

Reconceptualizing Inclusive Pedagogy as an Alternative Learning Model in Schools: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

Classroom instructional practices in schools remain dominated by standardized approaches that are insufficiently responsive to student diversity. This study aims to identify, synthesize, and formulate an alternative conceptual framework for inclusive pedagogy that is more adaptive to diverse learners. A qualitative meta-synthesis design was employed by reviewing relevant scholarly articles published between 2016 and 2026. Data were

collected from Google Scholar and Scopus and analyzed using domain analysis to identify and synthesize key themes in inclusive pedagogy. The findings indicate that inclusive pedagogy is a multidimensional approach encompassing differentiated instruction, collaborative learning, student-centered approaches, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), supportive social relationships, and active, contextual learning. Based on these findings, this study proposes the CARE framework (Connect, Adapt, Respond, and Expand) as an alternative conceptual model that emphasizes meaningful connections, flexibility, responsiveness, and continuous improvement throughout the learning process. The proposed framework contributes to the development of more operational, inclusive learning models and provides practical guidance for teachers and policymakers in strengthening equitable, inclusive education in schools.

Keywords

inclusive pedagogy; learning model; systematic literature review; inclusive education; CARE framework.

I. Introduction

1.1 Introduce the Problem

The global education system is currently facing fundamental challenges arising from the growing diversity of student populations. Such diversity extends beyond differences in cognitive abilities to include variations in sociocultural backgrounds, physical conditions, emotional needs, and learning preferences. Over the past few decades, inclusive education has emerged as a response to this growing diversity by promoting equitable access, meaningful participation, and successful learning outcomes for all students, regardless of their individual differences. As an educational approach, inclusive education seeks to eliminate all forms of exclusion by addressing diverse learner needs through

greater participation in learning processes, school culture, and the wider school community (She et al., 2025). Inclusive education is not merely about placing students with special educational needs in mainstream classrooms; rather, it requires schools to transform their practices by recognizing diversity as a valuable learning resource rather than a barrier (Núñez et al., 2025). This transformation presents a significant challenge for many countries as they seek to shift educational policies and practices from segregated to genuinely inclusive systems. Nevertheless, the implementation of inclusive education continues to encounter complex structural, cultural, and pedagogical barriers (Bindhani & Gopinath, 2024), with pedagogical practice remaining one of the most critical challenges across educational contexts (Aliyeva, 2026).

Inclusive pedagogy refers to a teaching approach designed to ensure that all students, without exception, have equitable access to high-quality education. It aims to create an equitable learning environment by eliminating marginalization and avoiding discriminatory practices that may lead to stigmatization. (Florian, 2008). The normative foundation of inclusive pedagogy can be traced back to the 1994 Salamanca Statement issued by UNESCO and endorsed by 92 countries. The statement explicitly recognizes that every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities, and learning needs; therefore, education systems should be designed to accommodate such diversity. (Hernández-Torrano et al., 2022). This global commitment has been further reinforced through the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which advocates inclusive and equitable quality education for all (Adipat & Chotikapanich, 2022; Masrukhi et al., 2026).

Despite these commitments, inclusive education continues to face significant pedagogical challenges. Teaching practices remain

largely conventional, standardized, and insufficiently responsive to student diversity. Classroom instruction is still predominantly teacher-centered and homogeneous, leaving limited opportunities for differentiated instruction (Kaizu & Tamaki, 2024; Love & Horn, 2021; Tracy-Bronson & Theoharis, 2026). Furthermore, many teachers continue to experience a disconnect between the inclusive principles they endorse and their pedagogical capacity to implement those principles effectively in everyday classroom practice (Emam et al., 2026).

As one of the countries that has adopted inclusive education, Indonesia faces increasingly complex challenges due to its extensive geographical, social, and cultural diversity. According to Fauziyah et al. (2025), most schools designated as inclusive in Indonesia continue to operate under an integration model rather than genuine inclusion, whereby students with special educational needs are physically placed in mainstream classrooms without receiving appropriate curricular adaptations or pedagogical support (Fauziyah et al., 2025). This condition highlights the pivotal role of inclusive pedagogy in advancing the effective implementation of inclusive education through equitable teaching practices. Another persistent challenge is that the dominant instructional models employed in inclusive schools remain grounded in assumptions of student homogeneity (Nabiela & Ulfatin, 2023). The need for learning models that embrace learner diversity has become increasingly urgent amid rapid social change, technological advancement, and the growing recognition of every individual's right to education. In the context of inclusive education, learning models should extend beyond pedagogical innovation to incorporate the principles of inclusion, equity, and diversity across all dimensions of the learning process (Abidin et al., 2023; Robiyansah, 2020). Consequently, strengthening inclusive practice requires the continuous reconstruction of educational policies, school culture, and pedagogical practices to

ensure that they effectively accommodate the needs of all learners. In this regard, reconceptualizing inclusive pedagogy represents a strategic step toward developing teaching practices that are more adaptive, flexible, and responsive to students' diverse needs.

