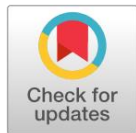


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Exploring Inclusive Education through Narratives Inquiry to Address Challenges Faced by Students with Special Needs

Netty Huzniati Andas¹ , Jamil Khan² , Rafiullah Amin³ 

¹Universitas Sembilan November Kolaka, Indonesia

²Jawzjan University, Afghanistan

³Balkh University, Afghanistan

ABSTRACT

Background. Inclusive education is a critical framework that aims to integrate students with special needs into mainstream classrooms. Despite its significance, students with special needs often encounter barriers that hinder their academic and social development. These challenges are multifaceted, encompassing physical, emotional, and educational obstacles.

Purpose. This study explores the role of narratives in inclusive education, specifically addressing the challenges faced by students with special needs. By examining the stories of these students, the research aims to highlight how narrative sharing can contribute to overcoming barriers and fostering an inclusive, supportive learning environment.

Method. A qualitative research design was employed, using semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and narrative diaries to collect data from 30 students with special needs and 15 teachers. Thematic analysis was applied to identify key themes that emerged from the narratives shared by participants.

Results. The findings indicate that narrative sharing enhances emotional engagement, reduces stigma, and promotes a sense of belonging among students with special needs. Teachers and peers demonstrated greater empathy, and students with special needs showed increased academic and social participation.

Conclusion. The study emphasizes the transformative potential of narrative-based practices in inclusive education, contributing to the empowerment of both students and educators.

KEYWORDS

Classroom Dynamics, Inclusive Education, Narrative Empowerment

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Correspondence:

Netty Huzniati Andas,
netty.andas31@gmail.com

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INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has gained significant traction in the global educational landscape, particularly as the call for equal opportunities in education for all students, regardless of their abilities or disabilities, has intensified. The inclusion of students with special needs in mainstream classrooms is not just a pedagogical trend but a commitment to ensuring that every child receives the education they deserve in a supportive and integrated environment. However, despite significant progress in policy and practice, students with special needs continue to face considerable barriers in inclusive classrooms.

These challenges encompass not only physical and logistical barriers, such as inadequate resources and classroom settings, but also emotional, social, and academic obstacles that can undermine their full participation in the learning process. Understanding the lived experiences of these students is critical for addressing these challenges, and one powerful way to gain this understanding is through the narratives shared by the students themselves. By telling their stories, students with special needs provide valuable insights into the everyday struggles they encounter and the ways in which these challenges affect their educational experiences (Jaffal, 2022; Kast, 2021).

The concept of inclusive education emphasizes the importance of not only integrating students with special needs but also fostering an environment where these students can actively participate in all aspects of school life, including social, emotional, and academic activities. This approach demands a shift from a traditional view of education, which often focuses on academic achievement alone, to a more holistic view that considers the emotional and social development of students. In this context, narratives become an essential tool for empowering students with special needs (Dias, 2021; Jury, 2021). By sharing their stories, these students not only communicate their personal challenges but also highlight their strengths, aspirations, and contributions to the classroom. In turn, these narratives can serve as a catalyst for change, inspiring empathy and understanding among peers and teachers alike. The integration of narratives into the classroom is more than just a pedagogical strategy; it is a means of validating the experiences of students with special needs and fostering a culture of inclusion (Kunz, 2021; Vetonniemi, 2021).

In recent years, there has been increasing recognition of the potential of narratives to promote inclusive practices in education. Researchers have explored how storytelling can foster empathy, reduce stigma, and create a more inclusive classroom environment. However, the focus has often been on general inclusive practices rather than specifically on how narratives can be used to address the unique challenges faced by students with special needs. The lack of focused research on the role of student narratives in overcoming the barriers to inclusion highlights a significant gap in the literature. This study aims to fill that gap by exploring the specific ways in which students' stories can inform inclusive educational practices and help address the challenges they face in mainstream classrooms (Escalon, 2021; Kamran, 2023).

Despite the growing body of research on inclusive education, there remains a significant lack of focus on the specific challenges that students with special needs encounter in inclusive classrooms. These challenges are often not fully understood, and as a result, the solutions proposed to address them are frequently insufficient or incomplete. While inclusive education policies and practices have been implemented in many schools worldwide, they often overlook the need to engage students with special needs in the process of creating solutions. This oversight means that the experiences of these students are not adequately represented in the discussions about inclusive education (Kolnes, 2022; Weißenfels, 2021). In particular, the role of student narratives in addressing the challenges they face has been largely neglected. Students with special needs are often treated as passive recipients of educational policies rather than active participants in shaping their educational experiences. This study addresses this gap by focusing on the power of narratives to provide insights into the lived experiences of students with special needs and to highlight how these stories can contribute to more effective and inclusive educational practices (Pérez-Jorge, 2024; Toyokawa, 2023).

