

## The Impact of Inclusive Education Settings on the Social Development of Children with and Without Disabilities

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### Abstract

Inclusive education has emerged as a transformative approach to fostering equity and social cohesion in schools by integrating children with disabilities alongside their non-disabled peers. This study investigates how inclusive education environments influence the social development of both groups, emphasizing interpersonal relationships, empathy, and collaborative learning. The research aims to evaluate whether inclusive classrooms promote positive social interactions, reduce stigma, and enhance mutual understanding among students. Using a mixed-method design, data were collected from 200 elementary school students 100 with disabilities and 100 without through sociometric surveys, behavioral observations, and semi-structured interviews with teachers. Quantitative data were analyzed using multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), while qualitative responses were thematically coded to enrich interpretation. The results reveal that inclusive settings significantly improve peer acceptance, cooperative behaviors, and emotional regulation in both groups. Students with disabilities exhibited notable gains in self-confidence and communication, while their peers without disabilities developed stronger empathy and social responsibility. The study concludes that inclusive education serves as a catalyst for holistic social growth and community building when supported by effective teacher facilitation and adaptive pedagogies.

**Keywords:** Disability Inclusion, Inclusive Education, Social Development



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## INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has become one of the central paradigms of modern educational reform, promoting the belief that every child, regardless of ability or disability, deserves equal access to quality education within a shared environment. The principle of inclusion not only ensures academic accessibility but also emphasizes the social, emotional, and psychological well-being of all students. Global initiatives such as UNESCO's Salamanca Statement (1994) and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) have urged educational systems worldwide to adopt inclusive frameworks that dismantle segregation and encourage social participation (Fasano et al., 2021; Ringland, 2019). The shift from exclusionary to inclusive practices marks a fundamental transformation in how societies view diversity not as a limitation, but as a source of enrichment in the classroom. Within this evolving context, schools have become crucial arenas for cultivating empathy, collaboration, and mutual respect among students of varying abilities.

Research in inclusive education increasingly highlights the significance of peer interaction as a catalyst for social growth. Children learn not only through direct instruction but also through engagement with others in cooperative and social learning contexts. When students with and without disabilities share learning spaces, the resulting interactions shape their understanding of difference, acceptance, and interdependence. Such experiences provide opportunities for the development of emotional intelligence, tolerance, and social adaptability (Shaw et al., 2021; Travers & Carter, 2022). The classroom, therefore, operates as a microcosm of society, where inclusion serves as a foundation for building communities rooted in equity and respect. This orientation underscores the social dimension of inclusion, situating it beyond mere academic integration to encompass relational and behavioral transformation.

Despite the widespread advocacy for inclusion, the outcomes of inclusive education on social development remain complex and context-dependent. The effectiveness of inclusion varies across cultures, educational structures, and teacher preparedness. Some studies have reported increased peer acceptance and cooperation among mixed-ability groups, while others have noted persistent social barriers and subtle exclusion. This diversity of findings suggests that inclusion is not merely a policy implementation but a dynamic social process requiring continuous adaptation (Lourenço et al., 2025; Munandar et al., 2020). Understanding how inclusive environments influence the social development of both children with disabilities and their non-disabled peers is essential to realizing the full potential of inclusive education as a transformative framework.

The growing implementation of inclusive education policies has not always been matched by sufficient understanding of their social implications. Many schools continue to measure inclusion through access and enrollment rather than through indicators of social participation and interpersonal development. The result is a partial application of inclusion that emphasizes physical placement in classrooms but neglects the deeper processes of social integration and mutual growth (Lindsay et al., 2023; Lindsay & Cagliostro, 2020). Children with disabilities often encounter subtle forms of social isolation, despite being physically present in inclusive settings, while their peers without disabilities may lack structured opportunities to engage meaningfully with them. This research seeks to address this imbalance by focusing explicitly on the social developmental dimensions of inclusion.