Although a substantial body of research has examined inclusive education and its pedagogical practices, a significant gap remains in the literature regarding how inclusive pedagogy can be systematically reconceptualized as a comprehensive alternative learning model. Existing studies tend to adopt a fragmented perspective, focusing on specific aspects such as instructional strategies or educational policy without integrating these findings into a coherent conceptual framework (Fauziyah et al., 2025; Ileri et al., 2020; Kenny et al., 2023). For example, Sari et al. (2026) emphasized the importance of school principals' instructional leadership in improving teachers' instructional practices; however, their study was limited to leadership strategies and did not examine the construction of inclusive pedagogy as a comprehensive learning model (Sari et al., 2026). Similarly, Li and Ruppert (2020) highlighted, through a systematic analysis, the pivotal role of teachers in promoting inclusion but did not translate this dimension into an operational pedagogical framework for classroom practice (Li & Ruppert, 2021). Other studies have also identified persistent gaps between inclusive education policy and its implementation in Indonesia, particularly concerning teacher preparedness and the adoption of adaptive instructional practices (Novrizal & Manaf, 2024; Rahmi et al., 2024).

The existing body of research indicates that studies on inclusive education have largely examined isolated dimensions, such as educational policy, evaluation, leadership, and teacher competence, without integrating these elements into a comprehensive and contextually grounded framework of inclusive

pedagogy. In response to this gap, the present study offers a novel contribution by reconceptualizing inclusive pedagogy through a systematic synthesis of empirical and conceptual evidence. Rather than merely combining pedagogical, social, and cultural dimensions, this study develops an alternative learning model that is adaptive, flexible, and responsive to student diversity. Accordingly, the study extends the current discourse on inclusive education while providing practical contributions to the development of more implementable and equitable instructional designs for school contexts.

II. Method

This study employed a qualitative meta-synthesis to analyze and integrate existing research on inclusive pedagogy. The aim was to develop a deeper understanding of inclusive teaching practices and to identify the core dimensions underpinning the development of an alternative learning model.

The study drew on secondary data obtained from relevant scholarly articles selected according to predefined inclusion criteria, including topic relevance, publication period (2016–2026), and journal quality (indexed in SINTA or Scopus). Data were collected through systematic searches of academic databases, including Google Scholar and Scopus, using the following keywords: inclusive pedagogy, inclusive education, inclusive teaching practices, inclusive classroom, special needs education, and differentiated instruction.

The data were analyzed using domain analysis, which involved identifying, categorizing, and synthesizing the findings into key dimensions of inclusive pedagogy, including differentiated instruction, collaborative learning, student-centered approaches, inclusive learning design, supportive social relationships, and active learning. The analytical process was conducted iteratively, encompassing article selection, thematic categorization, and interpretative synthesis. To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, source triangulation was employed by comparing evidence across studies conducted in different contexts, thereby

providing a more comprehensive and robust understanding of inclusive pedagogy.

III. Result and Discussion

Result

This study presents a synthesis of 25 studies examining inclusive pedagogical practices implemented across diverse countries, educational contexts, participant groups, and methodological approaches. The synthesis aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how the principles of inclusive pedagogy have been translated into classroom practice. By comparing findings across studies, it not only highlights variations in the implementation of inclusive pedagogy but also identifies common patterns that underpin the development of learning models that are adaptive, responsive, and equitable.

