

EXPLORING INDICATORS OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN CARIBBEAN AND INTERNATIONAL CONTEXTS: A Systematised Review

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What themes exist in the Caribbean and international literature for developing indicators of inclusive education (IE)? This is the question that guided this review. The inclusion of Caribbean and international literature in this review was guided by a systematised search and review of literature on IE. The criteria for the studies included in this review were the studies' primary focus on IE. Additionally, their examination or evaluation of indicators of progress in IE. Contingent to the limited availability of research studies, peer-reviewed conceptual papers supported by primary and secondary sources of data were included. An examination of the methodology of selected studies focused on the studies' data gathering, data extraction, and interpretation. The period for included studies was 20 years (2003 to 2023). The findings of the reviews validated several themes identified in international literature: sound policy, professional development and teacher education, teacher quality indicators, resources and finance, and modified curriculum.

Introduction

Education systems in the Anglophone Caribbean have maintained the structures of the “mother country”. It was only through sustained nationalistic effort that change in the typical post-colonial legacy was evidenced. Hence, the post-colonial legacy has underpinned various challenges and key milestones along the path towards the development of inclusive education (IE). The Marge Report of 1984 (Marge, 1984) and the Miske Witte Report of 2008 (Peters et al., 2008) were two key milestone reports commissioned by the Ministry of Education of Trinidad and Tobago which sought to shape policy for resource building, necessary for improving services for students with disabilities (Carrington-Blaidés & Conrad, 2017).

In recent years, the principles and practices of IE have gained prominence. Globally, IE was conceptualised as a commitment to support and embrace learner diversity (UNESCO, 2005; 2009). This philosophy of IE was centered on the fundamental right to free, compulsory, elementary education (Mitchell, 2015), without disability, gender, or

ethnic discrimination and prejudice (UNESCO, 1994; 2000; 2005). Furthermore, this rights-based approach was predicated on the belief that human rights can be enhanced through practices that improve access to and availability of education to all (Hollenweger, 2014). Consequently, there has been a broadening of the scope beyond the education of students with special needs to encompass all marginalised groups within society (Mitchell, 2015).

IE was also conceptualised as a technical issue related to how educational services are organised to ensure equitable delivery, participation, and social justice for all (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Ramberg & Watkins, 2020). Proponents of this school of thought advanced that IE is a process that should be practiced in ways that foster the child's optimal individual and social development (UNESCO, 2005). Therefore, the education system should be structured to cater to the individual needs of each student.

Consequently, researchers have deliberated on what actions are necessary to achieve the goals of IE (Waitoller & Artiles, 2013). Studies have also attempted to isolate the key components of IE (Berlach & Chambers, 2011; Loreman, et al., 2014; McLeskey et al., 2014; Mitchell, 2015). These key components have been used as indicators of progress towards IE outcomes. In particular, the framework advanced by Loreman et al. (2014) has been instrumental in evaluating the extent to which schools and education systems realise the goals of inclusion. The Loreman, et al. (2014) review divided key elements into a logic model of inputs, such as curriculum, resources, staff professional development, leadership, and supportive policies; processes, such as school and classroom practices, collaboration and shared responsibility, welcoming climate, and individual supports; and outcomes, such as increases in participation and academic achievement, and concomitant post-school outcomes.

Purpose

The purpose of this paper was to identify themes in international literature that could be considered in developing indicators for measuring IE in Caribbean settings. Formulating outcome measures involves identifying key features within inclusive schools and across education systems (Loreman et al., 2014). Although specifically focused on the Caribbean, the review also captured an international perspective. Furthermore, this review aimed to compare the indicators of IE such as

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teacher training, resources, leadership, inclusive school practices, climate, collaboration, support to individuals, participation, and student achievement in the international context with those in the Caribbean region. By analysing the similarities and differences of these indicators in different contexts, the researchers sought to identify possible implications of the identified issues in the Caribbean region and provide suggestions on how to realise the goals of IE as outlined by the UNESCO (2005) policy framework. Hence, the study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What themes exist in the international literature for developing indicators of IE?
2. What themes exist in the Caribbean literature for developing indicators of IE?

