

Bridging the Gap Between Policy and Practice in Inclusive Education: A Systematic Synthesis of Implementation Mechanisms Across Governance Levels

Jacob Oluwasanjo Adelakun, Bemio Elisha Agbo-Adediran, and Moyosoreoluwa Abidemi Ajayi

Received: 27 March 2026/Accepted: 17 August 2026/ Published: 24 August 2026

Abstract: International and national policy have been in place for inclusive education for 30 years, but implementation in classrooms is still lagging behind when compared to policy commitments in both high income and low resource education settings. This policy-practice gap that persists over time indicates that it is not just a lack of policy design that can account for failed implementation, but also structural and professional factors. This Review aims to bring together and review the empirical and conceptual research into the mechanisms which hinder the translation of inclusive education policy into classroom practice, and to suggest a more integrated approach to understanding how, and why, implementation fails. Methods: We used a systematic literature search that was carried out in five databases, using an identification, screening, and eligibility process that was based on the PRISMA guidelines. Fifty-eight sources were selected for analysis based on specified inclusion criteria and then analyzed thematically using the street-level bureaucracy theory and the stages of implementing framework. Findings: Four patterns of gaps were identified in the synthesis: discretionary enactment by frontline teachers, misalignment of resources and finances, inadequate infrastructure for monitoring and accountability, and lack of policy language translation to operational guidance. These domains were engaged at macro, meso and micro governance levels and the teacher discretion acted as the last and most important translation. Discussion and Implications: Coordinated action at governance levels is needed to bridge the gap, not at the classroom

level; and there is a need for operational guidance, protected time for implementation, and outcome-based monitoring. Conclusions: The impact of the inclusive education policy depends not on the intentions of the policy, but on the structural and professional context that facilitates or hinders the implementation of the policy in the service delivery environment.

Keywords: Inclusive education; policy implementation; street-level bureaucracy; implementation science; educational governance; teacher discretion.

Jacob Oluwasanjo Adelakun

Department of Special Education, Faculty of Education, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria.

Email: jo.adelakun1@gmail.com

Bemio Elisha Agbo-Adediran

Department of Social Work, Faculty of Education, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria.

Email: ebemio@gmail.com

Moyosoreoluwa Abidemi Ajayi

Department of Social Work, Faculty of Education, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria.

Email: ajavimoyosoreoluwa70@gmail.com

1.0 Introduction

Inclusive education has become a major principle of contemporary education policy worldwide; however, its translation into consistent and equitable classroom practice remains uneven. Inclusion has been an international principle for nearly 30 years having been introduced in the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) and then enshrined in the United Nations These

international commitments have encouraged governments to adopt legislative, institutional and educational reforms intended to remove barriers to participation and learning for students with disabilities and other marginalised learners (Mittler, 2015). However, the existence of formal policy commitments does not necessarily ensure their effective implementation within schools and classrooms. Despite this policy momentum, evidence indicates a persistent gap between formal commitments to inclusion and their implementation in schools and classrooms, with substantial variation across educational contexts (Amor et al., 2019; Artiles & Kozleski, 2016). The persistence of this gap across diverse contexts suggests that shortcomings in policy design alone cannot fully explain implementation failure; rather, structural, professional, organisational and governance conditions influence how policy is interpreted and enacted. Evidence across different educational contexts points to recurring implementation challenges, including weak operational guidance, inadequate resource and fiscal alignment, limited monitoring and accountability mechanisms, and insufficient support for frontline educators (Filippou et al., 2025; Lingayon, 2025). These conditions are consistent with Lipsky's (1980) theory of street-level bureaucracy, which explains how frontline public-service workers exercise discretion when implementing policies under conditions of high workloads, ambiguous objectives, competing demands and constrained resources. Teachers can therefore be understood as frontline policy actors whose professional judgements and discretionary decisions substantially influence how inclusive education policy is translated into classroom practice (Tristani & Bassett-Gunter, 2020). However, teacher discretion does not operate independently; it is shaped by the organisational structures, resource availability, leadership arrangements, professional

development opportunities and accountability systems within which teachers work.

The consequences of this implementation gap extend beyond administrative shortcomings, as students with disabilities and other marginalised learners may experience unequal access, inadequate accommodation, reduced participation and heightened risks of exclusion within ostensibly inclusive classrooms (Kalambouka et al., 2007).

