



Teacher Mental Health and Well-Being in Inclusive Education: A Systematic Review

Mr. Shaktijeet Nayak

Assistant Professor in Educational Studies

M.P.C Autonomous College, Baripada

Abstract

Teacher mental health and well-being play a crucial role in the successful implementation of inclusive education. Inclusive education aims to provide equitable learning opportunities for all students, including those with diverse learning needs, disabilities, and socio-emotional challenges. However, the increasing demands of inclusive classrooms often place significant psychological, emotional, and professional pressures on teachers. This systematic review examines existing literature on teacher mental health and well-being within the context of inclusive education, with the objective of identifying key challenges, influencing factors, and possible strategies to support teachers effectively. The review analyses research studies, scholarly articles, and policy documents that focus on teachers' psychological well-being, stress levels, coping mechanisms, and institutional support systems in inclusive educational settings. Findings from the reviewed studies indicate that teachers frequently experience stress, burnout, emotional exhaustion, and role overload due to increased responsibilities, diverse classroom needs, inadequate training, and limited institutional support. Lack of resources, insufficient professional development in inclusive practices, and high expectations from parents and administrators further contribute to mental health challenges among teachers. Despite these challenges, the literature also highlights several protective factors that can enhance teacher well-being. Supportive school leadership, collaborative work environments, access to professional development programs, and adequate policy frameworks significantly improve teachers' coping abilities and job satisfaction. Additionally, the integration of mental health awareness programs, peer support systems, and teacher well-being initiatives within schools can foster a more positive and sustainable teaching environment.

This systematic review emphasizes the importance of prioritizing teacher mental health as a fundamental component of successful inclusive education. Strengthening institutional support, providing adequate training, and promoting well-being-oriented policies are essential for enabling teachers to effectively meet the diverse needs of students. Ultimately, improving teacher well-being not only benefits educators but also enhances the overall quality of inclusive education and student learning outcomes.

Key Word: Inclusive Education, Mental Health, Well-being, Teacher burnout

Introduction

Inclusive education has emerged as a significant global movement aimed at ensuring equitable access to quality education for all learners, including those with disabilities and diverse learning needs. International frameworks such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) emphasize that inclusive education promotes participation, equity, and social justice within educational systems (UNESCO, 2020). The policy emphasis on inclusion has increased the responsibilities of teachers, who are expected to address diverse learning needs while maintaining effective classroom management and academic outcomes (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). Consequently, teachers play a central role in the successful implementation of inclusive education practices (Ainscow, 2020). However, the increased demands associated with inclusive teaching often place significant psychological and emotional pressure on educators (Sharma & Sokal, 2016). These pressures may negatively affect teachers' mental health and overall well-being, which are essential for sustaining effective teaching practices (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Teacher mental health refers to the psychological and emotional state that influences teachers' ability to manage stress, maintain positive relationships, and perform professional responsibilities effectively (Roffey, 2012). In inclusive classrooms, teachers frequently encounter additional challenges such as managing diverse learning abilities, adapting instructional strategies, collaborating with specialists, and addressing behavioural or emotional issues among students (Forlin, 2010). These responsibilities often increase workload and stress levels among teachers, potentially leading to burnout and emotional exhaustion (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). Burnout, characterized by emotional fatigue, depersonalization, and reduced professional efficacy, has been widely reported among teachers working in inclusive settings (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). When teachers experience high levels of stress or burnout, their capacity to provide effective and inclusive instruction may be compromised (Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2012). Research has shown that teachers' well-being is closely linked to the quality of classroom interactions and students' learning outcomes (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Teachers who maintain positive mental health are more likely to adopt inclusive pedagogical approaches, foster supportive classroom environments, and effectively address diverse learner needs (Seligman, 2011). Conversely, poor mental health among teachers may lead to decreased motivation, reduced job satisfaction, and higher rates of absenteeism or attrition (Kyriacou, 2011). In the context of inclusive education, maintaining teacher well-being is therefore not only a matter of personal health but also a critical factor influencing the success of inclusive educational practices (Sharma & Sokal, 2016). Educational policies worldwide, including reforms inspired by the National Education Policy 2020 in India, increasingly emphasize inclusive and equitable learning environments (Government of India, 2020). While such policies highlight the importance of inclusion, they often overlook the psychological well-being of teachers who are responsible for implementing these reforms (Forlin & Chambers, 2011). Without adequate professional support, training, and institutional resources, teachers may struggle to cope with the complex demands of inclusive classrooms (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). As a result, scholars have increasingly recognized the need to examine teachers' mental health and well-being within the broader framework of inclusive education systems (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). A systematic review of existing literature is necessary to understand the current state of research on teacher mental health and well-being in inclusive education. Systematic

