



PROMOTING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND APPLYING INCLUSIVE PRACTICE IN MIXED-ABILITY CLASSROOMS. FROM THEORY TO PRAXIS

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Abstract:

This paper aims to provide practical and pedagogical tips for implementing a successful Inclusive Education in Mixed-Ability Classrooms. It provides guidance for inclusive educational action, inclusive teaching and inclusive pedagogical practice removing barriers and empowering the inclusive teacher. The article highlights contemporary research findings and it is based on the assumption that with a better understanding of the inclusive concepts and pedagogical methods through open educational resources (OERs), guides, digital tools and AI, teachers will be able to apply conditions for educational experiences of inclusion for all and to create supportive and inclusive environments with Student-Centred Learning. This work contributes to the Teaching Higher Education Students and promotes the establishment of inclusion and social justice in all educational contexts for students with and without disabilities.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, inclusive practice, inclusive culture, inclusive teaching, pedagogical interaction, inclusion barriers, student-centred learning, blended learning, digital tools, social justice, disabilities

Highlights

- Focusing on the Human-Centered Approach of Inclusive Education
- Focusing on Blended and Virtual Teaching with Interaction
- Focusing on a Lifelong, Inclusive Pedagogical Culture

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- Focusing on the Combination of Teacher Skills with Positive Influence and Accessible Educational Material with Digital Tools
- Focusing on Open Educational Resources (OERs) for Inclusive Education and Implementing Collaborative Activities as Dynamic Learning Experiences through the Use of Technology
- Focusing on removing obstacles: The removal of barriers to learning is a key goal of Inclusive Education
- Focusing on relationship between theory and practice in Inclusive Teaching
- Focusing on Inclusion and Social Justice in Mixed-Ability Classrooms

1. Introduction

Today, it is a fact that developing separate policies for children belonging to different categories of at-risk children should no longer be considered an option. International and European bodies have suggested this in recent reports (e.g., the Eurydice Report of the European Commission, 2023). It is widely accepted that co-education policy must legitimize the responsibility of educators to differentiate instruction, supported by targeted professional development and resource provision (such as databases with texts for all learning styles) that will help teachers implement inclusive teaching (Symeonidou et al., 2024).

The writing of this article has been informed by the future development of policy on Inclusive Education at the international level, which must take into account all children, students/future teachers, and learners in any context, with an emphasis on inclusive student-centred pedagogies (Van der Rijst & Fernández-Díaz, 2025).

This is a primary imperative in the teacher training in Higher Education, aiming at establishing Inclusive Education and assessment in blended learning environments, recognizing the reflective role of the teacher and pedagogical observation at any educational level, as well as the creation of courses based on inclusive curricula, also harnessing the power of new technologies (Kravale-Paulina et al., 2025; Marin & Van der Rijst, 2025; Hellstén & De Jonge, 2025; Reierstam, 2025; Katsampoxaki-Hodgetts, 2025; Giannakos et al., 2025).

In particular, contemporary research findings show that higher education teaching staff are especially sensitized to Inclusive Education, maintaining traits such as patience, closeness, affection, empathy, and flexibility, while also adopting a guiding role through instructional adaptations and providing the necessary support to meet the learning needs of their students (Sánchez-Díaz et al., 2024).

Over all, this study focuses on bridging inclusive education and practice. It is a fact that access for all is influenced by the dynamics and quality of educational conditions for the inclusion of all children. Inclusion is the new approach to the education of children with different abilities and learning differences, and in this context, it is necessary to examine how school conditions can be modified or changed in order to include and treat all students with respect and flexibility, so that everyone can actively participate (Halder,

2023). According to Panteliadou & Argyropoulos (2023) point out that the introduction of the term Inclusive Education focuses mainly on the necessity of reshaping the general school and creating a school that can respond to the diversity of children, regardless of their particular characteristics, needs and capabilities.