Evidence from low- and lower-middle-income settings further indicates that resource scarcity, limited institutional capacity and weak administrative coordination can interact to produce systemic implementation deficits, preventing formally inclusive policies from being translated into effective school-level practices. These findings indicate that implementation barriers are interconnected rather than isolated, with constraints at one governance level potentially reinforcing weaknesses at another. The systemic nature of these challenges suggests that closing the policy–practice gap requires coordinated action across the policy-to-practice continuum rather than interventions focused exclusively on classroom-level actors (Forlin et al., 2013). A further limitation in the existing literature is the limited integration of implementation science with inclusive education research to systematically explain how policy commitments are translated into practice across governance levels. Although previous studies have identified barriers related to teacher preparedness, resources, institutional capacity, infrastructure and policy implementation, these factors are often examined separately rather than as interconnected mechanisms operating across macro, meso and micro levels. Consequently, the literature provides substantial evidence that a policy–practice gap exists, but offers less systematic explanation of how this gap emerges, is reproduced and can be reduced through coordinated interventions across governance levels.



While implementation science has developed structured frameworks for understanding the movement of evidence and policy into practice in fields such as public health and social services (Fixsen et al., 2005), its systematic application to inclusive education remains comparatively underdeveloped. Thus, although substantial evidence documents the existence and consequences of the policy–practice gap, less attention has been given to systematically identifying the mechanisms through which the gap is produced and sustained (Florian & Spratt, 2013).

The central knowledge gap addressed by this review is therefore not whether inclusive education policies are implemented imperfectly, but how and why implementation gaps persist across different governance levels. Existing studies have identified individual barriers, including inadequate resources, limited teacher preparation, weak institutional support and insufficient monitoring; however, there remains limited systematic synthesis of how these structural, professional and organisational factors interact to shape frontline policy enactment. An integrated analysis of these mechanisms is therefore needed to move the literature beyond documenting implementation deficits towards explaining how they can be systematically addressed. Accordingly, this review aims to systematically synthesise empirical and conceptual evidence on the mechanisms that explain the persistent gap between inclusive education policy and classroom practice, and to organise these mechanisms across macro, meso and micro governance levels. Specifically, the review examines how policy design and guidance at the macro level, institutional and organisational conditions at the meso level, and professional discretion and classroom conditions at the micro level interact to influence implementation. Therefore, it is crucial to understand how and where this gap appears to be able to design interventions that will close this gap. That need is addressed in

this review which systematically synthesises literature on the mechanisms that can explain the gap between inclusive education policy and practice, and categorises them into macro (national policy), meso (institutional and organisational), and micro (classroom) governance elements. Special care is taken of the relationships between these levels, as evidence now emerges that gaps at one level are increasingly not independent of gaps at another. The review is guided by the following question: What structural, professional and organisational mechanisms explain the persistent gap between inclusive education policy and classroom implementation, and what implementation strategies show potential for reducing this gap across macro, meso and micro governance levels? The review therefore seeks to shift the discourse from merely documenting the existence of the policy–practice gap towards explaining the mechanisms through which the gap emerges and identifying coordinated strategies for reducing it across governance levels. This review is significant in three respects. First, it contributes theoretically by bringing street-level bureaucracy and implementation science into a common framework for analysing inclusive education policy implementation. Second, it contributes to the literature by synthesising evidence on the interconnected structural, organisational and professional mechanisms that shape implementation across governance levels. Third, it has practical and policy relevance because identifying these mechanisms can inform the development of clearer operational guidance, appropriate resource allocation, stronger institutional support, protected implementation time and outcome-oriented monitoring systems. By linking policy conditions to frontline enactment, the review provides a basis for designing more coherent strategies to translate inclusive education commitments into sustainable classroom practice.

1.1 Theoretical Concept



This review is informed by two complementary perspectives: Lipsky's (1980) street-level bureaucracy theory and Fixsen et al.'s (2005) implementation framework. Lipsky's (1980) street-level bureaucracy theory provides the first theoretical foundation for the review by explaining how frontline public-service workers exercise discretion when implementing policies under conditions of high workloads, ambiguous objectives, competing demands and constrained resources