A central problem lies in the inconsistency of teacher preparation and institutional support. Teachers frequently lack the training to manage heterogeneous classrooms that

accommodate diverse learning and social needs. The absence of collaborative learning structures and peer-mediated strategies further limits opportunities for positive social interaction. Consequently, inclusion risks being reduced to a symbolic practice rather than a genuine social and pedagogical commitment. By analyzing how inclusive environments shape both the interpersonal and intrapersonal dimensions of children's social development, this study aims to provide empirical evidence that supports the implementation of socially responsive inclusion. Moreover, the lack of longitudinal and comparative data in existing studies has led to fragmented understanding of how inclusion affects students over time. Most research has concentrated on academic performance or attitudes toward inclusion, leaving social development understudied. This study responds to that gap by systematically comparing the social outcomes of children with and without disabilities within inclusive classrooms (Kwok et al., 2019; Lindsay et al., 2023). The problem extends beyond measurement it reflects a conceptual gap in educational discourse, where inclusion must be redefined not as the mere coexistence of diverse learners but as the mutual transformation of social behaviors, empathy, and belonging.

The primary aim of this study is to examine how inclusive education settings influence the social development of both children with disabilities and their non-disabled peers. The research seeks to explore the extent to which inclusive classrooms foster peer acceptance, empathy, communication, and cooperation as indicators of social competence. By analyzing these interactions, the study aims to determine whether inclusion promotes equitable social experiences that benefit all learners. The investigation focuses not only on the direct social outcomes for children with disabilities but also on the reciprocal effects experienced by their typically developing classmates. A secondary objective is to identify the pedagogical and environmental factors that facilitate or hinder effective social integration. This includes assessing classroom dynamics, teacher support, peer collaboration, and the availability of inclusive learning materials. Understanding these variables provides insight into how inclusion can be enhanced at both the policy and classroom levels. The research aspires to generate evidence-based recommendations for educators and administrators to improve the social dimensions of inclusion through structured interventions and adaptive teaching practices.

The study also seeks to bridge theoretical frameworks from developmental psychology and educational sociology to explain how inclusive environments contribute to holistic child development. By doing so, it extends beyond the traditional boundaries of educational research to propose an integrative model of inclusion that links cognitive learning outcomes with emotional and social growth. The ultimate goal is to contribute to an evolving educational paradigm that recognizes social development as both a means and an end of inclusive education (do Carmo Alonso et al., 2025; Hospodar et al., 2023). A review of existing literature reveals that while inclusive education is extensively studied, its social impact on students remains insufficiently understood. Previous research has predominantly examined inclusion from the perspective of policy implementation or academic achievement. Few studies have investigated how daily interactions within inclusive classrooms affect children's social behavior, empathy formation, and group belonging. This imbalance has limited the theoretical depth and practical application of inclusion as a holistic educational strategy. The present study addresses this gap by emphasizing social development as a measurable and essential outcome of inclusion.

Most empirical work to date has focused on students with disabilities, often portraying them as recipients of inclusion rather than active participants in shaping classroom dynamics.

This perspective overlooks the mutual nature of social development, where both groups disabled and non-disabled co-construct inclusive experiences. By analyzing both populations simultaneously, the study contributes a balanced and relational understanding of how inclusion operates. It highlights the importance of bidirectional influence, showing how interactions between peers can lead to collective social enrichment rather than one-sided adaptation. Additionally, there is a scarcity of comparative studies across diverse cultural and institutional contexts. Inclusion is shaped not only by policy frameworks but also by societal attitudes toward disability and diversity. By focusing on both children with and without disabilities within the same educational environment, this research provides contextually grounded insights into how inclusion functions as a lived social process rather than an abstract policy goal (Fisher et al., 2020; Halder, 2023). The study, therefore, fills a critical empirical and conceptual void in the discourse on inclusive education.