Method

The authors conducted a systematised search and review of the literature on IE. This research design was chosen because it provided a robust and reliable approach to examining indicators of IE in the international and Caribbean contexts. The use of this transparent methodology and the summarizing of existing evidence improved the rigor of the study. Consequently, this increased the study's potential to generate comprehensive insights that may influence policy and practice and ultimately contribute to the advancement of IE in the Caribbean.

Search and Selection

The authors searched relevant publications using a variety of online, academic databases, such as ERIC, EBSCOhost, ProQuest, library catalogues, and official websites of organisations to ascertain how IE was being measured globally and in the Caribbean context. Search phrases utilised were combinations of "IE," "measurement," "indicators," "outcomes," "assessment," "evaluating," "IE system," "developing countries," and "Caribbean." The search was primarily limited to peer-reviewed publications during the period 2003-2023.

The initial searches generated over 150 articles; therefore, inclusion and exclusion criteria were established based on a focus on IE measurement indicators, geographic location, and date of publication. Due to the paucity of Caribbean-based literature, all relevant articles, conceptual papers, and three unpublished theses from the Caribbean were also retained. Additionally, the authors examined the reference lists of

seminal works to identify prospective articles for the review. This two-tiered procedure yielded a total of 48 documents, which provided useful information relating to one, two or all components of the Loreman et al. (2014) model listed in Table 1.

Table 1: List of Documents Reviewed by Component

Component	Documents	
	International	Caribbean Region
INPUTS International (n=15) Caribbean (n=16)	Chambers, 1983; Cushing et al., 2009; Forlin et al., 2013; Forlin, et al., 2015; Loreman et al., 2014; Mitchell, 2015; PRIDE, 2007; Sharma et al., 2019; Sprunt et al., 2017; UNESCO, 1994, 2005, 2008, 2009; Van Mieghem et al., 2020; Waitoller & Artilles, 2013.	Amadio, 2009; Bergsma, 2000; Bobb-Ward, 2018; Carrington-Blaides & Conrad, 2017; Carrington-Blaides, et al., 2017; Conrad & Brown, 2011; De Lisle, et al., 2017; James, 2014; George, 2023; Johnstone, 2010; Joseph, 2020; Laptiste-Francis, 2023; Moriah & University of Aberdeen Department of Education, 2017; Myers, 2010; Peters et al., 2008; Williams, 2007.
PROCESSES International (n=8) Caribbean (n=7)	Ainscow et al., 2006; Berlach & Chambers, 2011; Deppeler et al., 2005; Drame & Kamphoff, 2014; Forlin et al., 2015; Loreman et al., 2014; Mitchell, 2015; Rasowsky, 2007.	Bergsma, 2000; Carrington-Blaides et al., 2017; Conrad & Brown, 2011; George, 2023; Peters et al., 2008; Paul, 2011; Ramoutar, 2023.

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OUTCOMES International (n=7) Caribbean (n=4)	Ainscow et al., 2006; Forlin et al., 2015; Hollenweger et al., 2014; Loreman et al., 2014; Van Miegheim et al., 2020; Pivik et al., 2002; Waitoller & Artiles, 2013.	De Lisle et al., 2017; George, 2023; Laptiste-Francis, 2023; Paul, 2011.
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Analysis

The researchers employed the constant comparative analysis approach developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) to compare the indicators of IE in the international and Caribbean contexts. The Glaser and Strauss constant comparative analysis approach is a systematic and iterative process that involves comparing data within and across cases to identify commonalities, differences, and trends.

This data analysis process commenced with data collection. Relevant literature on indicators of IE was selected. This resulted in a diverse dataset of both regional and international studies (see Table 1). In the second phase, each document in the dataset was coded. Coded chunks of data were then assigned to themes (Saldana, 2014). This first cycle coding utilised themes developed deductively from the Kyriazopoulou and Weber (2009) framework. Major components that contributed to the development of IE systems have been utilised in seminal studies to evaluate individual components that may serve as indicators of inclusivity (Loreman et al., 2014). The coding process was done manually to ensure thorough and nuanced interpretation of the data.