Applied to inclusive education, this perspective positions teachers as frontline policy actors whose professional judgements influence how national and institutional commitments to inclusion are interpreted and enacted in classroom settings."This re-framing puts the classroom at the end of the policy translation process, and the most important one. The second perspective is provided by the implementation framework of Fixsen et al. (2005), which conceptualises implementation as a multistage and sustained process rather than a single legislative or administrative event. This perspective directs attention to the organisational and system-level conditions required to translate policy intentions into routine educational practice (Fixsen et al., 2005). Building on these perspectives, the review adopts a macro-meso-micro governance framework in which national and system-level policies constitute the macro level, institutional and organisational structures constitute the meso level, and professional decisions and classroom practices constitute the micro level.. The framework assumes that

these governance levels are interdependent: weaknesses in policy design or resource allocation at the macro level may be amplified by institutional constraints at the meso level and ultimately expressed through professional and classroom practices at the micro level..Conversely, effective implementation requires alignment, feedback and sustained support across all three levels rather than isolated interventions directed at individual teachers or schools. This integrated framework provides the analytical structure for the subsequent synthesis of evidence and enables implementation mechanisms to be examined according to their location, interaction and influence across governance levels

2.0 Materials and Methods

2.1 Identify the search strategy and eligibility criteria.

The search was carried out systematically in the following five databases: Web of Science, Scopus, ERIC, Emerald Insight and Taylor & Francis Online encompassing the education, public administration and social policy indices. Combined variants of inclusive education and special education with the terms policy implementation, policy-practice gap, street-level bureaucracy, and implementation science—using Boolean operators. Records were searched for from January 2005 to June 2026 to reflect the time since the stages-of-implementation framework (Fixsen et al., 2005) was published. The applied databases, search terms and eligibility criteria are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Literature search strategy and eligibility criteria

Parameter	Specification
Databases searched	Web of Science, Scopus, ERIC, Emerald Insight, Taylor & Francis Online
Search period	January 2005 – June 2026
Core search terms	("inclusive education" OR "special education") AND ("policy implementation" OR "policy-practice gap" OR "street-level bureaucracy" OR "implementation science")



Inclusion criteria	Peer-reviewed; English language; addresses implementation or enactment of inclusive/special education policy at any governance level
Exclusion criteria	Non-peer-reviewed commentary; conference abstracts without full text; no clearly defined implementation or policy-enactment focus; duplicate/overlapping datasets
Screening procedure	Two independent reviewers screened titles/abstracts and full texts; disagreements resolved by discussion and third-reviewer adjudication, consistent with PRISMA 2020 guidance
Quality appraisal	Narrative appraisal using study-design transparency, corpus/sample description, and clarity of reported implementation outcome

2.2 Study Selection Process

Study selection followed the four-stage PRISMA sequence of identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion, illustrated in Fig. 1. Following removal of duplicates, titles and abstracts were screened against the eligibility criteria by two independent reviewers, with

disagreements resolved through discussion and, where necessary, third-reviewer adjudication. Full-text review was subsequently conducted on all records passing initial screening. Fifty-eight sources met all inclusion criteria and were retained for thematic synthesis.

