Editorial:

Advancing Inclusive Education in Asia: Policies, Practices and Pathways for Equity

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INTRODUCTION

This theme issue brings together a collection of research articles that explore how inclusive education is evolving across Asia. The articles are organised around three key themes: inclusive practices and curriculum design, policy implementation and leadership, and social-emotional and identity development. Together, they highlight innovative strategies, systemic challenges and context-specific solutions aimed at creating more equitable learning environments. By examining the intersection of theory, practice and policy, this issue offers valuable insights into how diverse stakeholders—from educators and families to policymakers and therapists—can work together to advance inclusive education and support all learners in meaningful and sustainable ways. This special issue aligns closely with the mission of the Asia Pacific Journal of Educators and Education (APJEE), which is to promote high-quality, impactful educational research that informs policy, enhances teaching and learning, and addresses pressing educational challenges across the Asia-Pacific region. By presenting regionally grounded and practice-oriented scholarship, the articles in this issue contribute meaningfully to APJEE's commitment to fostering inclusive, accessible and contextually relevant education systems.

THEME 1: INCLUSIVE PRACTICE AND CURRICULUM DESIGN

This theme showcases five articles that collectively emphasise the importance of designing responsive, inclusive and evidence-based practices to meet the diverse learning needs of children, particularly those with autism and learning difficulties. Hasrul et al. (2025) provides a foundational exploration of theoretical frameworks that guide how parents act as behaviour change agents in managing challenging behaviours at home. The review brings attention to often-overlooked dimensions of parent capacity and mental health, advocating for cost-effective, family-centred interventions. Hassan et al. (2025) build on this by presenting a structured Project-Based Learning (PBL) model, showing how real-life task integration can enhance language learning and communication skills among students with autism. Expanding the lens to early literacy, Ooi et al. (2025) demonstrate that visual supports significantly improve both literal and inferential comprehension in young autistic learners. Samsudin (2025) addresses teacher professional development through the AquaExplorers Module, evidencing improved knowledge and practice in delivering aquatic activities to special needs students. Finally, Wang et al. (2025) explore how praise for effort boosts motivation, mindset and performance in students with learning difficulties. Together, these studies reinforce the theme's core message: that effective curriculum design and teaching strategies must be both inclusive and adaptable, grounded in theory yet driven by practical, real-world implementation.

THEME 2: POLICY IMPLEMENTATION AND LEADERSHIP

The articles under this theme reflect the growing urgency and complexity of implementing inclusive education across diverse regional, cultural and policy contexts. Chen and Low (2025) provide a timely analysis of the evolving role of resource teachers in China's inclusive education landscape, calling for the establishment of national standards to ensure equitable role clarity and capacity building across regions. In parallel, Jang and Wong (2025) explore the state of teacher leadership in inclusive education among mainstream teachers in Guizhou, China. Their findings reveal systemic challenges, particularly top-down leadership structures and limited disability awareness, underscoring the need for leadership training as a pathway to inclusive transformation.

Ediyanto and Kawai (2025) contribute an important tool for policy and practice with the ITAIE Scale, developed to measure Indonesian teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education. This rigorously validated instrument fills a critical gap in the country's inclusive education evaluation landscape. Complementing this, Sun and Rozniza (2025) explore the integration of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in China's inclusive classrooms, revealing promising implementation in some areas but clear needs for expanded training and pedagogical support. Shifting focus to specialised services, Mahfuzah et al. (2025) highlight the scarcity and fragmented delivery of occupational

therapy services in Malaysian schools, stressing the need for structural reform and interprofessional collaboration. Finally, Dholina et al. (2025) examine the integration of disaster risk reduction (DRR) education for students with diverse needs in Indonesia, advocating for policy coherence and stakeholder collaboration to ensure inclusive and culturally responsive DRR education. Together, these articles offer critical insights that inform both national strategies and global dialogue on advancing inclusive education systems.

THEME 3: SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL AND IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

The third theme brings together research that centers on the social-emotional well-being, identity development and psychological inclusion of learners with disabilities. Che Rosli et al. (2025) address the crucial issue of social identity acceptance among disabled students in Malaysian public universities. Drawing on Social Identity Theory and Social Comparison Theory, the study reveals how stigma, negative self-perception and inadequate infrastructure hinder interpersonal relationships and self-worth. The findings advocate for institutional reforms that prioritise inclusion, peer acceptance and psychosocial support. Similarly, Ang and Phoon (2025) examine the behavioural challenges faced by mainstream teachers in inclusive classrooms, highlighting time constraints, limited collaboration and lack of parental involvement. Their study reinforces the pressing need for systemic support, interprofessional collaboration and targeted teacher training to foster inclusive classroom climates.

Pang (2025) expands the focus to post-school transitions by investigating how work aspirations can be developed in students with learning disabilities (SLDs). The findings reveal that personalised interventions, supported by teachers, parents and practitioners, significantly improve career awareness and self-determination, offering a hopeful narrative in bridging the employment gap. Lastly, Supermaniam and Muniandy (2025) addresses digital marginalisation within the hearing-impaired community by quantifying the relationship between online accessibility, social isolation, and psychological well-being. The study calls for digital equity as a foundational aspect of social participation and mental health. Collectively, these articles provide compelling evidence that inclusive education is not solely about access to classrooms—but also about fostering belonging, emotional readiness and long-term societal integration.

CONCLUSION

Taken together, the contributions in this issue move forward critical conversations on how inclusive education can be thoughtfully designed, effectively implemented, and sustainably supported across diverse cultural and institutional contexts. Whether through strengthening home–school partnerships, enhancing teacher leadership and

professional development, or addressing issues of identity, belonging and digital access, these studies make clear that inclusive education must be holistic—supporting both academic outcomes and the emotional and social well-being of learners. As the region continues to recover from the pandemic and push forward systemic educational reform, the insights shared here offer not only solid research evidence but also practical strategies for building more equitable, inclusive, and responsive education systems.

Looking ahead, future research should focus on closing the gap between academic knowledge and everyday classroom realities. Comparative studies across countries or regions can shed light on what inclusive practices work best in different settings. At the same time, exploring emerging themes—such as the use of artificial intelligence to promote digital access or applying intersectionality to understand how disability interacts with other social factors like poverty, gender or language—can bring greater depth to our understanding of inclusion. Just as crucial is the inclusion of voices that are often overlooked: teachers in under-resourced schools, families facing daily barriers and students who have experienced exclusion firsthand. Their lived experiences are vital in shaping solutions that are not only practical and relevant but also transformative. By grounding future research in these diverse realities, we move closer to an inclusive education system that truly works for all.