Following this, a second cycle of coding was performed. This procedure allowed for themes to emerge from data outside of preexisting categories. The researchers iteratively examined the data, identifying recurring themes and concepts that were not initially anticipated. This bottom-up process allowed the data to speak for itself, thereby allowing themes to emerge organically. As a result, this inductive approach facilitated deeper analysis through an open-ended exploration of diverse perspectives and the nuances of different contexts. Finally, the researchers compared the resultant themes to discover similarities, distinctions, and other relational patterns between the identified indicators.

Findings

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This section is consistent with Kyriazopoulou and Weber's, (2009) inputs-process-outputs model. It delineates broad themes gleaned from the literature about efforts to measure IE. The first component was Inputs. The themes related to this were: Sound Policy, Professional Development and Teacher Education, Teacher Quality Indicators, Resources, Leadership, and Curriculum. The second component was Processes. Related themes were Climate, School and Classroom Practices, Collaboration and Shared Responsibility, and Support to Individuals. In the final component, Outcomes, the themes identified were Participation, Student Achievement, and Post School Outcomes.

Sound Policy

There was consensus in the literature that sound policy informs IE praxis and justifies educational approaches and supports (Forlin et al., 2015; Loreman et al., 2014). Policymakers and administrators cannot successfully execute IE policies without a ready system in place. Notwithstanding this, few countries have developed comprehensive strategic plans of action to support policy (Forlin et al., 2015; Laptiste-Francis, 2023). Furthermore, a clear policy for inclusion should be expressed at all levels. The policy should be addressed at the national, district, and school levels, and be compatible with the ideals of IE held by the teacher and classroom community (Loreman et al., 2014). The effect of lack of policy clarity was seen in nations like New Zealand, where there was a failure to express the aims of policymakers at any level. This led to an unnecessarily complicated system and uneven IE policy (Loreman et al., 2014).

The literature confirmed that the global Education for All agenda influenced the Caribbean educational policy landscape. The policies for IE were well aligned with the mandate of the international donor organisations, such as the UNESCO (1994) statement, the Dakar Framework for Action for Education for All (UNESCO, 2000), and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Kanter, 2007). The policies espoused universal principles of equity, universal access, respect for diversity, and maximum participation (Amadio, 2009; Bergsma, 2000; Carrington-Blaides & Conrad, 2017; Carrington-Blaides et al., 2017; James, 2014; Williams, 2007).

Regionally, there were two main approaches to IE policy among Caribbean nations. In St. Lucia, Grenada, and St. Vincent, policies were developed with a disability-specific focus (Amadio, 2009; UNESCO, 2008). For instance, St. Lucia's was limited to special education provision;

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the goal was to ensure that all students with disabilities received an education through the special education division of the Student Support Services (UNESCO, 2008). The IE policy trend highlighted disadvantaged and marginalised people in Guyana, Belize, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Barbados (Amadio, 2009; Carrington-Blaides & Conrad, 2017). This was evident in the Trinidad and Tobago context as the Student Support Services Division (SSSD) identified that students with social challenges, those affected by HIV, and those for whom English was a second language were also entitled to inclusive educational services (Williams, 2007).

Nevertheless, there were policy implementation challenges across the region. Several policies had action plans, but the frameworks for implementation were inadequate since the planned medium- and short-term goals were not achieved (Laptiste-Francis, 2023). The monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for each of the policies were also inadequate. This posed a challenge for creating and implementing successful inclusive policies (Carrington-Blaides & Conrad, 2017; Joseph, 2020; Laptiste-Francis, 2023). Some developing countries in the Caribbean lacked comprehensive policies and legislation that prioritise IE for students with special needs. (Laptiste-Francis, 2023). The absence of clear guidelines and support mechanisms can impede efforts to provide IE. This situation was further compounded by gaps in the areas of early family intervention systems, articulation of a full continuum of placement alternatives, and programmes for the gifted and talented throughout the region (Laptiste-Francis, 2023). If these gaps are not addressed shortly, the progress towards full IE systems in the Caribbean will continue to be stymied.