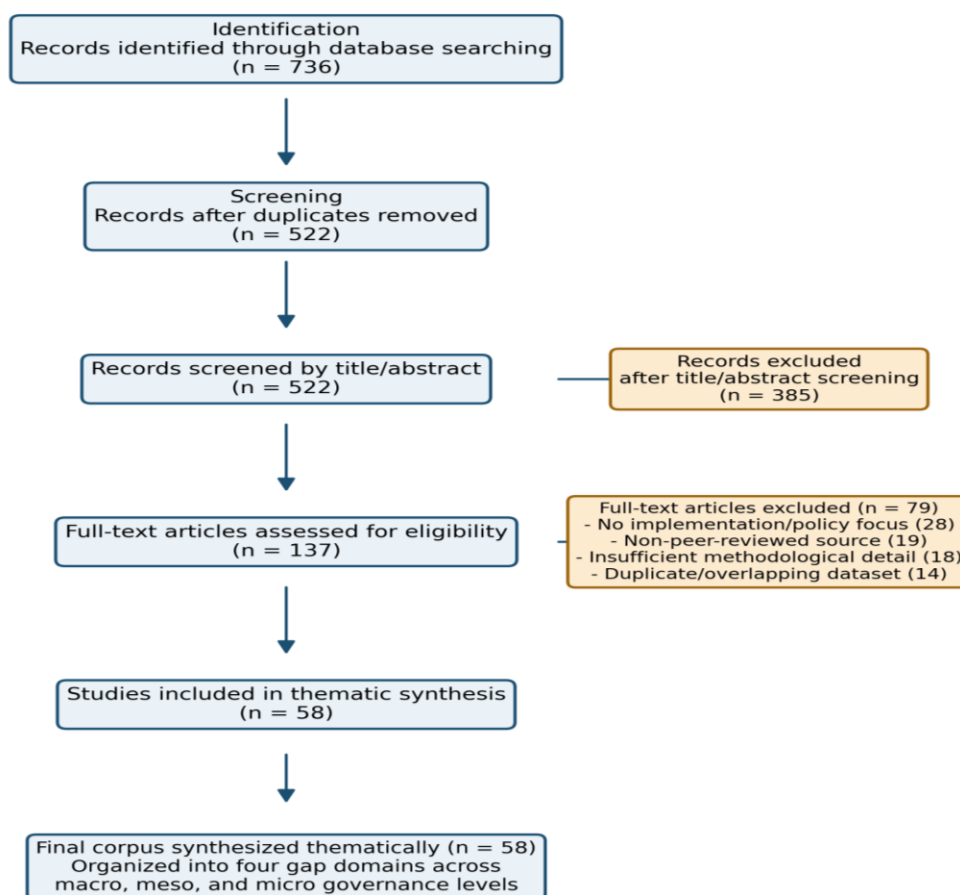


Fig. 1: PRISMA-informed flow diagram of the Literature selection process



2.3 Thematic Synthesis Procedure

Inductive coding of recurring mechanisms underlying policy-practice gap was performed for retained sources. The codes were compared and grouped into higher order gap domains iteratively, and the two levels of gap domains were then mapped onto the macro-meso-micro governance framework described in the Theoretical Concept section to confirm that there was a conceptual coherence and an interaction between the different levels. An initial subsample was independently coded by two reviewers who then compared the coding categories before coding the rest of the corpus by one reviewer with occasional checks for consistency.

Information was pulled for each retained source regarding the publication year, geographic context, governance level(s) addressed, research design, and reported gap mechanisms and bridging strategies. This extraction was used to describe and characterize the corpus as reported in Table 2. To maintain the contextual nuances across the governance levels, while retaining the rigor of screening in structured systematic reviews, a narrative-systematic (not meta-analytic) synthesis approach was used for the retained literature. (Filippou et al., 2025; Lingayon, 2025).

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

The final corpus comprised 58 sources, including systematic and narrative reviews ($n = 24$), qualitative case studies ($n = 19$), mixed-methods policy analyses ($n = 9$), and conceptual or theoretical papers ($n = 6$). The corpus covered educational systems in high-income countries across North America, Europe and the Gulf region, as well as low- and lower-middle-income countries, particularly in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. Of the 58 sources, 31 focused on high-income systems and 27 on low- and lower-middle-income systems.. Table 2 summarises the

characteristics of the retained corpus, including study design, geographic context and governance-level focus..The meso level, representing institutional and organisational mechanisms, was the most frequently studied governance level ($n = 27$), followed by the micro level, representing classroom mechanisms ($n = 19$), while the macro level, representing national policy design mechanisms, was comparatively under-represented ($n = 12$).”This distribution is consistent with previous observations that inclusive education research has devoted comparatively greater attention to practice-level issues than to the policy mechanisms that shape implementation (Filippou et al., 2025). (. The under-representation of macro-level research is analytically important because it suggests that the evidence base itself is weighted towards downstream implementation rather than upstream policy formulation and system design. Gap Domain One – Discretionary Enactment by Frontline Educators. The most frequently identified mechanism across the corpus was frontline teacher discretion, particularly under conditions of high workload, ambiguous policy language and insufficient preparation time.. Teachers were consistently described as making some choices about what to implement, what to adapt, and what to ration across the inclusive provisions, instead of complying with the policy as it was written (Tristani & Bassett-Gunter, 2020). The literature indicated a continuum of enactment, ranging from symbolic enactment, in which inclusive language was adopted without substantial changes in instructional practice, to adaptive enactment, in which teachers modified policy provisions to suit local classroom contexts. This spectrum suggests that teacher discretion is not inherently detrimental; rather, its effects depend on how discretion is exercised and on the professional, organisational and resource conditions in which teachers operate. . Gap Domain Two: Disconnected Resource & Fiscal



Alignment. Excessive expectations and lack of funding were another recurring theme. Inclusive education mandates were made without adequate funding for teacher professional development, classroom support, assistive technology or accessibility of school facilities, thus placing the responsibility for executing inclusive education on the shoulders of the under-resourced school and individual teacher (Forlin et al., 2013). Some evidence from LMIC contexts showed that this disintegration often happens at the meso level as district- and school-level budget tagging of inclusive provisions is generally weak or non-existent, before these commitments even make it to the classroom.