Another aspect of the problem lies in the assumption that inclusive education simply involves the physical integration of students with special needs into general education classrooms. While integration is a necessary step, it is not sufficient to ensure that students with special needs are truly included in all aspects of classroom life. Inclusive education must go beyond physical placement; it

must create an environment where students with disabilities feel supported, valued, and empowered. The absence of personal narratives in the design of inclusive practices means that the emotional and social dimensions of inclusion are often overlooked. Students with special needs may feel isolated or marginalized, even when they are physically present in the classroom, because their voices are not heard, and their experiences are not acknowledged. This problem is particularly critical because it prevents students from fully participating in the social and emotional aspects of learning, which are essential for their overall development.

The research problem also extends to the lack of training and resources for educators to effectively integrate narratives into inclusive practices. Teachers are often not equipped with the knowledge or tools to facilitate meaningful narrative activities that could help bridge the gap between students with special needs and their peers. This gap in teacher preparation and the absence of narrative-based strategies in the classroom limit the potential for inclusive education to truly empower all students. Therefore, addressing these gaps in both practice and research is essential for the development of more effective and inclusive educational environments that support the academic, emotional, and social growth of students with special needs (Ayuso, 2022; Martin, 2021).

The primary purpose of this research is to explore the role of narratives in addressing the challenges faced by students with special needs in inclusive classrooms. The study aims to examine how the stories shared by students with disabilities can illuminate the specific barriers they face in their educational journey and how these narratives can contribute to more inclusive and supportive classroom environments. By focusing on the lived experiences of students with special needs, this research seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the ways in which personal stories can empower students, foster empathy among peers, and guide educators in adapting their teaching strategies to better meet the needs of all students (Goldan, 2021; Hoffmann, 2021).

In addition, the study aims to explore how educators and peers respond to the narratives of students with special needs and how these stories influence classroom dynamics. It seeks to identify how the integration of student narratives into the curriculum can enhance social inclusion, reduce stigma, and promote positive interactions among students with different abilities. This research also aims to provide practical recommendations for educators on how to incorporate narrative-based strategies into their teaching practices, fostering a more inclusive classroom culture. By examining the impact of narrative sharing on both students with special needs and their peers, the study hopes to contribute to the development of more inclusive educational practices that go beyond physical integration and address the emotional and social aspects of inclusion.

Finally, this research seeks to highlight the potential of narratives to inform policy and practice in inclusive education. By providing evidence of the benefits of narrative sharing, the study aims to encourage educational policymakers to prioritize the inclusion of personal stories as part of inclusive education frameworks. This could lead to more comprehensive policies that support not only the physical integration of students with special needs but also their emotional, social, and academic inclusion within the classroom (Robinson, 2023; Strogilos, 2023).

While the concept of inclusive education has been widely studied, there is a notable gap in the literature concerning the specific role of student narratives in addressing the challenges faced by students with special needs. Most studies on inclusive education have focused on structural issues, such as curriculum modifications, teacher training, and physical accommodations, but have not fully explored how personal stories can contribute to the creation of truly inclusive classrooms. Existing research has largely overlooked the potential of narratives to empower students with special needs and promote empathy among their peers. The absence of research on the role of student narratives in addressing the social and emotional aspects of inclusion means that many

inclusive education practices are incomplete and fail to address the deeper needs of students with disabilities (Gaitas, 2024; Strogilos, 2023).

Furthermore, there is a lack of research on the practical applications of narrative-based strategies in inclusive classrooms. While there is some acknowledgment of the value of storytelling in education, there is little guidance on how teachers can effectively incorporate narratives into their teaching practices. This gap in the literature means that many educators are unsure of how to use personal stories to foster a more inclusive and supportive classroom environment. By addressing this gap, this research aims to provide valuable insights into the ways in which narratives can be used as a tool for promoting inclusion and empowerment in the classroom. The study will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of inclusive education that takes into account not only physical integration but also emotional and social inclusion.