Teacher Education and Professional Development

According to UNESCO (2005, 2009) policy recommendations, it was doubtful that IE policies would be successfully implemented if qualified practitioners were not readily available. Moreover, the effectiveness of inclusion at the school and classroom level was greatly influenced by how well-prepared teachers and school personnel felt to adopt inclusive practices (Loreman et al., 2014). Therefore, professional development is a crucial component of IE reform (Forlin et al., 2013; Van Mieghem et al., 2020; Waitoller & Artiles, 2013).

Teacher preparation programs must emphasise practical application and incorporate administrators' and teachers' views on practices that are both effective and sustainable in the given context (Cushing et al., 2009; Sprunt Deppeler et al., 2017). Similarly, Van Mieghem et al. (2020) noted

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that the most effective training programs for promoting change in teachers' practice consider specific teacher issues and their teaching context.

Professional development for IE should go beyond theory and emphasise practical skills. Schools and classrooms should focus on enhancing teacher capability using professional development and training. The lack of resources and negative attitudes should be addressed by utilising local resources, collaborating with non-government organisations and other schools, ensuring that budgets include teaching and learning resources and professional development to raise awareness and involving of community leaders. (Sharma et al., 2019). In addition, practitioners need particular critical sensitivities, and contextual awareness to offer excellent educational access, participation, and achievement for all students (Waitoller & Artiles, 2013). In their seminal review on professional development for IE, Waitoller and Artiles (2013) highlighted six types of professional development for IE: action research, on-site training, university classes, professional development schools, online courses, and a special educator's weekly newsletter on how to include children with disabilities.

Teacher Quality Indicators

Measuring the quality and process of becoming an inclusive teacher should include an interrogation of how teachers learn when professional, institutional, and contextual factors intersect. When teacher learning occurs in ongoing forums mutual agreement exists, this 'boundary practice' can provide needed feedback on how teachers learn in complex intersectoral spaces (Waitoller & Artiles, 2013). Loreman et al. (2014) found several criteria for teacher quality worldwide. In the Canadian context, they cited that teachers should be able to ensure that

... all students can learn, albeit at different rates and in different ways. They know how (including when and how to engage others) to identify students' different learning styles and ways students learn. They understand the need to respond to differences creating multiple paths to learning for individuals and groups of students, including students with special learning needs. (Government of Alberta, 1997, as cited in Loreman et al., 2014, pp. 13-14)

In the United States, Rasowsky (2007) noted three essential quality indicators in inclusive early childhood classrooms: teachers' undergraduate and higher degrees; more years of practical experience, and higher self-ratings of teacher efficacy (Rasowsky, 2007). Australia's Quality Teaching Model requires instructors to ensure that instructional content reflects and explicitly appreciates the participation of all students

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across sociocultural backgrounds in the classroom (Chambers, 1983). Likewise, in the Pacific Region, the Pacific Regional Initiatives for the Delivery of Basic Education (PRIDE) Project (2007) aims to improve the Ministry of Education's ability to provide high-quality basic education via enhanced teacher education (Forlin et al., 2015; Waitoller & Artiles, 2013).

Despite these developments, some nations acknowledged the need for better professional development in their plans for strategic development (Forlin et al., 2015). There were still major gaps in teacher preparation for IE worldwide, especially in countries of the global south. There were instances where teachers received no formal training in accommodations, differentiating instruction, or multi-level teaching. For example, in Senegal, Drame and Kamphoff (2014) found that teachers received no training for IE, so they did not understand how to modify instructional material according to student needs.

Caribbean-based research has also identified teacher training as an effective strategy to increase teachers' competence to implement inclusive educational programs (Bergsma, 2000; Conrad & Brown, 2011; Johnstone, 2010). Furthermore, studies have highlighted that teacher preparation should increase teachers' ability to advocate for students with special needs, communicate with parents, and recognise the characteristics of such individuals (Bergsma, 2000; Conrad & Brown, 2011; Johnstone, 2010; Peters et al., 2008). However, there were critical components of teacher preparation that still needed to be addressed such as adapting teaching and addressing learner diversity (Bergsma, 2000; Johnstone, 2010; Peters et al., 2008). Additionally, there was a need for systemwide training in other neglected areas such as accommodations (De Lisle et al., 2017).