Table 1. Summary of the Meta-Synthesis Findings on Inclusive Pedagogy

Dimensions of Inclusive Pedagogy	Inclusive Teaching Practices	References
Differentiated and Personalized Learning	1. Identifying students' learning needs through diagnostic and ongoing assessment, with adaptations to learning content, processes, and products according to students' abilities; 2. Implementing tiered tasks; 3. Providing scaffolding through graduated support (e.g., modeling, instructional cues, and visual aids); 4. Organizing individual and small-group learning; 5. Personalizing learning strategies; 6. Integrating technology-based	Agustian (2021); Al-Gerafi et al. (2024); Asula-Abaver & Machaba (2026); Birot-Gautron et al. (2025); Cavendish et al. (2025); D'Angelo & Singal (2024); Forber-Pratt & Sarkar (2022); Kamanzi et al. (2026); Kozibroda et al. (2020); Lin et al. (2026); Mullick et al. (2025); Mabasa-Manganyi (2023)

	differentiation; 7. Modifying learning activities for students with disabilities; 8. Implementing a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) at universal, targeted, and intensive levels; and 9. Providing flexibility in learning time and modes of learning.	
Collaborative Learning and Inclusive Social Interaction	1. Implementing co-teaching between general education teachers and special education teachers through co-planning, co-instruction, and co-assessment; 2. Organizing heterogeneous learning groups (mixed-ability grouping); 3. Promoting peer tutoring, buddy systems, cooperative learning, and positive interdependence among students; 4. Facilitating interactive dialogue and collaborative discussion; 5. Fostering a stigma-free classroom culture; 6. Incorporating student voice into the learning process, and 7. Promoting interdisciplinary collaboration among teachers, parents, and other educational professionals.	Castro & Sagredo-Lillo (2025). Cavendish et al. (2025); Estefan et al. (2023); Hamdan et al. (2016); Kamanzi et al. (2026); Kozibroda et al. (2020); Mansouri et al. (2024); Sheehy et al. (2019)
Student-Centered and Culturally Responsive Approaches	1. Implementing student-centered learning and the whole-child approach; 2. Promoting learner autonomy by providing students with meaningful choices in the learning process; 3. Incorporating student voice into teaching and learning; 4. Implementing culturally responsive teaching; 5. Integrating multilingual pedagogy and translanguaging	Agustian (2021); Bisai & Singh (2020); Cavendish et al. (2025); Estefan et al. (2023); Forber-Pratt & Sarkar (2022)

	practices; 6. Incorporating local culture and Indigenous knowledge into the curriculum; 7. Adopting an asset-based approach by recognizing students' cultural backgrounds, languages, and identities as valuable learning resources; and 8. Strengthening social relationships and a sense of belonging through the learning process.	
Inclusive Learning Design and Accessibility (Universal Design for Learning [UDL])	1. Implementing the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL); 2. Providing multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression through multimodal instructional resources (e.g., visual, auditory, and kinesthetic modalities); 3. Integrating UDL principles with game-based learning; 4. Engaging all students in shared learning activities while providing differentiated levels of support according to individual needs; 5. Applying flexible instructional methods and assessment strategies; 6. Organizing flexible grouping and employing multimodal instructional strategies to enhance learning accessibility.	Cavendish et al. (2025); Porta et al. (2026); Rodríguez-Ferrer et al. (2024); Lin et al. (2026)
Supportive Relationships, Care, and Inclusive Learning Environments	1. Fostering caring relationships among teachers, students, and families based on the principles of the ethics of care; 2. Creating safe, welcoming, and stigma-free classroom environments; 3. Rejecting labeling and segregation in educational practice; 4. Implementing	Forber-Pratt & Sarkar (2022). Núñez et al. (2025); Morris & Imms (2025); Stavrianos (2026); Sheehy et al. (2019)

	adaptive classroom management and positive behavior support; 5. Utilizing flexible furniture and personalizing learning spaces to accommodate diverse learner needs; 6. Incorporating outdoor and nature-based learning experiences, and 7 and promoting positive social interactions among students.	
Active, Creative, and Contextual Learning	1. Implementing inquiry-based, project-based, and design-based learning; 2. Incorporating game-based learning, songs, and storytelling into classroom instruction; 3. Facilitating activity-based learning; 4. Utilizing makerspaces and open educational resources (OER), 5. Engaging students in contextual problem-solving; 6. Promoting creativity and idea generation through exploratory learning; 7. Encouraging students' active participation in communication and social interaction; and 8. Continuously assessing and identifying students' learning needs through iterative evaluation throughout the learning process.	Monteira (2025); Mullick et al. (2025); Kamanzi et al. (2026); Rodríguez-Ferrer et al. (2024); Sheehy et al. (2019); Mabasa-Manganyi (2023)

Table 1 presents a comprehensive synthesis of the literature on inclusive pedagogy by categorizing inclusive teaching practices into six major dimensions. Overall, the findings suggest that inclusive pedagogy should not be understood as a single instructional approach but rather as a multidimensional framework that integrates complementary pedagogical practices.