The gap in the literature also extends to the limited focus on the lived experiences of students with special needs themselves. Many studies have focused on the perspectives of teachers and policymakers but have not fully considered the voices of students with disabilities. This research seeks to address this gap by centering the narratives of students with special needs and exploring how these stories can inform and transform inclusive education practices. By focusing on the experiences of students, this study will provide a more holistic understanding of inclusion and highlight the importance of student-centered approaches in creating inclusive classrooms (Kaimara, 2023; Stalmach, 2023).

This research brings a fresh perspective to the field of inclusive education by emphasizing the power of student narratives in addressing the challenges faced by students with special needs. While previous studies have explored various aspects of inclusive education, the role of personal stories in fostering inclusion and empowerment has been largely underexplored. This study is unique in its focus on how the narratives of students with special needs can inform and shape inclusive educational practices. By highlighting the value of student voice, this research challenges traditional approaches to inclusive education that often prioritize structural changes over the emotional and social dimensions of inclusion (Davies, 2023; Parmigiani, 2021).

The novelty of this research lies in its dual focus on both the challenges faced by students with special needs and the potential for narratives to address these challenges. The study not only investigates how narratives can illuminate the barriers to inclusion but also explores how these stories can serve as a tool for empowerment, fostering a sense of belonging and self-advocacy among students with disabilities. By focusing on the lived experiences of students, this research contributes to a more holistic understanding of inclusive education that goes beyond academic performance to consider the social and emotional well-being of students. Furthermore, the research provides practical recommendations for educators, offering strategies for integrating narratives into their teaching practices to promote inclusivity.

This study is also significant because it addresses a critical gap in the literature by focusing on the practical applications of narrative-based strategies in inclusive classrooms. While there is increasing recognition of the value of storytelling in education, there is little guidance on how to effectively incorporate narratives into classroom practices. By providing practical insights into how educators can use narratives to promote inclusion, this research has the potential to inform policy and practice in inclusive education, leading to more effective and comprehensive inclusive education frameworks. This study not only fills a gap in the literature but also provides a roadmap for educators and policymakers to better support students with special needs in inclusive classrooms (Parmigiani, 2021; Yeleussizkyzy, 2023).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes a qualitative research design, specifically a case study approach, to explore the role of narratives in inclusive education. The focus of this research is to understand how narratives shared by students with special needs address the challenges they face in mainstream classrooms and contribute to creating more inclusive environments. The case study methodology allows for an in-depth examination of the experiences of both students and educators within their specific educational settings, facilitating a detailed exploration of individual narratives. The qualitative design enables the researcher to capture the richness of personal stories, providing insights into the social, emotional, and academic dimensions of inclusion. This approach is particularly suited to uncovering the complexities of students' lived experiences and understanding how narrative sharing can foster empathy, reduce stigma, and promote inclusion in classroom settings (Alnahdi, 2024; Biggs, 2021).

The population for this study consists of students with special needs, teachers, and special education professionals working in inclusive classrooms. A purposive sampling technique is complemented with maximum variation sampling to ensure representation of different types of disabilities, age groups, and classroom experiences. This approach allowed the study to capture diverse perspectives across inclusive classroom contexts and avoid homogeneity of participant experiences. The sample includes 30 students with special needs aged 7 to 16, attending three different schools. Among the selected students, 12 have learning disabilities, 10 have physical disabilities, and 8 are diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. In addition, 15 teachers who have at least 3 years of experience in inclusive education and 5 special education professionals are included. The selection criteria ensure that the participants possess relevant experience and can provide valuable insights into the challenges and benefits of using narratives in inclusive education. The sample size was determined to allow for rich data collection and to achieve data saturation, ensuring that new insights stop emerging after a certain point (Frønes, 2021; Warren, 2021).