Research found that many teachers continue to rely on traditional modes of instruction despite teacher training for IE (Peters et al., 2008; Ramoutar, 2023.). This may be because of poor university-level teacher preparation (Sharma et al., 2019). Accordingly, the most effective way to ensure that teachers adopt inclusive practices previously learned was through social learning where collaboration and observation occur within their classroom contexts (Ainscow & Sandhill, 2010). Unfortunately, evidence suggests that despite established professional development standards in the international context, many teachers in developing countries of the Caribbean may not receive adequate training and support to address the diverse needs of students with disabilities.

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Several authors have suggested different causes of this situation ranging from simply the lack of specialized teacher training opportunities (Bergsma, 2000; Conrad & Brown, 2011; Johnstone, 2010; Peters et al., 2008) to more nuanced factors, such as resistance to changes in traditional pedagogical methods and pervasive attitudes of exclusion stemming from colonial legacies (Steinbach, 2012). Additionally, pragmatic reasons- such as financial constraints leading to the inability of aspiring special education teachers to pursue full-time studies- have been advanced (Peters et al., 2008). Consequently, this lack of specialised knowledge and skills can hinder effective inclusion practices (Johnstone, 2010; Peters et al., 2008).

Resources and Finances

For IE to be successful, sufficient funds and resources must be available. There was a disparity between the expectations of developed and developing nations. Inputs such as portable water and classroom size are often taken for granted in high-income countries. The indicators of resources and finances should be measured by how they are used to advance the education of all children through the provision of required services. Experts advise that resource problems should be seen as both a "process" problem and a problem related to "input" (Loreman et al., 2014).

Globally, there were not enough human and financial resources to facilitate the widespread deployment of IE (Sprunt et al., 2017; UNESCO, 2015). For inclusion to be successful, human resources such as teacher assistants and sign language interpreters; services including remedial education programs, brailing of books, notes, and tests, and awareness campaigns; and materials, such as assistive technologies, are necessary (Sprunt et al., 2017). The onus, therefore, was on local, regional, and national governing bodies to provide schools with adequate resources to fulfill their duties regarding IE. More specifically, the governing bodies should ensure that resources are given to the school and used for the intended goals. The administrators of the school should ensure that there are sufficient human and material resources in the classroom (Mitchell, 2015).

In the Caribbean, Carrington-Blaides and Conrad (2017) hypothesised that discrepancies in IE practice in Trinidad and Tobago and the wider region were caused by the need to balance available resources against the demands of the specific nation. This phenomenon explained the striking gap between the more developed countries in the north and the less developed countries in the south (Armstrong et al., 2011; Carrington-

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Blaides & Conrad, 2017; Johnstone, 2010). Two other local studies also reported inadequate support and resources for IE (Bobb-Ward, 2018; Myers, 2010).

Developing countries in the Caribbean often face challenges in providing adequate resources and infrastructure to support IE for students with special needs. This includes a lack of trained teachers, appropriate teaching materials, accessible classrooms, and assistive technologies (UNESCO, 2009).

Effective Leadership

The functioning of an IE system depends on effective leadership at all levels. (Conrad & Brown, 2011). An essential component of an IE system is ensuring strong leadership capable of meeting the needs of an inclusive school system (Loreman et al., 2014). Research demonstrated that schools with strong administrative support for inclusion successfully served more children with disabilities in normal classes (Conrad & Brown, 2011; Loreman et al., 2014; Moriah & University of Aberdeen Department of Education, 2017). The school principal's leadership was integral in empowering personnel to engage in inclusive practices at the school level (Ramoutar, 2023). Similarly, Mitchell (2015) noted that principals' views toward diverse classrooms, operationalised as the subjective school norm, were the best predictors of successful teaching behavior in IE settings. As a result, administrators should be committed to accepting and embracing diversity, and multicultural sensitivity and should have the ability to establish high but reasonable expectations (Mitchell, 2015).