The dimension of differentiated and personalized learning highlights the importance of adapting learning experiences to address the unique needs of individual students. In contrast, collaborative learning emphasizes the role of social interaction, cooperation, and co-teaching in fostering inclusive classroom environments. Student-centered and culturally responsive approaches underscore the importance of recognizing students' backgrounds, identities, and lived experiences as essential resources for learning. Furthermore, learning design grounded in Universal Design for Learning (UDL) emphasizes accessibility and flexibility in both instructional delivery and assessment. The dimension of supportive relationships and care demonstrates that inclusion is also fostered through meaningful interpersonal relationships and safe, stigma-free learning environments. Finally, active, creative, and contextual learning promotes students' direct engagement in authentic and meaningful learning experiences.

Discussion

The synthesis of the reviewed literature indicates that inclusive pedagogy is no longer viewed merely as an educational strategy but rather as a comprehensive conceptual framework that requires a fundamental transformation of teaching practice. The findings suggest that the successful implementation of inclusive education depends largely on teachers' capacity to embed inclusive principles into everyday classroom instruction. This requires a shift from homogeneous, teacher-centered approaches to pedagogical practices that are adaptive, flexible, and responsive to learners' diverse needs (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Kozibroda et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the synthesis demonstrates that effective inclusive pedagogy does not rely on a single instructional approach but rather emerges from the integration of multiple, complementary pedagogical perspectives within a holistic, multidimensional

framework. Across the studies reviewed, six interconnected dimensions consistently emerged as the core components of inclusive pedagogy: differentiated and personalized learning, collaborative learning, student-centered and culturally responsive approaches, inclusive learning design based on Universal Design for Learning (UDL), supportive relationships and inclusive learning environments, and active, creative, and contextual learning. Collectively, these dimensions provide a conceptual foundation for developing an alternative learning model that is more responsive to learner diversity. This finding is consistent with Florian's (2008) argument that inclusive pedagogy should not be regarded as a set of mechanical teaching techniques, but rather as a fundamental pedagogical orientation that permeates every dimension of teaching practice (Florian, 2008).

Differentiated and Personalized Learning

This dimension represents the core of inclusive pedagogy, aiming to accommodate students' diverse needs, abilities, and learning preferences. Differentiated instruction refers to a pedagogical strategy in which teachers adapt key elements of instruction to address learner diversity while maintaining consistent learning objectives and providing multiple pathways for students to achieve them. In contrast, personalized learning places students at the center of their own learning journey by recognizing their individual interests, aspirations, and learning pace. Within this approach, students actively participate in shaping their learning goals, strategies, and experiences. Together, these complementary approaches provide a fundamental basis for promoting equity in the classroom. Differentiated instruction ensures that learner diversity is systematically addressed through responsive teaching practices. In contrast, personalized learning acknowledges each student's identity, agency, and psychological needs, thereby fostering a stronger sense of ownership over the learning process.

The findings of the reviewed studies reinforce the central role of this dimension in the successful implementation of inclusive pedagogy. Birot-Gautron et al. (2025), in their study of multigrade classrooms in France, identified differentiated instruction as a key pedagogical practice that enables teachers to accommodate learners with varying abilities, including students with special educational needs, within the same classroom (Birot-Gautron et al., 2025). Likewise, Al-Gerafi et al. (2024) demonstrated, through a cross-national quantitative modeling study, that adaptive and flexible instructional practices supported by personalized learning strategies are significant predictors of successful inclusive education across diverse educational contexts (Al-Gerafi et al., 2024).

Further evidence indicates that teachers who implement scaffolding strategies, small-group instruction, and a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) are more likely to significantly enhance students' participation and learning outcomes (Kamanzi et al., 2026; Lin, T., Mullick & Campbell, 2026). Collectively, these findings suggest that differentiated instruction should not be regarded merely as a set of technical teaching strategies but rather as a pedagogical paradigm grounded in the belief that every student has the capacity to succeed when provided with appropriate instructional support.