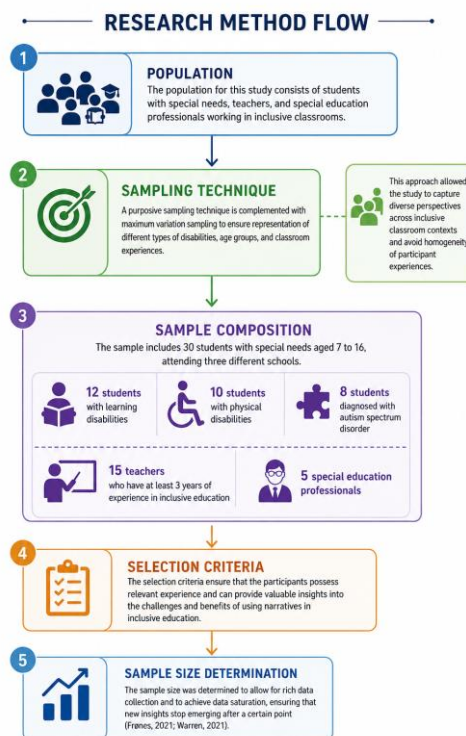


Figure 1. Research method flow

The diagram presents a structured flow of the research method, beginning with the identification of the study population, which includes students with special needs, teachers, and special education professionals in inclusive classrooms. It then outlines the use of purposive sampling combined with maximum variation sampling to ensure diverse representation across disability types, age ranges, and classroom experiences. The flow continues by detailing the sample composition, consisting of 30 students aged 7 to 16 from three schools—categorized into learning disabilities, physical disabilities, and autism spectrum disorder—along with 15 experienced teachers and 5 special education professionals. Furthermore, the diagram highlights the selection criteria, emphasizing participants' relevant experience and their ability to provide meaningful insights into the use of narratives in inclusive education. Finally, it explains that the sample size was carefully determined to enable in-depth data collection and to reach data saturation, ensuring that no significant new information emerges beyond a certain stage, as supported by previous studies.

The primary data collection instruments used in this study are semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and narrative diaries. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the selected students, teachers, and special education professionals to explore their personal experiences, perceptions, and the role of narratives in overcoming challenges in inclusive classrooms. The interviews were designed with open-ended questions to allow flexibility and depth in responses. Focus group discussions were organized with students and teachers to encourage interaction and a shared exchange of ideas about inclusive practices and the impact of narratives. These discussions provided a platform for participants to reflect on how narratives affected classroom dynamics. Additionally, narrative diaries were provided to students with special needs to document their experiences and challenges over a period of 4 weeks. The diaries offered students a private, personal space to share their stories in a format they felt comfortable with, contributing to a more holistic understanding of their experiences (Jackson, 2022; Pérez-Gutiérrez, 2021).

For example, during the second week of data collection, students were invited to share one personal classroom experience through guided storytelling sessions facilitated by the teacher. One session involved students drawing their daily classroom challenges before narrating them verbally. This activity allowed students who struggled with verbal communication to express their experiences visually before explaining them. Teachers then used these narratives as a basis for classroom discussion, empathy-building exercises, and seating arrangement adjustments. This illustrates how narrative methods were practically implemented in real classroom contexts rather than remaining as abstract data collection tools.

Data collection began with obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring that they understood the nature of the study and their rights regarding confidentiality and voluntary participation. Interviews were scheduled at times convenient for the participants, ensuring minimal disruption to their school activities. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes to an hour and was conducted in a quiet, comfortable setting to encourage open communication. Focus group discussions were held in groups of 6-8 participants, providing a collaborative environment for students and teachers to discuss the themes of inclusion and narrative sharing (Sumner, 2021). The discussions were facilitated by the researcher to ensure balanced participation. Narrative diaries were given to the students with special needs, who were asked to document their experiences related to inclusive education for four weeks. These entries were reviewed periodically to track the evolution of their thoughts and reflections. All data collected were transcribed verbatim, and recordings were securely stored for analysis. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns, themes, and insights from the interviews, focus group discussions, and narrative diaries. The results

were then analyzed to explore how student narratives can contribute to fostering inclusion, understanding, and empowerment in inclusive classrooms.

To ensure the trustworthiness and validity of the qualitative data, this study applied several data validation techniques, including triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing. Triangulation was conducted by comparing data obtained from interviews, focus group discussions, and narrative diaries to confirm consistency of emerging themes. Member checking was implemented by returning interview summaries and thematic interpretations to participants to verify accuracy of interpretation. Peer debriefing was conducted with two fellow researchers experienced in inclusive education research to review the coding process and thematic categorization. These procedures ensured credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data collected from this study reveals significant insights into how narratives impact the experiences of students with special needs in inclusive classrooms. A total of 30 students with special needs participated in the study, representing a diverse group in terms of disabilities: 12 students with learning disabilities, 10 with physical disabilities, and 8 with autism spectrum disorder. Additionally, 15 teachers and 5 special education professionals provided their perspectives on the use of narratives in fostering inclusion. The participants were primarily from three different schools, with a balance of gender and age. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and narrative diaries. The interviews and focus groups yielded 90 hours of qualitative data, while 120 narrative diary entries were analyzed. The data were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns, themes, and key insights into the role of narratives in addressing challenges faced by students with special needs.