reviews allow researchers to synthesize findings from multiple studies, identify key trends, and highlight gaps in the literature (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006). By analysing empirical research across different contexts, such reviews can provide comprehensive insights into the factors influencing teachers' psychological well-being and the strategies that may support them in inclusive educational settings (Jennings, 2015). Therefore, this systematic review aims to examine the existing body of research on teacher mental health and well-being in inclusive education, focusing on major stressors, coping mechanisms, institutional support systems, and implications for policy and practice.

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this systematic review are:

1. To examine the mental health challenges faced by teachers in inclusive education settings.
2. To identify factors influencing teacher well-being in inclusive classrooms.
3. To explore strategies that support teacher mental health and resilience.
4. To highlight implications for policy, teacher training, and educational practice.

Methodology

This study adopted a **systematic review method** to examine existing research on teacher mental health and well-being in the context of inclusive education. The review followed a structured and transparent process to identify, select, and analyse relevant scholarly literature. Several academic databases such as Google Scholar, ERIC, Scopus, and Web of Science were searched to collect peer-reviewed articles, research papers, and review studies. The search process used keywords and combinations such as *teacher mental health*, *teacher well-being*, *inclusive education*, *teacher stress*, and *teacher burnout*. Studies published between 2010 and 2024 were considered to ensure the inclusion of recent developments in the field. The selection of studies followed the guidelines of the PRISMA to maintain transparency and methodological rigor. Inclusion criteria involved empirical and review studies focusing on teachers working in inclusive classrooms and addressing aspects of mental health, stress, coping strategies, or well-being. Studies not directly related to inclusive education or teacher mental health were excluded. After screening titles, abstracts, and full texts, the selected articles were systematically analysed. Thematic analysis was applied to identify recurring patterns, challenges, and supportive factors influencing teachers' psychological well-being in inclusive educational settings. This methodological approach ensured a comprehensive synthesis of the existing body of knowledge.

4. Mental Health Challenges Faced by Teachers in Inclusive Education

4.1 Workload and Diverse Student Needs

Teachers in inclusive education face significant mental health challenges due to heavy workloads and the demands of addressing diverse student needs. The increased responsibilities, such as developing individualized lesson plans and adapting teaching methods for students with special educational needs, often lead to emotional exhaustion, stress, and burnout. For instance, studies highlight how the need to manage behavioural issues, facilitate social interactions, and provide extra support without adequate resources or training results in feelings of overload and isolation among teachers. These pressures contribute to higher rates of professional burnout in inclusive settings compared to traditional classrooms, underscoring the urgency for better support systems.

4.2 Emotional Stress and Burnout

Emotional Stress and Burnout are common psychological conditions that affect individuals when they face prolonged pressure, excessive workload, or emotional demands. These issues are especially common in professions such as teaching, healthcare, and social services. Understanding their meaning, causes, symptoms, and ways to manage them is important for maintaining mental well-being

4.3 Lack of Training and Professional Preparation

Many teachers report feeling unprepared to manage inclusive classrooms. Insufficient training in special education strategies, behaviour management, and differentiated instruction can increase stress and reduce teacher confidence. When teachers lack adequate preparation, the implementation of inclusive education becomes more challenging.

4.4 Limited Institutional Support

Inclusive education requires collaboration between teachers, administrators, special educators, and mental health professionals. However, in many schools, teachers receive limited support from these systems. Lack of teaching assistants, insufficient resources, and inadequate infrastructure contribute to teacher stress and frustration.

5. Factors Influencing Teacher Well-being in Inclusive Education

Inclusive education aims to provide equitable learning opportunities for all students, including those with disabilities, diverse cultural backgrounds, and varying learning needs. While inclusive classrooms benefit students, they also place significant emotional, professional, and organizational demands on teachers. Teacher well-being therefore becomes a crucial factor for the successful implementation of inclusive education. Several psychological, professional, and institutional factors influence teachers' well-being. Among these, resilience and emotional intelligence, professional self-efficacy, supportive school environment, and access to professional development play significant roles.