At the same time, several studies have identified substantial challenges in implementing differentiated instruction. For example, Kamanzi et al. (2026) reported that teachers in Tanzania often possessed only a limited understanding of inclusive education, resulting in the inconsistent and partial implementation of differentiated instructional practices (Kamanzi et al., 2026). This finding underscores that differentiated instruction cannot be separated from teachers' professional competence and the availability of institutional support systems

that enable inclusive practice. Furthermore, Asula-Abaver and Machaba (2026) argued that the integration of educational technology creates new opportunities for more personalized and responsive differentiation, transforming conventional teacher-directed instruction into more adaptive, learner-centered approaches that are responsive to students' diverse learning needs (Asula-Abaver & Machaba, 2026).

Collaborative Learning and Inclusive Social Interaction

Within inclusive education, collaborative learning and inclusive social interaction constitute two fundamental elements that transform the classroom from a space for information transmission into an equitable learning community. The presence of students from diverse backgrounds within the same mainstream classroom has limited educational value if they remain socially and academically isolated. In this context, collaborative learning functions as a pedagogical approach in which students work together in heterogeneous groups to achieve shared academic goals. Such an approach reframes differences in students' abilities not as barriers to learning but as valuable educational resources. Students with higher levels of proficiency deepen their understanding by explaining concepts to their peers, while those requiring additional support receive assistance naturally through peer interaction without experiencing stigma, thereby fostering a shared sense of ownership of the learning process.

Inclusive education extends beyond providing physical access to the same classroom; it also depends on the quality of students' participation and the social interactions that occur within it (Hamdan et al., 2016; Pramono et al., 2026). D'Angelo and Singal (2024), through a qualitative study exploring students' perspectives, found that mainstream students themselves identified inclusive practices—such as inviting peers to join group activities, building genuine interpersonal relationships, and

implementing buddy systems—as the most meaningful mechanisms for fostering inclusion (D’Angelo & Singal, 2024). In addition, collaboration between general and special education teachers has emerged as a key strategy for addressing the diverse learning needs of students in inclusive classrooms (Castro & Sagredo-Lillo, 2025). Similarly, Sheehy et al. (2019) argued that inclusive learning environments emphasizing social interaction and dialogic learning enhance student participation while strengthening the collaborative construction of knowledge (Sheehy et al., 2019). Collectively, these findings suggest that collaborative learning and socially interactive pedagogical practices function not only as instructional strategies but also as essential mechanisms for cultivating inclusive, supportive, and equitable learning communities.

Student-Centered and Culturally Responsive Approaches

Within the context of inclusive education, student-centered approaches represent a shift from traditional teacher-directed instruction toward learning experiences that recognize the uniqueness of every learner. In this approach, teachers serve as facilitators who design meaningful learning experiences based on students' individual needs, interests, and learning characteristics, thereby empowering students to become active agents in constructing their own knowledge (Bisai & Singh, 2020; Gaertner et al., 2023). However, student-centered learning becomes more meaningful when combined with culturally responsive approaches that integrate students' cultural backgrounds, languages, and lived experiences into the learning process. Approaches such as culturally responsive teaching and multilingual pedagogy have been shown to enhance the relevance of learning while strengthening students' cultural identities (Cavendish et al., 2025). Likewise, Estefan et al. (2023) emphasized the importance of actively engaging students through contextualized and experience-based learning (Estefan et al., 2023). The integration

of these complementary approaches creates learning environments that are not only cognitively adaptive but also socially and culturally relevant, fostering students' sense of belonging, enhancing their engagement, and supporting the realization of inclusive education within authentic educational contexts.

Inclusive Learning Design and Accessibility (Universal Design for Learning)

Inclusive learning design and accessibility, grounded in the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework, represent a proactive approach that emphasizes curriculum flexibility from the initial stages of instructional planning to accommodate learner diversity without requiring separate or retrospective adaptations. UDL was developed in response to learning barriers created by rigid instructional designs that fail to address the diverse characteristics and needs of learners (Porta, T., Quane & Gilbert, 2026). The framework is built upon three core principles. The first, multiple means of representation, ensures that learning materials are presented through diverse modalities—including visual, auditory, and kinesthetic formats—to maximize accessibility and understanding for all learners. The second, multiple means of action and expression, provides students with multiple opportunities to demonstrate their understanding through written assignments, oral presentations, projects, or other creative forms of expression. The third, multiple means of engagement, seeks to enhance learners' motivation and participation by designing learning experiences that are meaningful, relevant, and appropriately challenging.