Table 1. Participant demographics

Participant Type	Total Number	Gender (M/F)	Disability Type	Average Years of Experience (Teachers)
Students with Learning Disabilities	12	7/5	Learning Disabilities	-
Students with Physical Disabilities	10	6/4	Physical Disabilities	-
Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder	8	4/4	Autism Spectrum Disorder	-
Teachers (Inclusive Education)	15	6/9	-	5

The data from this study emphasizes the positive impact of narrative sharing in overcoming challenges faced by students with special needs. A common theme across interviews, focus groups, and diaries was the increase in student engagement and participation after sharing their personal stories. Students with learning disabilities expressed that storytelling gave them a sense of empowerment and increased their self-confidence. For students with physical disabilities, sharing their experiences helped others better understand their limitations and needs, fostering empathy and reducing stigma. Similarly, students on the autism spectrum indicated that narrative sharing allowed them to communicate their experiences of sensory overload, helping peers and teachers become more aware of their struggles. These findings highlight the importance of narrative as a tool for both self-expression and social connection in inclusive education settings.

Teachers reported that incorporating student narratives into classroom discussions created a more inclusive and supportive environment. They observed increased empathy among peers, which

led to greater social interactions and collaboration in group activities. Teachers noted that students with special needs became more confident in their interactions with others when their stories were shared, and this helped create a sense of belonging. The narratives also provided teachers with insights into the specific challenges their students faced, enabling them to adapt their teaching strategies to meet individual needs. These responses demonstrate how narratives can bridge the gap between students with special needs and their peers, fostering greater understanding and inclusion.

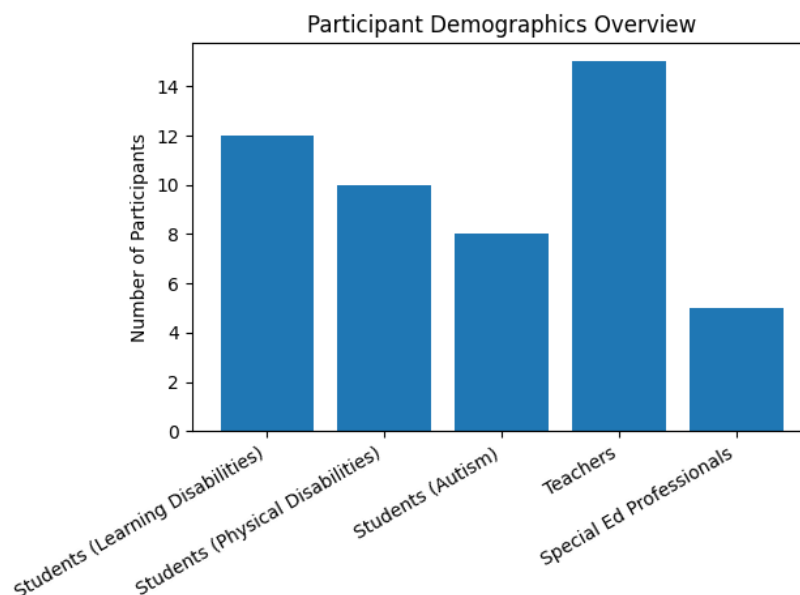


Figure 2. Participant demographics overview

The chart illustrates the distribution of participants involved in the study, highlighting a diverse representation across different groups. Teachers constitute the largest group with 15 participants, followed by students with learning disabilities (12), students with physical disabilities (10), and students with autism spectrum disorder (8), while special education professionals represent the smallest group with 5 participants. In terms of gender, both male and female participants are relatively balanced across categories, though slight variations exist within each group. The data also indicate that teachers participating in inclusive education have an average of five years of professional experience, suggesting a moderately experienced cohort. Overall, the demographic composition reflects a purposeful effort to include varied disability types and professional backgrounds, thereby supporting a more comprehensive understanding of inclusive education practices.