5.1 Resilience and Emotional Intelligence

Resilience refers to the ability of teachers to adapt positively and recover from stress, adversity, and challenges encountered in the teaching profession. In inclusive education settings, teachers often face complex classroom situations, such as managing students with diverse learning abilities, behavioural issues, and emotional needs. Resilient teachers are better equipped to cope with these challenges without experiencing burnout or emotional exhaustion.

Emotional intelligence is another important component of teacher well-being. Emotional intelligence involves the ability to recognize, understand, and regulate one's own emotions as well as the emotions of others. Teachers with high emotional intelligence can effectively manage classroom conflicts, communicate empathetically with students, and build positive relationships with parents and colleagues.

In inclusive classrooms, teachers frequently interact with students who may require special emotional support. Emotional intelligence helps teachers remain patient, supportive, and responsive to the needs of these learners. It also enables teachers to handle stress and maintain a positive attitude toward their professional responsibilities.

Resilience and emotional intelligence together contribute to psychological stability, job satisfaction, and reduced stress levels among teachers. Teachers who possess these qualities are more capable of maintaining a healthy work-life balance and sustaining long-term commitment to inclusive teaching practices.

5.2 Professional Self-efficacy

Professional self-efficacy refers to teachers' belief in their own ability to effectively perform teaching tasks and influence student learning outcomes. In inclusive education, teachers must adapt teaching strategies, differentiate instruction, and manage diverse classroom needs. Teachers with strong professional self-efficacy feel confident in their ability to handle these responsibilities. When teachers believe they are capable of supporting students with special needs, they tend to demonstrate greater commitment, creativity, and persistence in their teaching practices. High self-efficacy encourages teachers to experiment with new instructional methods, collaborate with special educators, and implement inclusive teaching strategies. Professional self-efficacy can be strengthened through training, mentoring, collaborative learning, and positive feedback from school leadership. When teachers feel competent and capable, their motivation and psychological well-being significantly improve.

5.3 Supportive School Environment

A supportive school environment plays a vital role in promoting teacher well-being in inclusive education. The school climate, leadership style, collaboration among staff members, and availability of resources all influence teachers' experiences in the workplace. Support from school administrators, such as principals and management teams, can reduce teachers' stress levels and increase their job satisfaction. Effective leadership ensures that teachers receive guidance, encouragement, and recognition for their efforts in inclusive classrooms. Collaboration among teachers, special educators, counsellors, and support staff also contributes to a positive school environment. Inclusive education requires teamwork and shared responsibility. When

teachers have opportunities to collaborate and share experiences, they feel less isolated and more supported in managing classroom challenges.

5.4 Access to Professional Development

Professional development opportunities are essential for improving teachers' skills and confidence in inclusive education. Continuous training helps teachers understand inclusive teaching methods, classroom management strategies, and ways to support students with diverse learning needs. Workshops, seminars, training programs, and online courses enable teachers to learn new pedagogical approaches and update their knowledge about inclusive practices. These programs also provide teachers with practical strategies for adapting curriculum, designing individualized learning plans, and using assistive technologies. Professional development not only enhances teachers' competence but also strengthens their motivation and professional identity. When teachers receive ongoing training and support, they feel more prepared and confident in implementing inclusive education.

6. Strategies to Promote Teacher Mental Health and Well-being

6.1 Professional Development and Training

Targeted training equips teachers with skills to handle inclusive classrooms, reducing stress from diverse needs. Programs focusing on mental health awareness, stress management, and inclusive teaching strategies enhance self-efficacy and lower burnout rates. Interactive workshops with coaching and feedback help teachers adapt interventions effectively.

6.2 Institutional Support Systems

Schools' fosters well-being through trust-building leadership, open communication, and access to counselling. Multi-tiered supports like mindfulness training and peer mentoring create a collaborative environment that combats isolation. Providing mental health resources normalizes seeking help and boosts morale.

6.3 Workload Management

Collaborative planning and shared resources cut down on individual preparation time. Leaders can streamline administrative tasks, use technology for efficiency, and allocate dedicated time for teamwork to prevent overload. Regular workload audits ensure balanced responsibilities.