In the Caribbean, leadership is similarly vital in inclusive educational systems since it is required to advance laws that encourage equitable, high-quality learning, and collaborative settings (Conrad & Brown, 2011; George, 2023; Moriah & University of Aberdeen Department of Education, 2017). However, similar to the lack of teacher preparation in the region, leadership training for IE is often inadequate (Moriah & University of Aberdeen Department of Education, 2017).

Modified Curriculum

Rasowsky (2007) asserted that the most crucial element of high-quality inclusive programming is a comprehensive, carefully thought-out curriculum. An inclusive curriculum at the input level is created to allow for differentiated instruction and other inclusive instructional techniques at the classroom level (Loreman et al., 2014). Such a curriculum should be universal and accessible to all students, especially those with special

educational needs. (Forlin et al., 2015; Mitchell, 2015; UNESCO, 2009). It is, therefore, the role of specialists and teachers, to develop strategies for including students with special needs in the regular curriculum (Mitchell, 2015). Further, the general curriculum should never be replaced by support for children with disabilities, nor should it ever be provided in a way that prevents the child from engaging in the general curriculum (Rasowsky, 2007).

There are five methods for modifying the curriculum: differentiation, adaptation, enhancement, enrichment, and elaboration. In addition, individualised education plans (IEPs) and the regular curriculum might be aligned through the processes of reduction, streamlining, overlapping, and extension (Mitchell, 2015). Collectively, these techniques facilitate the design of a curriculum that is appropriate for each student following national curricular standards.

Furthermore, assessments must reflect the accommodations and modifications implemented. Alternative assessments, such as students' work samples, teacher observations, and performance tasks should be provided with justification (Mitchell, 2015).

Throughout the Caribbean, there was the absence of curricular modifications and assessments to adequately support inclusive education (Carrington -Blaides et al., 2017). De Lisle et al. (2017) reasoned that that was due to inadequate teacher training, a lack of political will from technocrats and legislators, and the disregard for evaluation tools and inclusive policies

School Climate for Success

A crucial component of an IE environment is a school atmosphere that is inviting, accepting of diversity, and receptive to new ideas and approaches (Ainscow et al., 2006; Loreman et al., 2014). Developing and achieving success for the school is necessary in fostering a healthy school culture, or ethos. This must be consistent with the members of the group's shared values, beliefs, attitudes, traditions, and behavioral standards, especially those in leadership positions (Mitchell, 2015).

The classroom climate should be multifaceted and dependent on psychological rather than physical characteristics (Loreman et al., 2014). Psychological conditions, such as relationships, personal growth, and system upkeep are crucial elements that support learning. Forlin et al. (2015) found that policymakers emphasised the importance of culture, common values, and belief systems when introducing IE.

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School and Classroom Practices

School practices impact the quality and quantity of inclusion. These procedures may include scheduling, participation in a variety of groups and teams, communication, and transportation. Thus, IE cannot occur effectively if isolation exists within or among schools (George, 2023; Loreman et al., 2014).

It is necessary to implement practices that respect diversity, and guarantee that all students have equal access to opportunities and resources. Loreman et al. (2014) asserted that robust teaching approaches that facilitate multiple intelligences and various learning styles are necessary. Access, however, is a broad construct. It encompasses access to education, the modified curriculum and assessment, and sufficient physical access to and within classrooms (Mitchell, 2015).

To accommodate physical access, features such as ramps and lifts, accessible restrooms, doors to accommodate wheelchairs, and spaces inside classrooms for wheelchairs to maneuver are necessary. Additionally, the needs of students should be considered when designing and arranging the physical environment. This includes acoustics, lighting, temperature, and ventilation (Mitchell, 2015). Rasowsky (2007) cautioned that simply placing students with disabilities in regular classrooms without specialized instruction was not enough to ensure successful inclusion.

