classroom discussions, and patterns of social interaction that implicitly disadvantage certain groups. These practices are often not recognized as discriminatory; however, cumulatively, they contribute to the formation of a school climate that is not fully inclusive.

From sociological and psychopedagogical perspectives, the school's social environment constitutes a space where students' identities and self-esteem are constructed. Daily interactions between teachers and students, as well as among peers, shape self-perception, a sense of competence, and a sense of belonging. When the social environment is not supportive, students—particularly those with special needs—are at risk of experiencing psychosocial vulnerabilities, including low self-confidence, social anxiety, and withdrawal from learning activities (Arslan & Ph, 2021; Bora, 2025; Korpershoek et al., 2020; Štremfel & Ivan, 2024).

Therefore, strategies to strengthen a supportive and non-discriminatory social environment are essential as an integral component of inclusive education implementation, for the physical and



pedagogical dimensions of inclusion remain incomplete without a corresponding transformation of the school's social fabric. These strategies encompass several key dimensions that operate at the policy, professional, relational, and psychosocial levels. First, the development and internalization of school policies that explicitly reject all forms of stigma, discrimination, and bullying constitute a foundational imperative; such policies must be articulated in formal regulations, codes of conduct, and clear, accountable case-handling mechanisms, yet beyond mere administrative documentation, they must be actively socialized and internalized as shared values among all members of the school community—educators, students, administrators, and families alike. Second, strengthening teachers' capacity to develop pedagogical practices that are sensitive to diversity is equally critical; educators are called upon to cultivate critical awareness of implicit biases, to avoid reductive academic expectations toward students with special needs, and to ground all teacher–student interactions in respect for individual dignity and an unwavering belief in the potential of every learner. Third, fostering equitable peer relationships through collaborative strategies—such as cooperative learning, peer tutoring, and project-based activities involving heterogeneous groups—serves to minimize social segregation while actively promoting empathy, mutual understanding, and solidarity among students; structured and positive interactions within diverse groupings enable learners to recognize and value differences as resources for collective growth rather than as barriers to social cohesion. Fourth, the enhancement of psychosocial support through guidance and counseling services that are responsive to inclusion-related issues is indispensable; preventive and promotive approaches should be prioritized over reactive interventions to strengthen students' resilience, self-efficacy, and social competencies, thereby equipping them to navigate the complexities of diverse social environments with confidence and mutual respect. In sum, these strategies—operating in concert with the pedagogical and infrastructural measures previously delineated—constitute a holistic framework for inclusive education that addresses the learner across cognitive, physical, and socio-emotional domains, ultimately fostering a school culture in which every student is valued, supported, and empowered to realize their full potential.

The implications of these strategies are transformative for the school climate. The establishment of an inclusive social environment fosters psychological safety, enabling students to feel accepted, valued, and free to express themselves without fear of stigmatization. At the collective level, the school culture shifts from an exclusive, competition-oriented paradigm toward a collaborative paradigm that values diversity as a resource for social learning. Strengthening a supportive and non-discriminatory social environment is a fundamental prerequisite for the success of inclusive education. Without transformation at the level of culture and social relations, structural and curricular reforms will not be fully effective in ensuring equitable participation and the psychosocial well-being of all students (Aldridge et al., 2024; Maratia et al., 2025).

7) Strengthening Internal School Collaboration

Weak coordination among teachers and educational staff reflects fragmentation within the school's organizational system, which directly affects the effectiveness of inclusive education implementation. In the context of managing heterogeneous classrooms, successful learning cannot rely solely on individual teacher capacity; rather, it requires professional synergy across roles, including subject teachers, special education teachers, homeroom teachers, counselors, and other educational personnel. The lack of integrated communication and planning may lead to inconsistencies in service delivery, duplication of interventions, or even the neglect of students' specific needs.

Theoretically, collaborative approaches in education are rooted in the paradigms of professional learning communities (PLC) and collaborative inquiry, which emphasize the importance of collective reflection, shared responsibility for student outcomes, and the exchange of practice grounded in empirical experience. Within this framework, collaboration extends beyond administrative coordination to become a process of professional dialogue oriented toward systemic problem-solving in teaching and learning (Christensen, 2025; Denec, 2024; He et al., 2025).