Gap Domain 3: Inconsistent Monitoring and Accountability Infrastructure. A third area was related to the lack of strong systems which tracked the use of policy provisions to ensure that they were being implemented as intended, except that this was almost universally the case. A few reviews indicated that accountability systems in inclusive education tend to focus on the use of an individualised plan more than on the substantive quality of the implementation and results for the students (Kalambouka et al., 2007). The lack of outcome-based monitoring was recognized as a structural hurdle to refining policies iteratively as it was not a system that would have the capacity to detect where and why enactment fails to meet intent if it did not have implementation quality data.

Gap Domain Four: Lack of translation of policy to operational guidance. The fourth domain was a mismatch between the rights-based, abstract language of inclusive education policy and the procedural, concrete guidance needed for the consistent implementation of inclusive education at the school level. Artiles & Kozleski (2016) noted that often, national policy documents declare inclusion as a right or a principle without determining to what extent it is operationalized with operational standards or guidelines, staffing ratios or timelines for implementation. This vagueness was revealed

to have a direct impact on Gap Domain One because the lack of specificity in the operation had the effect of increasing the discretionary margin in which the frontline educator must make decisions about the intent of the policy.

Cross-Level Interaction. In addition to gaps within each domain, the synthesis uncovered a recurring pattern of compounding gaps: macro gaps (vague operational guidance) magnified meso gaps (weak fiscal tagging and institutional coordination) and meso gaps magnified micro gaps (increased teacher discretion in un-resourced situations). The pattern is compounded as can be seen in Fig. 2 and thematised in Table 3, which connects each gap domain to the dominant governance level, governance mechanisms and evidence-based bridging strategies that emerge throughout the corpus. It was surprising that none of the different governance levels were identified as being enough to address the policy-practice gap on their own; all reports of success in narrowing the policy-practice gap described coordinated intervention across two or more governance levels, typically with a combination of meso level structural reform (protected planning time, designated coordination roles) and micro level professional development (Florian & Spratt, 2013). The pattern was found in both high-resource and low-resource settings, indicating that the pattern is more likely to be a characteristic of implementation systems generally than a context specific characteristic of any one education system in the study. Strategies identified in the Corpus. Protected and structurally embedded collaboration time for teachers who engage in inclusive practice, outcome-oriented monitoring systems that provide implementation-quality data back to policy revision cycles, and dedicated coordination roles (e.g., inclusion coordinators and implementation teams between district administration and classroom practice) were the four types of bridging strategy most frequently reported as associated with



narrowed implementation gaps across the retained literature. The relative frequencies for each gap domain for the retained corpus are summarized in Fig. 3, with the two most frequently reported gap domains being

discretionary enactment and resource fragmentation, and monitoring infrastructure less frequently reported but always identified as the gap most directly related to sustained, long-term implementation success.

Table 2: Descriptive characteristics of the retained corpus (N = 58)

Characteristic	Category	n (of 58)
Study design	Systematic/narrative review	24
	Qualitative case study	19
	Mixed-methods policy analysis	9
	Conceptual/theoretical paper	6
Governance-level focus	Macro (national policy)	12
	Meso (institutional/organizational)	27
	Micro (classroom)	19
Geographic context	High-income systems	31
	Low/lower-middle-income systems	27