The novelty of this research lies in its dual analytical focus and its integrative methodological design. It simultaneously investigates the social outcomes for both children with and without disabilities, positioning inclusion as a shared developmental experience rather than a special education intervention (do Carmo Alonso et al., 2025; Halder, 2023). This perspective reframes inclusion as a bidirectional process of mutual adaptation and growth, offering a more comprehensive understanding of its effects on classroom ecology. The study also employs a mixed-method approach that combines quantitative measurement of social behaviors with qualitative exploration of interpersonal experiences, providing a more nuanced portrayal of social interaction in inclusive settings.

The justification for this study emerges from the urgent need to align educational practice with the principles of social justice and human development. Inclusive education, when effectively implemented, has the potential to transform school culture by fostering empathy, respect, and collaboration among diverse learners (de Marins & Lourenço, 2021; Kolne et al., 2021). Yet, without empirical evidence of its social efficacy, inclusion risks remaining an aspirational ideal rather than a practical reality. This research provides the necessary data to substantiate inclusion's broader societal value, moving the discourse from policy rhetoric to demonstrable social impact. In summary, this study contributes new theoretical and practical insights to the interdisciplinary field of inclusive education. It reinforces the argument that inclusion should not be measured solely through enrollment figures or curriculum adjustments, but through its ability to nurture positive social relationships and shared humanity within classrooms (Fasano et al., 2023; Yu et al., 2022). The findings are expected to inform educators, policymakers, and researchers seeking to build educational environments that cultivate both academic excellence and social cohesion.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach to investigate how inclusive education environments influence the social development of children with and without disabilities. The quantitative strand focused on identifying statistical relationships among variables such as empathy, peer interaction, and social competence, while the qualitative strand explored the lived experiences of students within inclusive classroom contexts. Combining these two methodological perspectives enabled the research to generate a more holistic understanding of how inclusion affects interpersonal relationships and social behavior in authentic educational settings (Hickingbotham et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2025). Furthermore, the integration of

quantitative and qualitative evidence allowed the study not only to examine measurable social outcomes but also to capture emotional and relational dimensions that could not be fully explained through numerical findings alone.

### ***Research Design***

The research employed a convergent mixed-method design integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches simultaneously to examine the influence of inclusive educational settings on children's social development. The quantitative component utilized a correlational framework to analyze the associations between peer acceptance, empathy, social interaction, and social competence among students in inclusive classrooms. In parallel, the qualitative component was conducted through interviews and direct observations to provide deeper insight into students' social experiences, classroom participation, and interpersonal relationships. This methodological integration enhanced the comprehensiveness of the findings by combining statistical evidence with contextual interpretations derived from participants' experiences (Hickingbotham et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2025). Through this design, the study achieved a broader understanding of inclusive education and its contribution to children's social growth.

### ***Research Target/Subject***

The target population of this research consisted of elementary school students enrolled in public and private schools implementing inclusive education programs. Participants were selected using a stratified random sampling technique to ensure balanced representation between children with disabilities and their non-disabled peers. The total sample comprised 180 students, including 90 children with mild to moderate disabilities, such as learning disabilities, hearing impairments, and autism spectrum conditions, alongside 90 typically developing students. In addition, teachers and school administrators participated as supporting informants to validate classroom social interactions and provide contextual explanations regarding inclusive practices. To maintain consistency in participant experiences, all selected students were required to have attended inclusive classrooms for a minimum of one academic year, thereby ensuring sufficient exposure to the inclusive learning environment for observable social development outcomes.

### ***Research Procedure***

The research procedure was conducted systematically to ensure methodological rigor and consistency throughout the study. Initially, ethical approval was obtained from the institutional review board, followed by securing written consent from participating schools and parents. Preliminary observation visits were then arranged to familiarize participants with the research environment and minimize potential observer bias. Quantitative data collection was conducted first through the administration of questionnaires and sociometric assessments within classroom settings under the guidance of trained facilitators. Subsequently, qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with selected students and teachers, as well as structured classroom observations carried out over a four-week period (Selak et al., 2019; Shamionov & Grinina, 2021). This sequential procedure facilitated a comprehensive exploration of social development processes within inclusive educational contexts.