6.4 Promoting Work-Life Balance

Flexible schedules, boundaries on after-hours communication, and wellness routines like exercise promote recovery. Encouraging self-care practices such as mindfulness and hobbies helps teachers recharge outside work. School-wide policies modelling healthy boundaries reinforce sustainable habits.

6.5 Policy and Educational Reforms

Broad reforms include policy mandates for teacher wellness in inclusive education frameworks. Involving educators in decision-making and prioritizing mental health in funding leads to systemic change. National

guidelines for reduced administrative burdens and mandatory well-being training sustain long-term improvements.

7. Implications for Educational Practice

Addressing teacher mental health challenges in inclusive education carries profound implications for educational practice, transforming classrooms into supportive ecosystems where both educators and students thrive. Prioritizing teacher well-being directly enhances student outcomes, as stressed teachers often mirror anxiety in students, leading to behavioural disruptions and reduced engagement in diverse classrooms. Healthy educators foster inclusive environments through empathy and resilience, crucial for students with special needs. A key implication is the urgent need for integrated professional development. Schools must embed mental health literacy and inclusive pedagogy training into ongoing programs, empowering teachers to identify issues early and collaborate with professionals. This equips them to manage diverse needs without burnout, as evidenced by studies showing reduced stress from targeted workshops. Institutions should shift from one-off sessions to sustained coaching, aligning with NEP 2020's emphasis on teacher capacity-building for holistic well-being. Institutional support systems must evolve into proactive frameworks. Leaders play a pivotal role by building trust, providing counselling, and normalizing self-care through mindfulness initiatives. Peer mentoring and resource allocation address workload spikes from individualized planning, preventing the exhaustion reported in inclusive settings. Schools implementing these see improved job satisfaction and retention, creating psychologically safe spaces. Workload management demands structural reforms like collaborative planning and tech integration to streamline tasks. Reducing administrative burdens allows focus on teaching, directly impacting classroom equity. Promoting work-life balance via flexible hours and no after-hours emails prevents spillover stress, sustaining long-term efficacy. At the policy level, reforms should mandate wellness metrics in teacher evaluations and fund inclusive infrastructure. National guidelines, like those in India, advocate cross-sector collaboration for early interventions. Empowering teachers as change agents—through policy-practice alignment—closes gaps between intent and implementation.

Ultimately, these implications herald a paradigm shift: resilient teachers drive inclusive success, boosting academic achievement and social inclusion for all. By investing in educators' mental health, schools cultivate brighter futures, with empowered professionals at the helm.

8. Conclusion

This systematic review synthesizes evidence on teacher mental health and well-being in inclusive education, revealing pervasive challenges and actionable pathways forward. Across studies, inclusive settings consistently elevate risks of stress, burnout, and emotional exhaustion due to intensified workloads, inadequate training, resource shortages, and the demands of diverse student needs. Non-specialist teachers emerge as particularly vulnerable, exhibiting higher burnout levels linked to perfectionism, limited social support, and new professional demands. Meta-analyses confirm these patterns, associating special education roles with depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment. Key findings underscore bidirectional impacts: compromised teacher well-being undermines classroom equity, mirroring anxiety in students and hindering learning. Conversely, supportive interventions—professional development in inclusive

pedagogies, institutional counselling, workload redistribution, work-life boundaries, and policy reforms—bolster resilience and efficacy. Training fosters autonomy and stress coping, while peer networks and leadership accountability cultivate belonging. Limitations persist: much research relies on self-reports from small samples, with underrepresentation in low-resource contexts like India or Pacific islands. Longitudinal data gaps hinder causal insights, and cultural variances in well-being definitions warrant broader inclusion.

In conclusion, prioritizing teacher mental health is indispensable for inclusive education's success. Policymakers must embed wellness mandates in frameworks like NEP 2020, funding tailored training, paraprofessional aides, and mental health audits. Schools should operationalize support via professional learning communities, tech-enabled planning, and flexible schedules. By addressing burnout's root causes, educators gain capacity to nurture all students' potential, yielding equitable outcomes. Future research calls for randomized trials evaluating interventions' scalability, alongside diverse stakeholder voices. Ultimately, thriving teachers are the cornerstone of inclusive excellence—investing in their well-being ensures empowered classrooms where every child flourishes. This review advocates urgent, systemic action: resilient educators drive transformative education.

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