Strategies for strengthening internal school collaboration are paramount to ensuring that inclusive education is not merely a collection of isolated initiatives but a coherent, institutionally embedded practice sustained through collective professional engagement. These strategies can be implemented through several conceptual and operational measures that span the domains of instructional design, reflective practice, pedagogical partnership, and systematic communication. First, the institutionalization of joint lesson planning serves as a foundational mechanism, providing a structured forum in which teachers can discuss student characteristics, collaboratively design differentiated instruction, and agree upon consistent intervention strategies; such collaborative planning not only enhances instructional coherence but also prevents fragmented or contradictory approaches to addressing the diverse needs of students with special educational requirements. Second, the development of data-informed collective reflection mechanisms is equally essential, wherein learning outcomes, classroom observations, and student feedback serve as the empirical basis for professional discussions aimed at identifying pedagogical challenges and formulating evidence-based solutions; this cyclical process of inquiry and evaluation fosters a constructive and sustainable evaluative culture that prioritizes continuous improvement over episodic remediation. Third, the implementation of co-teaching or collaborative teaching models in inclusive classrooms represents a particularly impactful strategy, as it enables teachers to share responsibilities in delivering instruction, managing classroom dynamics, and providing individualized support to students; such collaborative practices not only enhance the quality and responsiveness of service delivery but also enrich teachers' pedagogical competencies through reciprocal learning and peer modeling. Fourth, the strengthening of cross-role communication through integrated documentation systems—such as shared student progress records and individualized intervention plans—is critical for ensuring informational continuity and minimizing miscommunication among teachers, support staff, and specialists; systematic documentation guarantees that all stakeholders possess timely and accurate knowledge of each student's evolving needs, thereby facilitating coordinated and consistent support across instructional contexts. Collectively, these collaborative strategies—rooted in joint planning, reflective inquiry, pedagogical partnership, and systematic communication—constitute the institutional backbone of inclusive education, ensuring that the collective expertise of the school community is harnessed to create a responsive, adaptive, and genuinely supportive learning environment for every student.

The implications of strengthening collaboration are both structural and cultural. Structurally, it leads to the development of a coordinated system that is responsive to student diversity. Culturally, it fosters a collaborative work culture characterized by professional trust, openness to feedback, and a shared commitment to inclusive principles. A collaborative culture enables the internal dissemination of best practices. Teachers no longer operate in professional isolation, but rather as members of a learning community that supports one another. This condition enhances the institutional capacity of schools to manage inclusive classrooms in a sustainable manner.

Thus, strengthening internal school collaboration constitutes a strategic prerequisite for building an effective inclusive education system. Without coordination and synergy among educational actors, efforts toward differentiation and individualized support risk becoming sporadic and fragmented. Structured and reflective collaboration forms the foundation for delivering adaptive, comprehensive, and learner-centered educational services that promote the success of all students.

8) Strengthening Collaboration with External Stakeholders

The limited external support for schools indicates that the implementation of inclusive education cannot be understood solely as the responsibility of the school as an institution, but rather as a social practice intertwined with family and community contexts. Schools are part of a broader educational ecosystem; therefore, the success of inclusive practices is significantly influenced by acceptance, participation, and social legitimacy from external environments.

From an educational ecology perspective, the relationships among schools, families, and communities form an interconnected system of interactions (Aldridge et al., 2024; Amirah et al.,



2023; Saracostti et al., 2020). When external support is weak—manifested, for instance, in parental resistance, community stigma toward disability, or low levels of public participation—schools are likely to encounter structural and cultural barriers in sustaining inclusive practices. Such limitations may generate tensions between the inclusive values promoted by schools and the prevailing social norms within the community.