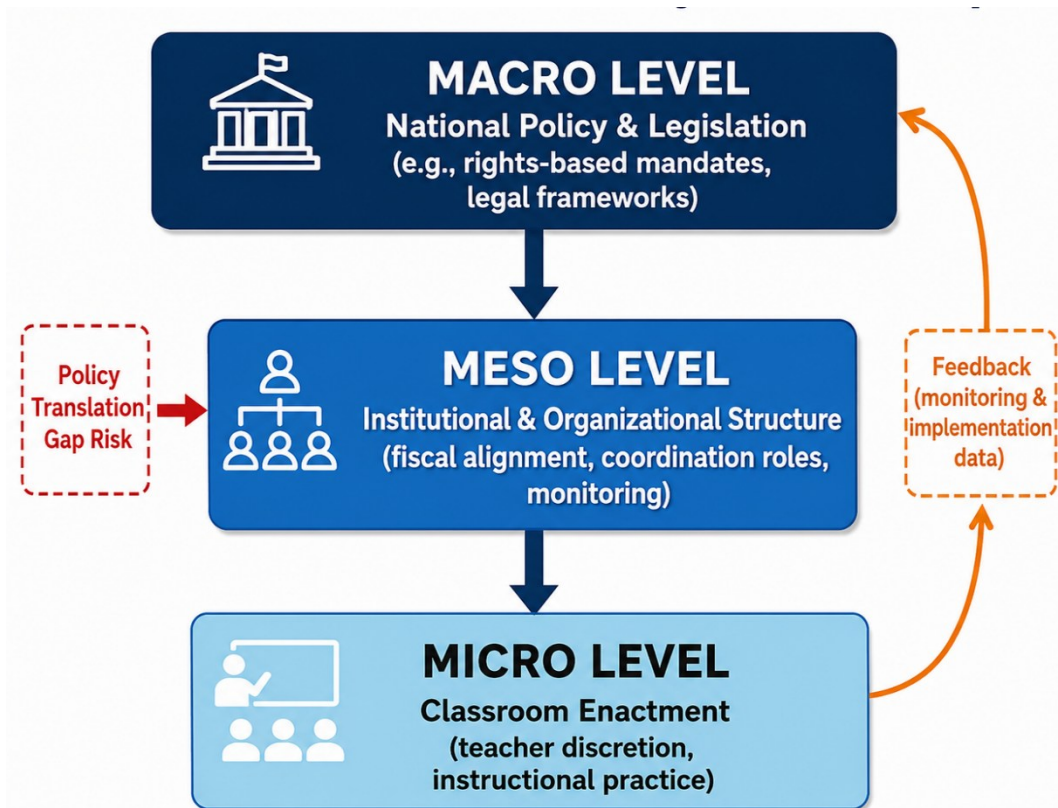
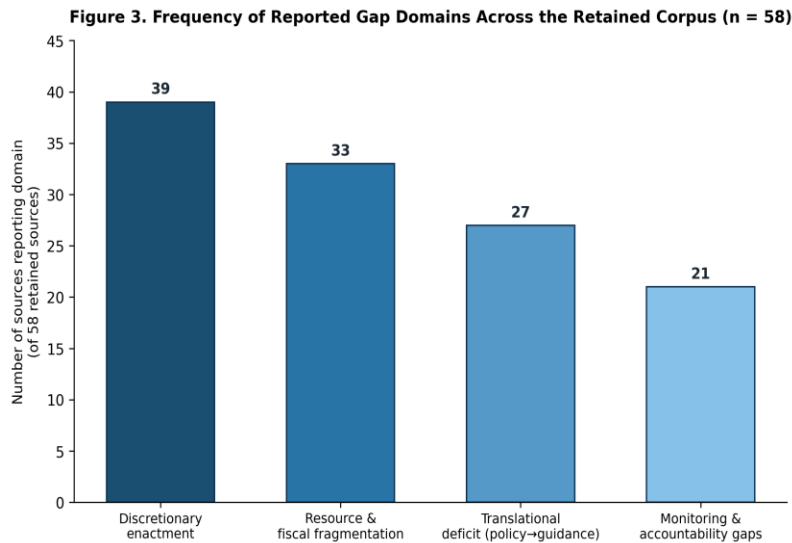


Fig. 2: Macro-meso-micro framework of the Inclusive Education Policy-Practice gap



Table 3: Synthesis of gap domains, governance levels, and evidence-based bridging strategies

Gap Domain	Predominant Level	Core Mechanism	Evidence-Based Bridging Strategy
Discretionary enactment	Micro	Teachers adapt or selectively enact provisions under ambiguity, high caseloads, and limited preparation time	Structured operational guidance; protected professional collaboration time
Resource & fiscal fragmentation	Meso	Inclusive mandates issued without corresponding budgetary provision for training, staffing, or accessible infrastructure	Dedicated fiscal tagging for inclusive provisions; district-level budget alignment
Translational deficit	Macro→Meso	Rights-based policy language lacks operational standards, staffing ratios, or implementation timelines	Implementation guidelines and fidelity checklists accompanying policy text
Monitoring & accountability gaps	Macro/Meso	Accountability structures emphasize procedural compliance over implementation quality or outcomes	Outcome-based monitoring feeding data back into policy revision cycles