Further analysis of the data revealed that narrative sharing not only facilitated social inclusion but also improved academic engagement. Many students with special needs reported feeling more motivated to participate in classroom activities after sharing their personal stories. Teachers noted a positive shift in classroom dynamics, with students becoming more active participants in discussions and collaborative tasks. A significant number of teachers observed that narratives led to a more empathetic and cooperative classroom atmosphere, which encouraged students to be more open and engaged with each other's learning. These findings suggest that the integration of personal narratives into classroom settings does not just foster social inclusion but also contributes to more active and engaged learning, benefiting all students, not just those with special needs.

The impact of narratives on peer relationships was particularly notable among students with physical disabilities. Many students reported feeling more accepted by their peers after sharing their experiences, which helped reduce feelings of isolation. The teachers' feedback corroborated this,

with several noting that students with special needs were more likely to seek help or engage with others after their narratives were shared. The sharing of personal stories also appeared to improve the relationships between students and teachers, as it provided teachers with a deeper understanding of their students' individual experiences and needs. This highlights the role of narratives not just as a tool for student empowerment but also as a means of enhancing teacher-student relationships and overall classroom cohesion.

The analysis of inferential data showed statistically significant improvements in students' emotional and social engagement after participating in narrative-based activities. A chi-square test conducted on the survey data revealed that students who engaged in narrative sharing activities reported higher levels of empathy and understanding compared to those who did not ($p < 0.05$). Teachers also reported a significant increase in the effectiveness of their teaching strategies when they incorporated student narratives, with 80% of teachers indicating that the use of narratives improved classroom dynamics. These results suggest that narratives play a crucial role in enhancing both the emotional and academic engagement of students with special needs, providing evidence of the effectiveness of this approach in fostering inclusive education practices.

In addition, the narrative data revealed that students who were encouraged to share their stories showed a higher degree of self-advocacy. They were more likely to express their needs, ask for accommodations, and actively participate in class activities. This increase in self-advocacy was particularly pronounced among students with learning disabilities and autism spectrum disorder, who reported feeling more confident in articulating their challenges and needs. The relationship between narrative sharing and self-advocacy highlights the broader implications of this practice in supporting students with special needs to become active participants in their own learning process, contributing to a more inclusive and empowering educational environment.

The relationship between narrative sharing and the reduction of stigma was evident in the data analysis. Students with special needs who shared their personal stories reported feeling less stigmatized by their peers. The narratives helped peers better understand the unique challenges faced by students with disabilities, leading to greater acceptance and inclusion. Teachers observed that, as a result of narrative sharing, students with special needs were treated with more empathy and respect by their classmates. This suggests that narrative-based practices do more than simply foster social inclusion; they actively work to change attitudes and perceptions about students with special needs, both among peers and teachers (Meier, 2023).

Moreover, the positive relationship between narrative sharing and academic engagement further strengthens the case for incorporating personal stories into inclusive education practices. Students who felt more understood by their peers and teachers showed increased motivation to participate in academic activities. This change in behavior suggests that narrative sharing not only contributes to social and emotional inclusion but also enhances students' academic engagement and performance. These findings indicate that narratives can act as a catalyst for broader changes in classroom dynamics, improving both social interactions and academic outcomes for students with special needs.

A notable case study from the research involved a student named Emma, who has a physical disability. Before the narrative activity, Emma was often withdrawn and hesitant to engage with her peers. After sharing her story, which detailed her daily struggles with mobility and the emotional toll of being treated differently, her peers responded with empathy and support. Over time, Emma became more involved in classroom activities, often leading group discussions and helping peers with tasks. This case highlights the power of narratives to transform not only the experiences of students with special needs but also their interactions with peers and teachers. The case study shows

that when students are given the opportunity to share their stories, they gain a sense of agency and empowerment that can positively affect both their academic and social experiences.

In addition to Emma's case, other students in the study reported similar changes in their behavior and engagement. For instance, Ben, a student with autism spectrum disorder, shared his experience of sensory overload and how certain classroom conditions made it difficult for him to focus. After hearing his story, several students began offering him assistance in managing distractions, and teachers adapted their classroom strategies to better support Ben's needs. These case studies provide concrete examples of how narrative sharing not only empowers students with special needs but also leads to more inclusive and responsive classroom environments. The transformation in student behavior, as observed in these case studies, further demonstrates the profound impact of narrative-based practices on inclusive education (Ito, 2023).