Accordingly, strategies to strengthen collaboration with families and communities are necessary as a means of expanding collective responsibility for inclusive education. These strategies can be analyzed across several key dimensions: First, strengthening school–family partnerships through dialogic and participatory communication. Schools should actively involve parents in educational program planning, discussions of children’s development, and decision-making processes related to services provided for students with special educational needs. This approach not only enhances transparency but also fosters a sense of ownership over inclusive practices. Second, public education and social advocacy regarding the values of inclusion. Schools can organize outreach programs, seminars, and community-based activities aimed at reducing stigma toward disability and promoting collective awareness of every child’s right to equitable education. This process is essential for building social legitimacy for the presence of students with special educational needs in mainstream schools. Third, collaboration with social organizations, disability service providers, and local communities to provide additional support, including mentoring, training, and resource sharing. Such external networks expand the school’s capacity to deliver comprehensive services. Fourth, integrating inclusive values into community-based activities, ensuring that inclusive practices extend beyond the classroom and become embedded in students’ broader social lives. This creates continuity between school-based learning experiences and social experiences outside the school context.

The implications of strengthening external collaboration are strategic and long-term. First, it establishes sustained support beyond the school environment, reinforcing the stability of inclusive practices. Second, social resistance toward students with special educational needs can be mitigated through education and positive interaction. Third, it fosters the development of social networks that enable the continuity of interventions and support. Conceptually, collaboration with families and communities expands the meaning of inclusion from a school-based policy into a broader social movement oriented toward equity and justice. Within this framework, inclusive education is not only concerned with integrating students with special educational needs into mainstream education systems, but also with transforming societal attitudes toward diversity. Strengthening external support through strategic partnerships constitutes a critical foundation for the sustainability of inclusive education. Without sufficient social legitimacy and participation, inclusive practices risk becoming merely formalistic programs that are vulnerable to resistance and instability in implementation.

10) Developing an Inclusive School Culture

The persistence of strong social stigma toward students with special educational needs indicates that the challenges of inclusive education do not lie solely in the technical aspects of instruction, but also in the social construction of disability. Stigma operates through labeling, stereotyping, and deficit-oriented assumptions that position students with special educational needs as lacking, incapable, or as burdens within the educational system. From a sociological perspective, such stigma is a product of power relations and dominant norms that construct standards of normality, thereby positioning individuals who fall outside these standards as deviant.

Consequently, educational practices that fail to critically reflect on these social constructions risk reproducing both symbolic and structural forms of exclusion, thereby undermining the very principles of equity and justice that inclusive education seeks to uphold. Therefore, the development of an inclusive and reflective school culture is required as a transformational strategy that permeates every facet of institutional life. An inclusive school culture does not merely emphasize the administrative acceptance of students with special educational needs, but also the internalization of values such as empathy, tolerance, and social justice across all institutional practices, ensuring that inclusion is experienced not as a procedural



obligation but as a shared ethical commitment. This strategy can be examined through several conceptual dimensions that collectively address the normative, cognitive, pedagogical, and representational layers of school culture.

First, the normative dimension involves affirming inclusion as a foundational principle of school governance; values such as empathy, respect for diversity, and non-discrimination must be embedded in the school's vision, mission, and policies, yet these values should not remain at the level of formal documentation but must be enacted in everyday practices—including language use, interaction patterns, and conflict resolution mechanisms—so that they become tangible and observable in daily institutional life. Second, the reflective-critical dimension focuses on developing collective awareness among school members regarding implicit biases, prejudices, and potentially discriminatory practices; activities such as collective reflection, inclusion awareness training, and critical discussions on disability issues can serve as mechanisms for deconstructing stigma, thereby positioning the school as a social learning space that continuously evaluates and transforms itself through ongoing critical inquiry. Third, the pedagogical-transformative dimension entails integrating social justice values into the curriculum and instructional processes; teaching materials, discussion methods, and collaborative projects can be designed to foster students' critical perspectives on issues of diversity and equity, such that students not only understand inclusion cognitively but also experience it as a lived social practice that shapes their identities and interactions. Fourth, the symbolic and representational dimension involves providing positive representation for students with special educational needs within school activities; the recognition of achievements, active participation in extracurricular activities, and involvement in decision-making forums collectively strengthen their position as equal subjects within the school community, counteracting marginalization through visibility and agency. In synthesis, these four dimensions—normative, reflective-critical, pedagogical-transformative, and symbolic-representational—constitute a comprehensive framework for cultivating an institutional ethos that transcends mere policy compliance and instead embraces inclusion as an ongoing, dynamic process of cultural transformation. When integrated with the pedagogical, infrastructural, social-relational, and collaborative strategies previously delineated, this framework ensures that inclusive education is realized not as a fragmented set of interventions but as a coherent, holistic, and deeply embedded commitment to the dignity and potential of every learner.