Loreman et al. (2014) asserted that robust teaching approaches that facilitate multiple intelligences and various learning styles are necessary. Additionally, it is critical to consider classroom procedures from the perspective of appropriate pedagogy for all learners, not just those with special needs. The focus is no longer on the content itself but rather on the strengths and needs of the students. This entails using instructional strategies including differentiated instruction, universal design for learning, backward design, and, if necessary, a focus on crucial areas for individuals (Carrington-Blaidies et al., 2017; Loreman et al., 2014).

International research has identified the following threats to inclusive classroom practice: Unresponsive teachers and parents, disproportionate class sizes, a lack of resources, and inadequate policy implementation processes (De Lisle et al., 2017; Loreman et al., 2014; Pivik et al., 2002; Sharma et al., 2019). Similarly, Forlin et al. (2015) opined that the lack of a national definition, stigma, prejudice, and a lack of awareness of the needs of children with disabilities and the importance of a high-quality educational system, are all issues that need to be addressed (Forlin et al., 2015).

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Similarly, in the Caribbean, a lack of knowledge and skills at all levels, a lack of support for implementing successful inclusive practices, issues with culture, a lack of knowledge about IE, inadequate skills, and intolerance for children with disabilities were identified as potential barriers (Carrington-Blaides & Conrad 2017). Caribbean studies confirmed that mainstreaming was founded on the idea of just placing disabled students in physical settings without the corresponding pedagogical adjustments and support mechanisms needed to satisfy their unique learning requirements (Bergsma, 2000; Conrad & Brown, 2010; Paul, 2011; UNESCO, 2008). Trinidad and Tobago had significant difficulties with mainstreaming due to a lack of necessary restructuring in several areas including curriculum, teaching methods, and learning techniques (Conrad & Brown, 2011).

Collaboration and Shared Responsibility

Collaboration is a key component of an inclusive educational system. It is a coordinated strategy for assisting classrooms, families, and schools and is essential to delivering effective services. This collaboration should ideally occur across multiple levels: between the school-based staff and students, other professionals and education staff, districts, and schools, the school and the community, as well as staff and families at all levels (Loreman et al., 2014). This approach constitutes a "community of practice" or a social group actively engaged in the persistent pursuit of a collective goal (Ainscow et al., 2006). As far as possible, this coordination should remain "invisible" to the students in the learning environment. Furthermore, all stakeholders should share joint responsibility for IE and student achievement (Deppeler et al., 2005; Loreman et al., 2014). Forlin et al. (2015) recommend more collaboration and understanding regarding attempts at IE to reduce misconceptions among teachers

Support to Individuals

According to the literature, a successful IE system supports and attends to the unique needs of every student, regardless of ability. Inclusive educational support is offered through classroom materials, staff, and other professional resource personnel (Deppeler et al., 2005; Mitchell, 2015). Therefore, providing the necessary numbers of qualified consultants, therapists, teacher aides, and other experts is an example of how countries may assist individuals (Loreman et al., 2014).

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Outcomes

An indicator may be considered a tool for gauging the desired end goals. The exploration of IE indicators is complex. It includes determining inputs, processes, and resulting outcomes. Creating a set of outcomes from which indicators might be developed entails conceptualising what has to be implemented at various levels in schools and school systems to support IE (Loreman et al., 2014).

Student Participation

Forlin et al. (2015) argued that student participation is a critical indicator of successful IE. Broadly, shared experiences derived from purposeful interactions within a community define participation. Furthermore, participation in inclusive settings emphasises student presence, involvement, and accomplishments on the premise that effective leadership seeks to ensure these elements (Ainscow et al., 2006).

Van Miegheim et al. (2020) discussed two forms of student participation. These are social participation and academic participation. Student participation involves mixed classes with a minority of students with disability and the majority without disabilities educated in a mainstream classroom. This arrangement focuses on fostering positive relationships.

Waitoller and Artiles (2013) found barriers to meaningful participation in IE are sociocultural and economic. This occurs when the cultural mores of minority groups are misunderstood, and financial constraints result in underfunded schools or debar students and their families from accessing supplementary services (Waitoller & Artiles, 2013). Similarly, in the Caribbean, Laptiste-Francis (2023) reported that persons with disabilities felt that although they were being included, they did not experience meaningful participation in the IE decision-making process.