Specifically, the present context paper aims to present the important role of “tips”, which contributes to more inclusiveness and social justice in all educational contexts. According to the literature review, six tips have been structured in such a way that a teacher or educator can use them to develop and implement an inclusive educational practice. The tips presented in this article are based on highlighting and targeting key dimensions of Inclusive Education, as well as a collection of inclusive literacy tools, combined with the experience of implementing an electronic Guide for the training and reflection of teachers on inclusive practices (Ioannidi & Malafantis, 2025). The research literature emphasizes the necessity of such guides to bridge the gap between research and inclusive teaching practice across all subject areas (Dewsbury & Brame, 2019; <https://lse.ascb.org/evidence-based-teaching-guides/inclusive-teaching/>). Furthermore, open educational resources in the field of Inclusive Education are mentioned. In total, the aim is to focus on the inclusive pedagogical framework, which will be founded on the principles of diversity, lifelong learning, open access and removing obstacles, because the removal of barriers to learning is a key goal of Inclusive Education.

Tip 1 - Inclusive Pedagogical Praxis

Focusing on the Human-Centered Approach of Inclusive Education

Inclusive Education adopts a human-centered approach to ensure the effective participation of all individuals in the educational process. It is a pedagogical approach that actively engages all learners in an active and dynamic learning process that is accessible to everyone (Kokolaki & Katsampoxaki-Hodgetts, 2023; Ioannidi, 2022; Ioannidi & Malafantis, 2022).

An inclusive educational framework requires participation and accessibility for all, participation and collaboration, participation and achievement, and participation and support for everyone’s learning, as well as the recognition and acceptance of diversity. Participation as an ongoing process involves responding to the variety among students and requires learning to be active and collaborative. Participation is based on relationships of mutual recognition and acceptance (Black-Hawkins, 2014).

Tip 2 – Inclusive Learning with Interaction

Focusing on Blended and Virtual Teaching with Interaction

Today, blended learning is widespread as an alternative combination of face-to-face and online learning. In this way, traditional teaching is combined with the use of new tools offered by modern technologies. As a result, contemporary pedagogical dialogue is based on the construction of blended/hybrid learning, teaching, and working dialogues, with an emphasis on communication and collaborative processes.

So, building upon traditional face-to-face teaching, electronic environments are also created where learners have the opportunity to engage in discussions through online forums. In any case, what is particularly important is pedagogical planning based on multimodal content that enriches conventional material – such as collaborative activities, videos, parallel texts, hyperlinks, etc. – which are considered best practices for creating effective learning environments, especially electronic ones.

It is important to highlight the significance of pedagogical interaction in an online environment through the possibilities that multimodal content offers to users, as well as the interaction in communication through interpersonal discussions among users/learners within virtual and digital learning ecosystems (Sofos et al., 2015; Sakellariou, 2022), catering to all learning differences (EARLI).

Tip 3 – Inclusive Culture

Focusing on a Lifelong Inclusive Pedagogical Culture

Today, the value of an inclusive culture of lifelong learning is clearly recognized for enhancing the transversal skills of all education professionals across all formal, non-formal, and informal educational settings. This contributes to a more just, sustainable, dynamically inclusive, and democratic society for all children, at any developmental stage, regardless of anatomical, cognitive, learning, socio-cultural, or other differences (Seitz et al., 2023).

The development of more inclusive approaches does not result from a mechanical process that can simply generate higher levels of student participation in the educational process. Instead, the creation of an inclusive pedagogical culture requires a shared commitment among staff to processes that lead to a holistic enhancement of participation for all involved (Ainscow & Kaplan, 2004).

Tip 4 – Inclusive Skills

Focusing on the Combination of Teacher Skills with Positive Influence and Accessible Educational Material with Digital Tools

Contemporary literature emphasizes the critical role of skills and competencies, in combination with new literacies (Chrysanthopoulou, 2025), such as for example:

- In creative, collaborative, communicative, digital, and ethical skills of the Inclusive Educator in blended learning environments (Ioannidi, 2024),
- In the use of digital tools and Artificial Intelligence to enhance students' literacy across all subject areas (Sofos et al., 2024; Gavriilidou, 2024),
- In the power of teacher training in addressing learning differences (Westwood, 2004) and the connection between knowledge and skills (Ioannidi, 2020),
- In a collaborative learning culture and the role of leadership within the school community and among students (Owen, 2015),
- In the use of learning capacity and readiness through differentiated pedagogy and differentiated instruction in traditional face-to-face and/or distance learning environments (<http://iep.edu.gr/el/link-eniaia1/diaforopoiisi>; Sakellariou, 2022),

- In the value of accessible educational material (<https://prosvasimo.iep.edu.gr/el/>) through maximizing the use of digital tools in education and safeguarding children's rights within the digital world (https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/TBSearch.aspx?Lang=en&TreatyID=5&DocTypeID=11).