The implications of developing an inclusive and reflective school culture are multidimensional. At the individual level, students with special educational needs gain psychological safety and social recognition, which supports the development of a positive identity. At the interpersonal level, social interactions become more egalitarian and grounded in respect for differences. At the institutional level, the school transforms from a mere academic institution into an agent of social change that actively challenges exclusionary norms within society (Bentsalo & Benson, 2025; Hayward & Marshman, 2025; Kolleck, 2025; Maratia et al., 2025). The development of an inclusive and reflective school culture constitutes a strategic effort to reduce stigma toward students with special educational needs. Schools not only perform the function of knowledge transmission but also serve as agents of social transformation cultivating generations with ethical sensitivity, a commitment to justice, and the readiness to live in diverse societies.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This study confirms that the implementation of inclusive education in junior high schools in Denpasar City remains in a transitional phase between normative commitment and substantive realization. Administratively, schools have admitted students with special needs and formally endorsed inclusive policies. However, structurally, pedagogically, and culturally, the systemic support required to achieve authentic inclusivity has not yet been fully established. The findings indicate that the barriers to implementing inclusive education are systemic and interdependent. At the structural level, weak operational policies at the school level, the absence of special education support teachers, limited access to continuous professional development, high teacher–



student ratios, and inadequate accessible infrastructure demonstrate that schools lack sufficient enabling structures to sustain inclusive practices. Inclusive policies remain largely declarative and have not yet been institutionalized within systematic and sustainable school governance.

At the pedagogical level, teaching practices are still predominantly characterized by homogeneous approaches oriented toward the “average student.” Differentiated instruction, curriculum adaptation, the development of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), and flexible assessment practices have not been consistently implemented. As a result, the diversity of learning needs remains insufficiently accommodated, and the academic participation of students with special needs tends to be limited. This indicates that pedagogical transformation—the core of inclusive education—has not yet been fully realized. Meanwhile, at the cultural level, stigma and implicit perceptions persist, framing students with special needs as burdens to the academic rhythm of the classroom. A school culture that emphasizes uniform academic achievement and classroom order risks generating mechanisms of hidden exclusion, in which differentiated instruction is underdeveloped because it is perceived as disrupting curricular stability and targets. Thus, cultural constraints not only influence individual attitudes but also shape pedagogical logics that sustain uniformity as the dominant standard of learning success.

These three dimensions do not operate independently; rather, they form a mutually reinforcing cycle of exclusion. Structural limitations constrain pedagogical innovation; pedagogical constraints reinforce negative perceptions of diversity; and a non-inclusive school culture weakens institutional commitment to structural reform. Under such conditions, inclusive education risks being reduced to an administrative symbol without substantive transformation in teaching practices and school culture. Theoretically, this study reinforces the perspective that inclusive education must be understood as a comprehensive transformation of the education system, rather than merely a technical adaptation within the classroom. Inclusivity emerges from the interaction of policy, practice, and school culture as an integrated whole. Without simultaneous transformation across these three dimensions, inclusion efforts are likely to remain partial and unsustainable.

Practically, strengthening the implementation of inclusive education in junior high schools in Denpasar requires a holistic, school-based approach that includes strengthening inclusive leadership of school principals as drivers of vision, policy, and governance of inclusive education; developing clear operational policies and minimum service standards as guidelines for implementation; providing and equitably distributing special education support teachers, alongside efforts to reduce teacher–student ratios in inclusive classrooms; promoting continuous professional development for teachers based on the practical needs of inclusive teaching; optimizing educational facilities and infrastructure based on the principles of universal design; and transforming school culture toward one that values diversity as a resource for learning.

In conclusion, the success of inclusive education should not be measured by the number of students with special needs enrolled in regular schools, but by the extent to which schools are able to transform their systems, pedagogical practices, and institutional culture to ensure that all learners, without exception, can participate meaningfully and achieve optimal development according to their individual potential. Equitable inclusive education can only be realized through collective commitment, continuous reflection, and consistent systemic reform.

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