The integration of these three principles enables teachers not only to create more accessible learning environments but also to promote active participation, learner autonomy, and intrinsic motivation (Cavendish et al., 2025; Rodríguez-Ferrer et al., 2025). Consequently, UDL contributes to strengthening students' sense

of inclusion, self-confidence, and social empathy within equitable learning environments. Nevertheless, the implementation of UDL continues to face significant challenges, including limited educational resources, insufficient teacher expertise, and resistance to sustained pedagogical innovation (Kozibroda et al., 2020). These challenges underscore that the successful implementation of UDL depends on a supportive educational ecosystem encompassing continuous professional development for teachers, visionary school leadership, and flexible curriculum policies.

Supportive Relationships, Care, and Inclusive Learning Environments

This dimension represents the psychosocial foundation of inclusive pedagogy, as the effectiveness of inclusive education depends not only on technical components such as curriculum design and instructional methods, but also on the quality of interpersonal relationships and the psychological safety students experience in the classroom. Inclusive teacher–student relationships are built upon mutual respect, recognition of students' identities, and warm, responsive interactions that foster trust and belonging (Núñez et al., 2025). These relational qualities are further strengthened through positive peer interactions fostered by collaborative learning, which promotes communication, empathy, and the reduction of social prejudice. Consequently, care-oriented pedagogy becomes an essential and reflective dimension of inclusive practice, requiring teachers not only to recognize students' academic needs but also to respond to their emotional and social well-being while cultivating a classroom culture of mutual care that prevents marginalization. From an ethics-of-care perspective, inclusion is understood as a relational phenomenon that requires authentic emotional engagement among all members of the learning community, including families

and the wider social environment surrounding students (Forber-Pratt & Sarkar, 2022).

Furthermore, supportive relationships and a culture of care are reflected in the creation of learning environments that are socially inclusive, psychologically safe, and physically flexible, enabling every student to feel accepted, express themselves confidently, and participate actively in the learning process. Previous studies have demonstrated that stigma-free learning environments and opportunities for positive social interaction are essential prerequisites for authentic student participation (Morris & Imms, 2025; Stavrianos, 2026). These findings suggest that inclusive education extends beyond the implementation of instructional strategies to encompass the transformation of the entire learning ecosystem. Such transformation involves relational, emotional, and physical dimensions that collectively shape equitable, human-centered, and meaningful learning experiences for all students.

Active, Creative, and Contextual Learning

Active, creative, and contextual learning represents a pedagogical approach that positions students as active constructors of knowledge while creating broad opportunities for participation that accommodate diverse ways of learning. This approach rejects passive models of instruction and replaces them with learning experiences that promote direct engagement through discussion, experimentation, simulation, educational games, and collaborative projects (Monteira, 2026). Creativity constitutes a central component of this approach, reflected not only in teachers' ability to design flexible and innovative learning experiences but also in students' capacity to think critically, explore ideas, and generate creative solutions. Pedagogical approaches such as design-based learning, inquiry-based learning, game-based learning, and storytelling have been shown to promote active engagement and significantly increase student participation because of their

flexible, open-ended, and adaptive nature (Kamanzi et al., 2026; Mullick et al., 2025).

The contextual dimension of learning ensures that knowledge is not confined to abstract concepts but is meaningfully connected to students' lived experiences and everyday realities, thereby enhancing both the relevance and the meaningfulness of learning. By linking instructional content to students' daily experiences, local cultural contexts, and contemporary social issues, learners are better able to understand and internalize concepts, particularly those who experience difficulties with abstract reasoning (Estefan et al., 2023). The integration of active, creative, and contextual learning produces comprehensive benefits for students' development. Beyond promoting deeper cognitive understanding, it also strengthens affective and conative dimensions by reducing learning anxiety while fostering collaboration, empathy, and social responsibility. Collectively, these findings indicate that active, creative, and contextual learning is not merely an instructional approach but a fundamental dimension of inclusive pedagogy that enables meaningful participation and holistic student development.

Reconceptualizing Inclusive Pedagogy: The CARE Framework (Connect–Adapt–Respond–Expand)

As a practical framework for supporting teachers in implementing inclusive pedagogy, this study proposes the CARE Framework, which comprises four interconnected dimensions: Connect, Adapt, Respond, and Expand. The framework represents a reconceptualization of inclusive pedagogy grounded in the premise that inclusion is not merely about placing students within the same classroom, but about cultivating a dynamic, relational, and continuously evolving educational practice. The acronym CARE was intentionally selected to reflect the central value of inclusive pedagogy—care—as the foundation of meaningful

relationships among teachers, students, families, and the wider learning community. These relationships constitute an essential prerequisite for creating equitable and meaningful learning experiences for all students.