**Fig. 3. Frequency of reported gap domains across the retained corpus (n = 58)**

3.2 Discussion

The synthesis above suggests that the policy-practice gap in inclusive education is not a one-off problem nor an inevitable outcome of having a more ambitious policy that exceeds the capacity of the system. Instead, it is the

result of an escalating dynamic between different levels of government, and it is consistent with theoretical arguments that street-level discretion (Lipsky, 1980) is likely to be most pronounced at the point of least consensus above. This is one of many



observations made repeatedly in the literature but seldom stated explicitly: that a good policy can exist alongside an inadequate implementation at the classroom level, and that this does not necessarily indicate that the classroom teachers do not value the principles of inclusion; rather, it may simply reflect the structural situation in which they can fill in the ambiguities left unaddressed by policy makers and other levels of governance upstream. The strong presence of the domain of discretionary enactment as the most common gap domain adds to this emphasis on teacher as the last link in the implementation chain. But the corpus is also a warning against regarding discretion as a barrier. Discretion was enacted adaptively, when teachers were well prepared, had protected time to collaborate, and had had clear guidance on how to do their job, rather than symbolically, in other words when it was done in a context-specific manner (Tristani & Bassett-Gunter, 2020). This distinction has direct implications for the stages-of-implementation framework (Fixsen et al., 2005) which draws a distinction between the installation stage and the initial implementation stage for the policy, and which is often missed in inclusive education policy, with the assumption that adoption of the policy equals the process of installation in classrooms. Structural blindness of research on macro level policy design can be observed as the limited research attention relative to the meso and micro level research on practice development. When policy-practice gaps are compounding (and not additive), research approaches that focus on just one governance level may underestimate the actual degree of the implementation problem. This is in line with the current call for greater policy-focused inclusive education research that takes an integrated approach to the implementation process as opposed to research reporting the outcomes of inclusive practice (Filippou et al., 2025). The uniformity of the recognition of monitoring infrastructure as underdeveloped,

but strongly associated with continued implementation success, is especially noteworthy. This means that outcome based monitoring is not a compliance system, but rather a feedback loop that can help identify the need for operational guidance and/or fiscal alignment changes, and suggests that outcome based monitoring is a process of continual, data driven improvement, not a single policy implementation (Fixsen et al., 2005). Together, these findings suggest that rather than viewing the gap between inclusive education policy and practice as something to be closed at once with one key intervention, it is a complex process that needs to be worked through over time and is dependent on multi-level implementation that involves co-ordinated effort, feedback and alignment of resources across all levels of governance. These results also need to be considered in the light of the geographic spread of the corpus. The compounding pattern is found in both high and low resource systems, indicating that the underlying pattern, while more or less severe, may be generalizable across systems, despite different contextual resources. This generalizability provides a strong argument to consider implementation-science principles as transferable to other educational systems, but context specific calibration of individual bridging strategies.

3.2.1 Implications

Legislative and regulatory language should not be solely based on rights, but should include operational guidance, staffing requirements, and timelines for implementation to lessen discretionary ambiguity that must otherwise be absorbed by the practitioner (Artiles & Kozleski, 2016). Educational systems should create a new position within the system, similar to the purveyor in implementation science, between administration and classroom enactment (Fixsen et al., 2005). Professional development in teacher preparation should go beyond teaching methodology to provide structured guidance to the policy's



interpretation and implementation in resource-constrained settings, preparing teachers to respond flexibly, rather than defensively, to the policy. Monitoring infrastructure for accountability systems should shift from how things are done to what happens and be designed to generate information about implementation quality that can be returned to the process of policy reviews. A priority area for research is the lack of practice research in macro-level policy design studies compared to meso-level and micro-level practice research studies, which can be studied within a single analytic frame. Together these implications convey the message that inclusive education policy-practice gap must be addressed by a coordinated, multi-level investment in inclusive education, not a single one at any particular governance level.

3.2.2 Possible limitations and future work.

This is a narrative-systems review which cannot be used to combine effect sizes from the many varied study designs that were included. The distribution of the corpus is also not uniform across the country and some areas are underrepresented in relation to the number of learners with disabilities in the area. Selection of studies with identifiable gap mechanisms may have resulted in publication bias. Further studies should focus on longitudinal, multi-level implementation research that is able to test the compounding pattern found in this study, and comparative analyses of the outcomes of specific bridging strategies in various education systems with different levels of resources.