Tip 5 - Inclusive Educational Practice

Focusing on Open Educational Resources (OER) for Inclusive Education and Implementing Collaborative Activities as Dynamic Learning Experiences through the Use of Technology

It has been demonstrated through previous theoretical and empirical studies that, within the context of the new post-COVID-19 socio-educational conditions, digital media can offer multiple benefits to the students across all educational settings and levels. They can provide motivation for learning, identify weaknesses, cultivate critical and creative thinking, enhance observational skills, and train learners in information gathering and the appropriate use of new technologies (Kokolakis et al., 2023).

At the same time, the educator extends beyond the narrow limits of conventional teaching based on static curricula. They transform the instructional content into appropriate digital formats and structures, supporting multiple modes of knowledge representation (Zervos & Soudias, n.d.), thus contributing to the establishment of Universal Design for Learning for All.

According to Ioannidi & Malafantis (2025), a relevant application experience is offered by a digital guide in higher education settings that utilizes open-access resources to support the establishment of inclusive pedagogical praxis in all educational contexts: https://www.uoa.gr/fileadmin/user_upload/PDF-files/anakoinwseis/ekdoseis/1806_E-Book_Ioannidou-Malafantis_FINAL.pdf. It promotes critical and creative teaching methods, encourages digital literacy and leverages AI-based tools to support equity, diversity and Inclusive Education. This digital guide for inclusive action is designed for teachers of all disciplines and in all pedagogical settings. It provides indicative teaching examples aimed at university students, teachers, trainers, and generally professionals and specialists in education across all subject areas. It serves as an exploratory and reflective process of giving meaning to inclusive work, especially in light of the modern need for blended teaching in all educational contexts. More specifically, through collaborative activities (e-tivities) and the use of best practices -especially by applying the *Index for Inclusion* (<https://www.csie.org.uk/resources/inclusion-index-explained.shtml>)- teachers can familiarize themselves with applied knowledge and skills offered by the Inclusion Indicators for creating inclusive classrooms and educational communities of diverse learning capacities, both in traditional and digital ecosystems of inclusive learning (Ioannidi & Malafantis, 2025, pp. 47, 35).

So, university student-teachers, educators, and educational professionals are introduced to sample reflective, interactive, and collaborative activities (*e-tivities*) (Salmon, 2011; Salmon, 2013) that apply Inclusive Education practices in blended

teaching environments. At the same time, the contribution of digital tools as educational resources and exemplary practices is highlighted, especially in designing various collaborative activities with interactive content (Naggar et al., 2024; Loizou & Symeonidou, 2019), e.g., artificial intelligence software, online platforms, cartoons, etc. A practical pedagogical reference framework is presented using digital tools aimed at applied support and fostering Inclusive Education in Higher Education. The goal is to highlight pedagogical practices that treat Inclusive Education as an active and ongoing process in both learning and society. Additionally, problem-solving examples using AI are proposed (Ioannidi & Malafantis, 2025, p. 41), to enhance inclusive literacy across all curriculum subjects as an applied framework for understanding key concepts in authentic environments. These promote feedback, accessibility, participation, and the pursuit of progress for all learners (Katsampoxaki-Hodgetts, 2023).

From this perspective of expanding Inclusive Education into 21st-century educational and learning environments -with a focus on university-level teacher education- the E-Book (Ioannidi & Malafantis, 2025) has been developed as a guide for inclusive action. It encourages current and future educators to reflect, rethink, improve, and enrich their teaching practice and critically assess their own assumptions regarding the participation of all children, adolescents, and learners in formal and non-formal education. In total, the pedagogical framework of the digital guide is based on social constructivism, with an emphasis on pedagogical interaction between the educational material and learners, active learner engagement, and the development of critical thinking and metacognitive skills (Lionarakis, n.d.). The overall structure of the material, following the principles of West and Lionarakis, offers flexibility for both individualized learning and group approaches. Collaborative e-tivities can frame online interactive discussions (forums) or take place in traditional face-to-face environments supported by technology, functioning as participatory teaching and learning methods. The structure of this E-Book promotes the necessary teaching conditions for open and distance education and blended learning (Lionarakis, 2001).