Conceptually, the CARE Framework challenges two prevailing assumptions that have frequently constrained the implementation of inclusive education in schools. First, it rejects the notion that inclusive education is relevant only to students with disabilities. Second, it challenges the assumption that inclusive teaching requires separate instructional pathways for students with and without special educational needs. Instead, the framework conceptualizes learner diversity as a pedagogical resource rather than a learning barrier. Each component of the CARE Framework is designed to be implemented flexibly across different levels of instructional planning—from a single lesson and instructional unit to an entire semester—while maintaining consistency with its underlying principles of inclusive pedagogy.

The first dimension of the CARE Framework, Connect, emphasizes the establishment of meaningful relationships as the foundation of inclusive education. At this stage, relationships are positioned not merely as a prerequisite for effective teaching but as the starting point of inclusive pedagogical practice. Before designing instructional materials or selecting teaching strategies, teachers seek to develop a comprehensive understanding of their students, including their cultural and linguistic backgrounds, emotional conditions, patterns of thinking, and learning needs that may not always be immediately visible. Such understanding is developed through comprehensive diagnostic assessment, informal conversations, classroom observations, and a willingness to incorporate student voice into the design of learning experiences.

The Connect dimension also requires teachers to actively cultivate learning environments that are psychologically safe, socially inclusive, and free from stigma, ability labeling, and segregation based on physical conditions or social backgrounds. The relationships fostered at this stage extend beyond teacher–student interactions to include peer relationships and meaningful partnerships between schools and families. The ethics of care provides the moral foundation for this dimension, encouraging teachers to view students holistically as individuals with unique identities, experiences, and potential that deserve recognition and respect, rather than merely as recipients of pedagogical intervention (Sider & Morvan, 2025). Through this process, inclusive pedagogy begins with connection, trust, and belonging, creating the conditions necessary for equitable participation and meaningful learning for all students.

The second dimension, Adapt, focuses on designing learning experiences that are both flexible and accessible. Building on the comprehensive understanding of students developed during the Connect stage, teachers design learning experiences in which all students participate in the same core learning activities while receiving varying levels of instructional support, multiple forms of content representation, and diverse opportunities to demonstrate their understanding, tailored to their individual needs. At this stage, the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework serves as the primary guide by encouraging teachers to provide multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression, ensuring that no single mode of learning is regarded as the standard for all learners (Priyadharsini & Mary, 2024).

Furthermore, instructional content is intentionally connected to students' lived experiences, cultural backgrounds, and linguistic resources through an asset-based pedagogical approach, recognizing learner diversity as a valuable educational resource

rather than a barrier to learning (Panfilio-Padden & Devitt, 2021). Differentiated instruction—across learning content, instructional processes, and learning products—is implemented not to separate students into different instructional pathways, but to ensure that every learner can participate meaningfully in the same learning experience. Additional instructional support is provided through graduated levels of assistance according to individual learning needs, enabling all students to participate actively and successfully within an inclusive learning environment.

The third dimension, Respond, focuses on translating inclusive learning design into meaningful participation through active engagement, collaboration, and responsive instructional practice. At this stage, the emphasis shifts from instructional planning to facilitating students' active involvement in the learning process. Teachers assume the role of facilitators, intentionally creating opportunities for authentic interaction, collaboration, and participation among all learners (Thomas, 2021). A range of active learning strategies is employed to enable students to learn from and with one another through shared learning experiences. Heterogeneous learning groups encourage collaboration among students with diverse abilities, allowing them to support one another while contributing their individual strengths to collective learning. Peer-support systems, collaborative discussions, project-based learning, educational games, and creative inquiry serve as pedagogical mechanisms for strengthening both academic engagement and social participation.

Responsive support is further enhanced through collaboration among general education teachers, special education teachers, and other relevant professionals involved in students' learning. Such collaborative practices ensure that diverse learning needs can be addressed without removing students from mainstream classrooms or creating separate instructional pathways. Beyond instructional

strategies, attention is also given to the physical organization of the classroom to promote comfort, accessibility, and students' self-regulation, particularly for learners with sensory or emotional support needs. Consequently, inclusive education is understood not simply as the physical presence of students within the same classroom, but as a dynamic process of meaningful participation in which every learner experiences a genuine sense of belonging and is recognized as a valued member of the learning community.