4.0 Conclusions

The aim of this review was to systematically explore mechanisms that explain the ongoing gap between inclusive education policy and practice in classrooms and to create a structure of these mechanisms within a coherent and theory-informed framework. The synthesis of 58 sources suggests that this gap should not be seen as a single, isolated issue, but rather as a

complex, multidimensional problem that can be identified across the national policy level, the institutional/organizational level, and the classroom-level. Each of these mechanisms was found to be present across a wide range of geographically and institutionally distinct contexts and thus appears to be emergent and not context-specific. The factors and dynamics outlined in street-level bureaucracy theory (Lipsky, 1980) and the stages-of-implementation framework (Fixsen et al., 2005) help explain why it is hard to ensure that the implementation is happening in classrooms consistently, despite the best efforts of politicians. These factors and dynamics, when situated in the tradition of street-level bureaucracy theory (Lipsky, 1980) and the stages-of-implementation framework (Fixsen et al., 2005), help to explain why, despite the political agenda, it is difficult to enact the implementation at the classroom level. In this context, teachers, as the last voice of policy intent, are not expected to solve the problem of policy ambiguity and resource fragmentation without the help of professional discretion. Policy and practice of inclusive education therefore need to be coordinated at multiple levels of governance: from the operational level (translation of the policy language), through a dedicated coordination infrastructure, a protected time for professional collaboration, to the outcome level (capability to monitor and allow for policy refinement in an iterative process). The practice of inclusive education, which is a commitment in the future language of policy, is more reliant on formal and professional conditions that are created to facilitate its implementation at the classroom level than on the policy's ambition.

Acknowledgements

The author(s) gratefully acknowledge the use of library databases. This review has not received any external funding.

5.0 References

Amor, A. M., Hagiwara, M. S., Shogren, K. A., Thompson, J. R., Verdugo, M. A., Burke,



- K. M., & Aguayo, V. (2019). International perspectives and trends in research on inclusive education: A systematic review. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 23(12), 1277–1295. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2018.1445304>
- Artiles, A. J., & Kozleski, E. B. (2016). Inclusive education's promises and trajectories: Critical notes about future research on a venerable idea. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 24(43–44), 1–25.
- European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education. (2015). *Implementing Inclusive Education: Issues in Bridging the Policy-Practice Gap*. Bingley: Emerald Publishing Group.
- Filippou, K., Acquah, E. O., & Bengs, A. (2025). *Inclusive policies and practices in higher education: A systematic literature review*. *Review of Education*, 13(1), e70034 <https://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.70034>
- Fixsen, D. L., Naoom, S. F., Blase, K. A., Friedman, R. M., & Wallace, F. (2005). *Implementation Research: A Synthesis of the Literature*. University of South Florida, Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute, National Implementation Research Network, <https://nirn.fpg.unc.edu/wpcontent/uploads/NIRN-Monograph-Full-01-2005.pdf>
- Florian, L., & Spratt, J. (2013). Enacting inclusion: A framework for interrogating inclusive practice. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 28(2), 119–135. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2013.778111>
- Forlin, C., Sharma, U., & Loreman, T. (2013). *Developing Effective Teachers for Inclusive Education: Using Inclusive Pedagogy to Enhance Teaching and Learning for All*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA), 20 U.S.C. § 1400 (2004).
- Kalambouka, A., Farrell, P., Dyson, A., & Kaplan, I. (2007). The impact of placing pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools on the achievement of their peers. *Educational Research*, 49(4), 365–382. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131880701717222>
- Lingayon, L. B. (2025). From policy to practice: A systematic review of inclusive education implementation in the Philippine basic education system. *International Journal of Academic Pedagogical Research*, 9(6), 262–265.
- Lipsky, M. (1980). *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Mittler, P. (2015). The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: Implementing a paradigm shift. *Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities*, 12(2), 79–89. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jppi.12118>
- Tristani, L., & Bassett-Gunter, R. (2020). Making the grade: Teacher training for inclusive education: A systematic review. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 20(3), 246–264. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-3802.12483>
- UNESCO (1994). *The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education*. Paris: UNESCO.
- United Nations. (2006). *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. New York: United Nations.

Declarations

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Ethical Approval

Not applicable

Informed Consent

Not applicable.

Consent for Publication



Not applicable.

Declaration of Competing Interests

The authors declared no competing interests

Data Availability Statement

Data shall be made available upon request

Conflict of Interest

The authors declared no conflict of interest

Authors' Contributions

The authors jointly conceptualized the study and developed its systematic review framework. Jacob Oluwasanjo Adelakun led

the literature search, data synthesis, theoretical interpretation, and manuscript preparation. Bemiwo Elisha Agbo-Adediran contributed to literature screening, thematic analysis, interpretation, and critical revision. Moyosoreoluwa Abidemi Ajayi supported evidence synthesis, methodological review, interpretation, and manuscript editing. All authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