In conclusion, the digital guide is aligned with international frameworks such as Article 24 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and utilizes open-access tools, including the *Index for Inclusion*. It is freely available and designed to support both new and experienced educators in developing inclusive instructional design and pedagogical reflection. It focuses on inclusive education practices, promotes innovative teaching approaches and supports academic staff in creating inclusive and digitally enhanced learning environments (https://www.uoa.gr/fileadmin/user_upload/PDF-files/anakoinwseis/ekdoseis/1806_E-Book_Ioannidou-Malafantis_FINAL.pdf).

Additionally, other open-access educational resources and repositories can be utilized, such as:

- Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) (www.cast.org) – A website offering rich information, extensive resources, and multiple strategies for Universal Design for Learning (UDL).

- National Center for Accessible Media (<http://ncam.wgbh.org>) – Provides resources and information to expand access to educational and multimedia technologies for students with disabilities.
- National Center on Universal Design for Learning (UDL Center) (<http://www.udlcenter.org>) – Supports effective UDL implementation by connecting stakeholders and offering UDL resources and guidance.
- Designing for All (<https://prosvasimo.iep.edu.gr/el/88-polimesiko-uliko>) – A Greek platform that supports Universal Design and the development of accessible digital educational content and software for all types of disabilities.
- The IRIS Center is a center dedicated to improving education outcomes for all children, especially those with disabilities, from birth through age twenty-one, through the use of effective evidence-based practices and interventions (<https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/>).
- The European School Education Platform is a meeting point for the school education community – school staff, researchers, and policymakers – to share news, interviews, publications, practice examples, courses and partners for their Erasmus+ projects. Its eTwinning area is dedicated to eTwinners and their activities (<https://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/el/pub/resources/toolkitsforschools.htm>)

Tip 6 - The removal of barriers to learning is a key goal of Inclusive Education.

Focusing on removing obstacles

Concepts such as responsiveness to different educational needs and learning styles, appropriate resources, accessibility and quality effective education for and towards all are useful and precise elements (prerequisites) in overcoming obstacles towards learning for all.

In particular, it should be noted that an in-depth understanding of inclusive practices in the educational process, combined with positive attitudes of teachers is a crucial factor for the implementation of inclusion (Krischler et al., 2018) as well as knowledge of the limits or barriers that make schools inclusive (Angelidis, 2019; Hedegaard Hansen, 2012). Finally, inclusion is considered a foundation for quality education, and teachers' inclusive practices are essential for the success of vulnerable groups of students in regular classrooms (Cruz, 2023). So, school and social inclusion and especially Inclusive Education, is a sustainable development strategy for individuals, social groups and communities and constitutes an education that is inclusive, an education that includes everyone, an education that respects the diversity and needs of everyone (Ioannidi, 2022).

2. Significance and Conclusion

In conclusion, Inclusive Education is one of the contemporary trends in global education systems and promotes ACCESS FOR ALL. It is based on the assumption that students of all abilities have the right to a meaningful, appropriate and equal education (CSIE). The development of Inclusive Education, action, and culture for students and educators is grounded in the Sustainable Development Goals for quality education (UN, 2015) and builds applied knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values as defined by global organizations and agencies (WEF, 2023; OECD, 2019). Furthermore, the “Right to Inclusion” (Article 24) is utilized to support the advancement of social justice across all educational settings, helping to reduce the digital divide and build sustainable educational communities, where teachers act as leaders with positive influence in blended classrooms of diverse learning and cultural backgrounds (Ioannidi, 2025a; Ioannidi, 2025b; Ioannidi, 2022).

It is noteworthy that the acceleration of the implementation of Inclusive Education is proposed by international literature to improve the teaching and learning experiences of students with special educational needs and the entire student population in all educational contexts and educational institutions internationally (Mavezera et al., 2024; Dyliaeva et al., 2024; Norwich & Lindsay, 2024). The practical significance of the paper lies in the inclusiveness of Primary, High School and Higher education for persons with and without disabilities. Also, it contributes to the University Education and Teaching Higher Education Students and it promotes the establishment of inclusion and social justice in all educational contexts.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no conflicts of interest.

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