The fourth dimension, *Expand*, emphasizes the importance of continuous reflection, evaluation, and professional learning as essential processes for sustaining inclusive educational practice. At this stage, inclusive pedagogy is understood as an ongoing process of improvement rather than a fixed set of instructional strategies. Following the implementation of learning activities, teachers and students collaboratively reflect on their learning experiences to evaluate the extent to which instruction has enabled the meaningful participation of all learners and to identify remaining barriers, challenges, and emerging learning needs. Teachers are encouraged not only to assess students' learning outcomes but also to critically examine their own instructional strategies, pedagogical approaches, and interactions throughout the teaching and learning process (Watulingas & Cendana, 2020). The insights generated through this reflective process serve as the basis for refining and strengthening inclusive teaching practices in subsequent learning cycles.

The *Expand* dimension also highlights the importance of collaborative professional reflection involving colleagues, parents, school counselors, psychologists, and other relevant professionals to develop a more comprehensive understanding of students' diverse learning needs and the effectiveness of inclusive practices. Equally important, students are provided with meaningful opportunities to express their perspectives and experiences

regarding the learning process. Their voices constitute valuable sources of evidence for understanding whether they feel accepted, psychologically safe, and able to participate fully within the classroom community. Consequently, the Expand dimension conceptualizes inclusive education as a dynamic, continuously evolving process in which reflection and evaluation do not merely conclude a cycle of instruction but become the foundation for initiating a new cycle of the CARE Framework, with deeper pedagogical understanding, stronger collaborative partnerships, and an ongoing commitment to inclusive excellence.

The CARE Framework is distinguished by its conceptualization of inclusive education as a transformative approach that extends beyond providing educational access for students with special educational needs. Instead, it promotes a learning culture that values and embraces the diversity of all learners. The framework is founded on the premise that every student enters the classroom with unique social, cultural, linguistic, experiential, and cognitive characteristics. Rather than viewing these differences as obstacles to teaching and learning, the CARE Framework recognizes learner diversity as an inherent educational asset that enriches the learning process. Accordingly, it positions meaningful relationships, active student participation, and instructional flexibility as the core principles of inclusive pedagogical practice.

Furthermore, the CARE Framework integrates academic, social, and emotional dimensions of learning into a unified conceptual model. Consequently, educational success is understood not only in terms of academic achievement but also in terms of the extent to which students experience acceptance, respect, psychological safety, and meaningful participation within their learning community. A defining characteristic of the framework is its cyclical, relational, and contextual nature. It is cyclical because inclusive practice is viewed as a continuous process of reflection,

refinement, and improvement rather than a linear sequence of instructional steps. It is relational because it positions meaningful relationships among teachers, students, families, and the wider school community as the foundation of inclusive practice rather than as supplementary elements. Finally, it is contextual because it does not prescribe a universal instructional formula; instead, it encourages teachers to adapt inclusive practices to the cultural, linguistic, and institutional contexts of their schools while remaining faithful to the fundamental principles of inclusive pedagogy.

IV. Conclusion

Inclusive pedagogy should be understood not merely as a technical approach to teaching but as a comprehensive conceptual framework that requires a fundamental transformation of educational practice to recognize and respond to learner diversity in equitable and meaningful ways. This study identified six interconnected dimensions of inclusive pedagogy: differentiated and personalized learning; collaborative learning and inclusive social interaction; student-centered and culturally responsive approaches; inclusive learning design based on Universal Design for Learning (UDL); supportive relationships and inclusive learning environments; and active, creative, and contextual learning. Together, these dimensions demonstrate that meaningful inclusion can only be achieved through the integration of complementary pedagogical practices that address students' academic, social, emotional, and cultural needs. The proposed CARE Framework (Connect–Adapt–Respond–Expand) represents the principal conceptual contribution of this study by reconceptualizing inclusive pedagogy as a cyclical, relational, and contextual process. Rather than viewing inclusion solely as access, the framework positions care as the foundational principle for creating adaptive, participatory, and equitable learning experiences

for all students. Consequently, the CARE Framework provides both a conceptual and an operational foundation for developing inclusive teaching practices that address the complexities of contemporary education while ensuring equitable access, meaningful participation, and successful learning outcomes for every learner.

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