Student Achievement

One of the main goals of IE was providing evidence that all students can learn. Thus, there should be careful monitoring of the type of settings that produce favorable student performances. Research has shown that IE has a great impact on students' academic performance (De Lisle et al., 2017; George, 2023; Loreman et al., 2014). In a Tobago study, Paul (2011) found that students with special needs consistently exhibited lower levels of academic performance across all subject areas. She emphasised that both students with special needs and their parents harbored low expectations regarding student achievement.

Post School Outcomes

Readiness for life beyond school is one of the goals of education. Therefore, an important outcome of an inclusive school system is that students can pursue careers that ultimately lead them to a self-sufficient, successful, and fulfilling life (Loreman et al., 2014).

To prepare children effectively and maximise their chances when they graduate from school, the educational system must look at the conditions that lead students with special needs to leave the classroom. Moreover, a comparison of post-school outcomes between special needs students and those without them may offer insightful data for school and district improvement as well as overall system reform (Loreman et al., 2014; Paul, 2011). This is significant because Paul (2011) explained that few students with special needs were able to find employment after school in Trinidad and Tobago.

Discussion

This study applied the Loreman framework to explore the range of practices, processes, and outcomes that may facilitate the development of indicators specific to measuring IE in the Caribbean context and beyond (Loreman et al., 2014). Since IE is not a simple process, any means of evaluating its success would entail reviewing multiple sources of data and arriving at a nuanced understanding of the given context to promote valid interpretation. To eschew these variables will invariably “lead to a shallow evaluation” of the state of IE in any given context (Loreman et al., 2014). This review confirmed that inputs such as teacher training, resources and finance, leadership, and flexible curriculum; processes such as non-discriminatory access and participation, inclusive pedagogy, collaboration, and individual supports were found to be necessary to achieve a welcoming school climate, participation, student achievement, and positive post-school outcomes. (Loreman et al., 2014; Kyriazopoulou & Weber, 2009).

The “role of special schools” was referenced as an additional theme (Loreman et al., 2014). Similarly, within this systemised review, special schools' role was encountered, although not discussed as a separate theme. Research conducted by Carrington-Blaides and Conrad (2017) highlighted the importance of special schools to the development of inclusive education in the Trinidad and Tobago context. Consequently, the emphasis on the “role of special schools” signaled a need for additional research on the “role of special schools” as a theme. Additionally, this review concurs

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that there was a need to focus on key outcomes such as the quality of student participation and student achievement in Caribbean literature.

Although the literature was replete with indicators at the macro and meso levels, such as the government inputs and the institutional practices respectively, closer attention should be paid to the individual or micro levels when benchmarking IE because the review found that student participation and achievement were often overlooked regionally. The role of culture was not a focus in the studies examined. The Caribbean's historical cultural identity may have an undetermined impact on how Caribbean people and the international community view, interpret, and implement IE.

Conclusion

Overall, the review demonstrated the intricacies of IE explored in the extant literature. Specifically, the framework of 14 interrelated themes serves as key indicators worthy of measuring the complexity of multi-level issues within the dynamic IE process in the Caribbean and beyond (Loreman et al., 2014). There was no ready-made comprehensive list of relevant indicators for IE. The thematic areas presented point to indicators for further discussion and research. Future research should point to exploring themes that occur separately and interrelatedly and should embrace perspectives of the unique historical and cultural heritage of Caribbean society. Specifically, themes that embrace the removal of barriers, such as lack of knowledge and lack of sensitivity to children with disabilities, should also be explored. Overall, the review pointed to the potential benefit to the Caribbean region of themes that focus on the understanding of IE as a process; not an event that was implemented at any one time. Lessons learned from the Caribbean region can contribute to the global discourse on inclusive schooling. By embracing the principles of human rights and inclusivity, the region can pave the way for the implementation of more effective inclusive systems. It is crucial for Caribbean research to expand the current perspective on IE in the Caribbean context, influencing the acceptance of IE as a global issue.

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