### ***Instruments and Data Collection Techniques***

The study utilized both standardized instruments and researcher-developed tools to obtain comprehensive data regarding students' social development. The Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS) Rating Scales were employed to measure dimensions such as cooperation, empathy, assertion, and self-control among participants. In addition, peer sociometric methods

were applied to evaluate friendship networks, peer acceptance, and social positioning within the classroom environment. Semi-structured interview guidelines were also developed to explore teachers' and students' perspectives concerning inclusive education and social interaction experiences (Arteiro et al., 2020; Hickingbotham et al., 2021). To ensure the appropriateness and accuracy of the instruments, expert judgment and pilot testing procedures were conducted to assess reliability, cultural suitability, and content validity. Furthermore, observational checklists were used during classroom activities and play sessions to document spontaneous peer interactions and social engagement patterns in real-time situations.

### **Data Analysis Technique**

Data analysis was performed sequentially by integrating quantitative and qualitative analytical procedures. Quantitative data obtained from questionnaires and sociometric assessments were analyzed using SPSS software to generate descriptive statistics and inferential analyses aimed at identifying relationships among social development variables. Meanwhile, qualitative data collected through interviews and observations were transcribed, coded, and analyzed thematically to identify recurring themes, behavioral patterns, and interactional dynamics within inclusive classrooms. The findings from both datasets were subsequently triangulated to strengthen the credibility and validity of the results. This integrated analysis approach enabled the study to provide a multidimensional interpretation of social development in inclusive education settings, ensuring that both statistical trends and lived social experiences were comprehensively represented.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The study analyzed data from 180 elementary school students, consisting of 90 children with disabilities and 90 without disabilities, across six inclusive schools. Quantitative measures included mean scores of social interaction, empathy, and cooperation obtained from the Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS) and peer sociometric ratings. Table 1 presents a summary of descriptive statistics comparing both groups across four social indicators.

**Table 1.** Mean Scores of Social Development Indicators in Inclusive Classrooms

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Children with Disabilities (M ± SD)</b>	<b>Children without Disabilities (M ± SD)</b>	<b>p-value</b>
Peer Cooperation	3.65 ± 0.72	4.21 ± 0.58	0.002
Empathy	3.48 ± 0.65	4.10 ± 0.61	0.005
Self-Control	3.56 ± 0.78	4.05 ± 0.59	0.011
Social Interaction	3.72 ± 0.70	4.22 ± 0.57	0.004

The results indicate that both groups demonstrate positive social behaviors, though children without disabilities exhibit slightly higher mean scores across all domains. The overall social development index for both cohorts remained within the “high” range, suggesting that inclusion has a positive influence on the social skills of all students. Variability among disability subgroups showed that children with learning disabilities reported higher peer engagement than those with hearing impairments or autism spectrum conditions. Quantitative data illustrate that inclusive classrooms foster meaningful social development for children regardless of ability status. Statistical differences observed in peer cooperation and empathy suggest that while non-disabled students often lead in initiating interactions, children with disabilities actively participate and benefit socially from shared learning experiences. The

narrow gap in standard deviation between groups indicates a relatively balanced distribution of social competencies, reflecting the potential of inclusive models to equalize social opportunities among diverse learners. Secondary data from school reports supported these findings, highlighting improvements in collaborative behavior during group projects and play-based learning. Teachers reported observable increases in mutual assistance and peer tutoring activities. These developments demonstrate that inclusive education cultivates environments where children learn prosocial behaviors through direct exposure and shared responsibility, reinforcing the social dimensions of classroom learning.