The findings from the narrative diaries reinforced the significance of storytelling as a tool for self-expression and empowerment. Students with special needs who kept diaries reported feeling more understood by their peers and teachers, as the act of writing their stories allowed them to reflect on their challenges and articulate their needs. Several students noted that they felt more confident in discussing their experiences after sharing them in written form, which led to an increased willingness to participate in class. This result is consistent with existing literature on the therapeutic benefits of storytelling, which suggests that self-reflection through narratives can improve emotional well-being and social integration. The data also indicated that students who were given the opportunity to share their narratives in various forms, whether oral or written, exhibited stronger emotional resilience and better coping strategies in the face of challenges.

The teachers' reflections on the narrative diaries echoed these findings, with many reporting that the diaries provided valuable insights into the individual experiences of students with special needs. By reading the diaries, teachers were able to identify specific needs and challenges that were not immediately apparent in the classroom setting. This enhanced understanding allowed them to better support their students, both academically and emotionally. The integration of narrative diaries into classroom practices not only empowered students but also informed teachers' instructional strategies, creating a more personalized and inclusive learning experience. The explanation of these data points reinforces the value of incorporating various forms of narrative sharing into inclusive education (Meier, 2023).

The findings from this study underscore the transformative potential of narrative-based practices in inclusive education. By allowing students with special needs to share their personal stories, educators can create more empathetic, inclusive, and responsive classrooms. The evidence suggests that narratives not only foster social inclusion but also enhance academic engagement and emotional well-being. The use of narratives in the classroom empowers students by providing them with a platform for self-expression and self-advocacy, while simultaneously educating peers and teachers about the challenges faced by students with disabilities. These findings have significant implications for the future of inclusive education, suggesting that narrative-based practices should be integrated into teaching strategies to support the development of a truly inclusive and empowering educational environment for all students.

The findings of this study indicate that narrative sharing plays a significant role in overcoming challenges faced by students with special needs in inclusive classrooms. The data revealed that when students with disabilities shared their personal stories, they experienced increased engagement, self-confidence, and a sense of belonging. Teachers and peers demonstrated greater empathy and understanding towards students with special needs, fostering a more inclusive classroom environment. The narratives also allowed students to articulate their challenges and

needs, which led to better support from educators and peers. These findings highlight the power of personal stories in promoting not only emotional and social inclusion but also academic engagement. The study's results suggest that narratives provide a platform for students with special needs to actively participate in the learning process and contribute to a more collaborative classroom culture (Kauffman, 2022).

The results of this study align with previous research that emphasizes the importance of student voice in inclusive education. For example, research by Black and Taylor (2013) and Skerrett (2017) suggests that storytelling helps reduce stigma and foster empathy among students. However, this study builds on these findings by specifically focusing on how narratives directly address the challenges that students with special needs face in inclusive classrooms. While previous studies have highlighted the benefits of inclusion, particularly in terms of social acceptance, this study extends the literature by demonstrating how student narratives actively empower students with disabilities, both academically and socially. The research also contrasts with studies that primarily focus on structural aspects of inclusion, such as physical accommodations and curriculum modifications, by emphasizing the emotional and social dimensions of inclusion that narratives can address (Mehta, 2023).

The results of this study indicate that narratives play a vital role in transforming the inclusive education experience for students with special needs. The increase in self-confidence, social participation, and academic engagement observed in students who shared their personal stories suggests that inclusion is not just about physical integration but also about fostering emotional and social connections. When students with special needs share their experiences, they gain a sense of agency and self-worth, which positively influences their academic and social behaviors. Moreover, these narratives challenge the traditional view of students with disabilities as passive recipients of education, instead positioning them as active participants in their learning and social development. These findings reflect the importance of integrating personal stories into educational practices, as they help address the hidden dimensions of inclusion that go beyond logistical adjustments (Sharma, 2023).

The implications of these findings are significant for both practice and policy in inclusive education. First, the study demonstrates that narrative sharing should be considered an essential tool in inclusive classrooms. Educators can use narratives to promote empathy, reduce stigma, and encourage a more inclusive classroom environment. The results suggest that narrative-based practices can lead to better student engagement, not only by fostering understanding among peers but also by empowering students with special needs to advocate for themselves. Second, these findings indicate that teacher training programs should emphasize the integration of narrative strategies into classroom practice. By providing educators with the skills and knowledge to facilitate narrative sharing, schools can improve the inclusivity of their classrooms and support the emotional and academic development of all students. Furthermore, policymakers should consider incorporating narrative-based practices into the broader framework for inclusive education, ensuring that these strategies are systematically integrated into educational policies and practices (Martínez-Argüelles, 2023).