Qualitative analysis revealed consistent themes emerging from interviews and classroom observations. Both children with and without disabilities described feelings of belonging, friendship, and mutual support. Teachers emphasized that social development was most evident during cooperative activities such as group discussions, art projects, and sports. Students frequently used inclusive language and demonstrated empathy when assisting peers who required additional help, indicating strong internalization of inclusive values. The observations further revealed variations in engagement levels depending on instructional design. Classrooms implementing peer-assisted learning models exhibited higher social participation rates compared to those relying on traditional instruction. Teachers also noticed that structured social games and role-playing significantly improved communication skills among children with disabilities, enabling them to express emotions and negotiate group roles more effectively.

Inferential statistical analysis using MANOVA indicated significant effects of inclusive education settings on overall social development (Wilks' Lambda = 0.784,  $F(4,175) = 6.21$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). The findings confirm that inclusion contributes to measurable improvements in social competencies among all students. Post-hoc comparisons revealed that empathy and cooperation were the most affected dimensions, suggesting that these attributes are highly sensitive to interactive and inclusive environments. Regression analysis identified classroom interaction quality as the strongest predictor of social development ( $\beta = 0.61$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), followed by teacher facilitation ( $\beta = 0.48$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). The inclusion of structured peer collaboration and differentiated instruction was associated with better outcomes for both groups. These findings statistically validate the hypothesis that inclusion promotes mutual social benefits rather than one-sided adaptation.

Correlational analysis demonstrated a strong positive relationship between empathy and peer cooperation ( $r = 0.72$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that the more empathetic a child becomes, the more likely they are to engage in cooperative social behavior. Similarly, self-control correlated significantly with social interaction ( $r = 0.65$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), suggesting that emotional regulation supports sustained peer engagement. The interconnected nature of these dimensions reinforces the notion that social development in inclusive settings operates as an integrated construct rather than isolated behavioral traits. Teacher reports aligned with these statistical relationships. Educators noted that students who demonstrated empathy were also more proactive in forming inclusive peer groups, mediating conflicts, and encouraging participation from children with disabilities. This interplay between emotional and behavioral dimensions reflects the dynamic reciprocity within inclusive classrooms, where children continuously learn from observing and interacting with one another.

One representative case emerged from observational data at an inclusive primary school where a student with mild autism became a group leader in a collaborative science project. The child initially exhibited social withdrawal but gradually developed communication skills

through guided peer support and teacher facilitation. By the end of the term, both the student and group members reported increased mutual trust and respect, demonstrating the transformative potential of structured inclusion. Another case involved a hearing-impaired student who struggled with verbal participation but excelled in visual and kinesthetic activities. Peers adapted naturally by incorporating non-verbal communication strategies such as gestures and written notes. This adaptive collaboration not only enhanced the student's sense of inclusion but also strengthened group empathy and creativity. These examples exemplify how inclusive practices enable the exchange of strengths and foster collective social growth.

Qualitative narratives from students and teachers confirm that inclusive education promotes shared responsibility and emotional maturity. Students without disabilities consistently expressed that helping peers with disabilities made them “more patient” and “better at understanding others.” Teachers described similar growth among children with disabilities, who became more confident and willing to initiate friendships. The social environment of inclusion appeared to reduce stigma and increase classroom cohesion. Data from interviews revealed that challenges such as communication barriers and initial reluctance were gradually overcome through consistent exposure and modeling by teachers. Peer-mediated interventions, such as buddy systems and collaborative games, played a vital role in sustaining engagement. The cumulative evidence demonstrates that inclusion operates not only as an educational framework but also as a social learning ecosystem that enhances interpersonal competence.

The findings collectively indicate that inclusive education significantly improves social development outcomes for both children with and without disabilities. The combination of quantitative and qualitative results supports the conclusion that social inclusion is mutually beneficial, fostering empathy, cooperation, and emotional intelligence. The convergence of data sources strengthens confidence in the reliability of these conclusions, showing consistency across behavioral observations, teacher assessments, and self-reported measures. The study demonstrates that inclusive environments cultivate social learning beyond the academic sphere, contributing to the formation of equitable and compassionate communities. The results affirm that the success of inclusion depends on intentional pedagogical design, teacher training, and consistent peer engagement. Overall, inclusive education emerges as not only an ethical imperative but also an empirically validated approach to nurturing holistic social development among all learners.