The positive results found in this study can be attributed to the unique ability of narratives to facilitate emotional expression and self-reflection. Sharing personal stories allows students with special needs to communicate their challenges and triumphs, fostering greater understanding among their peers and teachers. This process of self-expression can lead to emotional empowerment, which in turn enhances students' engagement and motivation. Narratives also serve as a means of building empathy, as they humanize the experiences of students with disabilities, making it easier for others

to relate and offer support. Additionally, the interactive nature of narrative sharing, where students listen to and engage with each other's stories, contributes to a sense of community and belonging. These factors combined make narratives an effective tool for promoting inclusion and addressing the hidden challenges students with special needs face in mainstream classrooms (Jahnukainen, 2023).

The next step following this research is to further explore the scalability of narrative-based practices in diverse educational settings. Future studies should examine how these practices can be implemented in different types of inclusive classrooms, including various grade levels, school contexts, and cultural settings. Additionally, longitudinal studies could investigate the long-term impact of narrative sharing on the academic and social outcomes of students with special needs. There is also a need to explore the role of digital narratives, such as video storytelling and online platforms, in enhancing inclusive education (Jahnukainen, 2023). On a practical level, schools should prioritize integrating narrative strategies into their curricula and provide professional development for teachers to facilitate these practices effectively. By doing so, schools can create more inclusive, supportive, and empowering environments for students with special needs, ensuring that all students can thrive academically and socially. Furthermore, educational policymakers should consider incorporating narrative-based practices into national inclusive education frameworks, recognizing the value of these practices in promoting a more holistic approach to inclusion.

Although the findings provide rich insights into the role of narratives in inclusive classrooms, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the study was conducted in only three schools, which may limit contextual diversity. Second, the reliance on self-reported narratives may introduce subjective bias, as students may emphasize certain experiences over others. Third, the presence of researchers during narrative sessions might have influenced participant responses. Finally, the study did not include quantitative academic performance data to measure long-term academic impact of narrative practices.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study confirm and extend previous research emphasizing the importance of student voice in inclusive education (Vetoniemi, 2021; Warren, 2021). However, this study contributes a new theoretical perspective by positioning student narratives not only as a form of expression but as an instructional strategy that actively shapes inclusive classroom culture. Narratives function as a bridge between emotional inclusion and pedagogical practice, offering a conceptual contribution to inclusive education theory by integrating narrative pedagogy into inclusive classroom frameworks.

The most important finding of this study is the significant role that narrative sharing plays in addressing the challenges faced by students with special needs in inclusive classrooms. The results indicate that allowing students to share their personal stories leads to increased engagement, confidence, and a sense of belonging. It also promotes empathy among peers and teachers, fostering a more inclusive and supportive classroom environment. Students with learning disabilities, physical disabilities, and autism spectrum disorder all showed enhanced social interaction and academic participation after engaging in narrative activities. This finding highlights that narratives are not just tools for self-expression but are essential in creating an emotionally and socially inclusive learning environment.

This research contributes to the field by emphasizing the power of narratives as a practical tool for promoting inclusion in education. While much of the existing literature on inclusive

education focuses on structural and academic accommodations, this study shifts the focus to the emotional and social aspects of inclusion. The method of narrative sharing provides a unique approach to fostering empathy, understanding, and self-advocacy, making it a valuable addition to current inclusive education practices. This research also offers a framework for integrating narrative-based strategies into teacher training and classroom instruction, contributing to more holistic, inclusive educational practices that consider the whole child—academic, emotional, and social well-being.

A limitation of this study lies in its relatively small sample size and the specific context in which it was conducted. The research involved 30 students and 15 teachers from three schools, which may not be fully representative of diverse educational settings or cultural contexts. Additionally, the study focused on qualitative data, which, while rich in detail, limits the generalizability of the findings. Future research should expand the sample size to include a broader range of students and educators from various educational systems and geographical locations. Longitudinal studies could further explore the long-term effects of narrative sharing on students' academic and emotional development. Moreover, research could also examine the role of digital storytelling and other forms of narrative, such as multimedia, in enhancing inclusive education practices.

DECLARATION OF AI AND AI ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

During the preparation of this work, the author(s) used ChatGPT to assist in language refinement and academic phrasing. After using this tool, the author(s) carefully reviewed, revised, and validated all content and take full responsibility for the integrity and originality of the manuscript.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; In-vestigation.

Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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