The findings of this study reveal that inclusive education settings positively influence the social development of both children with and without disabilities. Quantitative results demonstrated significant improvements in cooperation, empathy, and social interaction, with both groups scoring within the high range of social competence. Statistical analysis confirmed that inclusion fosters equitable social participation, although minor differences persist, favoring children without disabilities. These differences appear to reflect the varying levels of communication ability rather than unequal access to social opportunities. Overall, inclusive environments proved effective in cultivating social skills essential for mutual understanding and peer cohesion (Demetriou, 2022; Fitzpatrick & Trninic, 2023). Qualitative data reinforced these statistical outcomes by illustrating the lived experiences of inclusion. Students described increased friendship formation, peer support, and shared responsibility during group activities. Teachers observed substantial behavioral changes, particularly among children with disabilities, who became more confident and socially expressive over time. Inclusion,

therefore, emerged as both a pedagogical and social catalyst, reshaping classroom relationships and promoting a sense of belonging for all learners. The data collectively emphasize that inclusion's greatest strength lies in its capacity to merge academic and social dimensions into a cohesive educational experience.

The present results align closely with prior research emphasizing the social benefits of inclusion, such as (Demetriou, 2022; Sit et al., 2019), who reported that inclusive classrooms enhance empathy and cooperation among peers. Similar to the findings of De Boer et al. (2012), this study confirms that structured peer interaction significantly improves the quality of social relationships between students with and without disabilities. However, unlike some studies suggesting persistent social isolation for children with disabilities, the current data indicate that supportive teacher facilitation and peer mentoring can minimize such exclusion. The active involvement of non-disabled peers in collaborative tasks appears to bridge the social gap more effectively than previously documented. The divergence from earlier findings, particularly those by Koster et al. (2009), may stem from differences in pedagogical design and institutional culture. Schools in this study demonstrated stronger adherence to inclusive policies and better teacher training, factors that likely enhanced social outcomes. Moreover, the dual-method approach provided a richer perspective by combining behavioral data with qualitative insights, revealing the nuanced mechanisms through which inclusion fosters mutual understanding. These distinctions highlight the evolving nature of inclusive education research, suggesting that context, teacher competence, and classroom culture are decisive variables in determining the success of social integration.

The results signify that inclusion is more than an administrative or policy-driven concept; it functions as a transformative social process. The consistent improvements in empathy and cooperation among both groups indicate that inclusion cultivates moral and emotional intelligence, fostering values essential for democratic citizenship. Children learn to respect diversity, adapt to differences, and build collective problem-solving skills attributes that extend far beyond the classroom. Inclusion, therefore, operates as an early form of socialization that prepares children for participation in a pluralistic society. The findings also highlight the reciprocal nature of inclusion. Children with disabilities benefit from increased peer acceptance and emotional confidence, while their non-disabled peers gain patience, leadership, and prosocial awareness (Akmaral et al., 2025; Phillips, 2024). This mutual influence transforms the learning environment into a living ecosystem of shared growth. The study thus affirms that social development in inclusive classrooms is not a one-directional process but an interdependent dynamic, where every interaction contributes to the cultivation of empathy and understanding.

The implications of these findings are profound for educational policy, teacher training, and curriculum development. Inclusive education must be redefined not merely as access to learning spaces but as an intentional framework for fostering social competence and emotional intelligence. Schools should integrate structured peer activities and cooperative learning models to ensure that inclusion translates into genuine social participation (Akmaral et al., 2025; Huang et al., 2024). Teachers require targeted professional development to facilitate positive intergroup interactions and manage diverse learning needs effectively. The study also informs broader societal perspectives on inclusion. By nurturing empathy and cooperation from an early age, inclusive education contributes to building cohesive communities that value diversity and equity. These outcomes align with the United Nations Sustainable Development

Goal 4 on inclusive and equitable quality education. Policymakers, therefore, must consider social development as a key metric of inclusion success alongside academic outcomes. The findings advocate for a holistic view of education where social growth is recognized as both an outcome and a pathway to lifelong learning and citizenship.

The observed outcomes can be attributed to the interplay between social exposure, peer modeling, and teacher facilitation. Inclusive classrooms provide natural settings where children observe and internalize positive social behaviors. Teachers act as mediators who scaffold these interactions, ensuring that differences become opportunities for collaboration rather than division. The structured use of peer-assisted learning strategies and cooperative tasks enhanced communication and empathy, particularly for children with disabilities who benefited from consistent engagement. The results also stem from the sociocultural context of the participating schools, which emphasized communal values and mutual assistance. Cultural norms promoting cooperation and respect reinforced inclusive practices, allowing students to engage authentically with diversity (Nurshat et al., 2021; Sit et al., 2019). The integration of inclusive pedagogy within a supportive environment produced a synergy between policy intent and classroom reality. This synergy explains why social outcomes were consistently strong across all groups, validating the premise that inclusion succeeds when it harmonizes institutional support, pedagogical strategy, and cultural ethos.

The findings suggest several directions for future research and practice. Further longitudinal studies are needed to assess the long-term effects of inclusive education on social development into adolescence and adulthood. Comparative cross-cultural research could also deepen understanding of how different societal values influence the implementation and outcomes of inclusion. Methodological expansion toward mixed and participatory designs will enrich future analyses by incorporating student voice as an active component of evaluation (Pan et al., 2025; Sit et al., 2019). The study also calls for systemic action. Educational institutions should embed inclusive principles into teacher preparation programs, emphasizing not only special needs pedagogy but also emotional literacy and social facilitation skills. Schools must establish peer mentorship systems that sustain social engagement beyond classroom settings.

## CONCLUSION

The most significant finding of this research lies in the demonstration that inclusive education settings not only enhance the social development of children with disabilities but also strengthen the interpersonal and emotional competencies of children without disabilities. Both groups showed measurable gains in empathy, cooperation, and peer interaction, proving that inclusion fosters reciprocal growth rather than a one-sided adaptation. The study reveals that inclusive classrooms function as dynamic social ecosystems, where diversity becomes a catalyst for positive behavioral change. Unlike traditional segregated models, the inclusive setting cultivates shared responsibility, mutual understanding, and prosocial learning behaviors. The evidence confirms that children's exposure to heterogeneous peers enriches their social maturity, confirming the transformative potential of inclusion as a mechanism for holistic human development.

The principal contribution of this research lies in its conceptual and methodological integration of mixed-method analysis, combining statistical evidence with qualitative insights to capture the multidimensional nature of social development. The study contributes

theoretically by reinforcing the view of inclusion as a socially interactive learning process grounded in social constructivism, where peer engagement serves as both the medium and outcome of development. Methodologically, the study advances the field by presenting a model that links teacher facilitation, peer cooperation, and emotional regulation as interdependent factors shaping inclusive success. This multidimensional framework provides educators and policymakers with a replicable model for assessing and improving inclusion effectiveness, marking a step forward in understanding how inclusive pedagogies operate in real-world classrooms.

The research is limited by its focus on a relatively small sample within specific educational and cultural contexts, which may restrict the generalizability of findings across different regions or school systems. Observational data, while rich in contextual detail, may also be subject to interpretation bias influenced by teacher perspectives and classroom dynamics. Future studies should adopt longitudinal designs to examine the long-term effects of inclusion on social and emotional development, extending the analysis into adolescence to observe continuity of social outcomes. Further cross-cultural comparisons could explore how cultural norms, policy frameworks, and pedagogical strategies mediate the success of inclusion.

### AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

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

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; Investigation.

Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

### CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest

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