

Teachers' Role in Promoting Caring Classroom and Creating Inclusive Learning Environment in Elementary Schools

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Abstract. In the present educational scenario, elementary schools are expected to function not only as centers of academic learning but also spaces for emotional safety, inclusion, empathy, and holistic child development. The growing diversity among children increases the necessity of creating caring and inclusive learning environments that promote both academic and socio-emotional growth of the diverse learner. This paper explores the central, multidimensional role of teachers in nurturing caring classrooms and fostering equitable learning opportunities when the existence of the diverse learners is inevitable. In agreement with the existing literature and core theoretical foundations, the paper examines how teachers can successfully integrate emotional care and professional knowledge to nurture belongingness, mutual respect, and active participation of the children. While inclusive education allows all students to learn under a single roof without discrimination, at the same time teachers face significant systemic challenges in creating inclusive environment, containing emotional burnout, large class sizes, resource scarcity, and a lack of professional training. To address these barriers, this paper highlights the value of adopting relevant instructional strategies and proposes practical methods for strengthening teacher preparedness and school culture for creating inclusive environment in the school. Lastly, this paper argues that caring pedagogy and inclusive practices are interconnected, essential dimensions of quality education necessary for achieving equity, quality, diversity, accessibility, and holistic development in elementary education.

keywords: Caring classroom, Inclusive learning environment, Elementary schools, Teachers' role, Barriers, Relevant instructional strategies, Caring pedagogy and inclusive practices, Quality education, Diverse learner, Holistic child development.

I. Introduction

Education in the twenty-first century is a fundamental right that extends beyond academic achievement to foster holistic social, emotional, moral, and psychological development. Contemporary educational literature profoundly emphasizes equity, inclusion, and emotional well-being. Consequently, national and international frameworks—such as the UNESCO's Education for All (EFA)- 2000, the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006), United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal-4 (SDG-4)- 2015, and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 focusing on 'Education for Equality'—strongly advocate for inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all learners.

Further, elementary education forms the foundation of a child's personality, learning habits, and social understanding. At this stage, children are highly sensitive to classroom interactions and teachers' behavior. Successful inclusion goes beyond structural compliance; it means bringing diverse learners, teachers, families, and community members together to build a child-friendly environment where everyone feels respected and valued. Research indorses that inclusion seeks to provide learners with collaborative, supportive, and nurturing communities that offer the resources and to overcome challenges they need to succeed academically, behaviorally, and socially. A student-friendly, caring classroom serves as a safe space where young learners are motivated to share ideas, interact with peers, and participate actively.

However, the increasing diversity of today's classrooms—driven by shifting socio-economic, religious, regional and political backgrounds; migration; cultural & linguistic differences; and special educational needs—has made the teacher's role highly complex. While existing literature repeatedly focuses on curricula and instructional methods, it often ignores critical systemic barriers and teacher-centered variables- including structural inequalities, teacher qualifications, stress levels, large class sizes, and a scarcity of resources. There is an urgent need to restructure inclusive education by identifying these challenges and understanding how student-teacher relationships act as a vital bridge. With this background, the present conceptual paper explores the multi-dimensional role of elementary school teachers in promoting caring classrooms and creating inclusive learning environments.

Need and Significance of the study

The primary school stage is a foundational phase where children develop critical cognitive, emotional, and social capacities. However, due to rising student diversity, modern elementary classrooms face substantial challenges, systemic inequities, and escalating psychological pressures. Investigating the role of teachers in establishing caring classrooms and inclusive learning environments is vital to addressing these issues.

The foremost significance of this study lies in understanding how teachers nurture emotional safety, which serves as a prerequisite for any meaningful cognitive development. Worldwide research indicates that when teachers nurture an emotionally secure environment where mistakes are treated as learning opportunities, students feel safe to

take academic risks. When researcher draw conclusion from humanistic frameworks, they exhibit that students' basic need for physical and emotional safety should be met before they can achieve academic self-actualization.

Furthermore, the study addresses the persistent demand for systemic equity and inclusion in general education classrooms. Inclusive education goes beyond physically placing children with diverse learning needs, special educational requirements, or marginalized backgrounds into regular classrooms; it requires restructuring the relational and pedagogical fabric of the school. Research emphasizes that structural compliance with inclusion policies rarely converts into an authentic sense of belongingness. Instead, marginalized students experience equity only when teachers adopt culturally responsive pedagogies and intentional relational practices.

Investigating the intersection of care and inclusion is directly linked to safeguarding student well-being. The emotional support provided by elementary teachers is foundational to shaping long-term mental health outcomes and life satisfaction. Empathetic interactions between teachers and young learners build a secure sense of belongingness, which directly reduces feelings of isolation. A high-quality student-teacher interaction characterized by empathy act as a safeguard against anxiety, laying a positive social framework that promotes psychological well-being. Simultaneously, a caring classroom environment functions as an essential incubator for student resilience. Research demonstrates that strong, supportive student-teacher relationships equip students with the internal coping mechanisms needed to navigate adversity, helping them bounce back from early academic challenges.

Beyond socio-emotional development, this study holds profound academic value by exploring how an inclusive atmosphere drives academic engagement. Recent empirical evidence confirms a strong, predictive relationship between an inclusive, socially supportive classroom environment and high levels of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement (Fredricks et al., 2019) thereby improved learning (Li & Singh, 2022). When teacher integrate relevant instructional strategies, it increases students' motivation and active participation. In conclusion, establishing a caring and inclusive classroom is an absolute ethical imperative for modern teachers. Grounded in Nel Noddings' Ethics of Care Theory (1984), schools have a moral obligation to treat every child with dignity, validate their unique identity, and protect them from exclusion and discrimination. This study provides actionable insights to help schools move past strict compliance and embrace authentic, empathetic education by examining how elementary teachers navigate these challenges. In this way, in order to create an inclusive learning environment in the school, this paper explores the role of teachers in promoting caring classroom, creating inclusive learning environment when diverse learners are expected in the class along-with the challenges faced by the teacher.

Objectives of the study: The study was carried out with the focus on:

- To explore the role of teachers in promoting caring classrooms and creating inclusive learning environments.

- To analyze the challenges faced by the teachers in promoting caring classrooms and creating inclusive learning environments in elementary schools.
- To identify the relevant instructional strategies and propose practical methods for implementing inclusive practices in elementary schools.

II. Theoretical Foundations and Review of Related Literature

The conceptual framework of caring and inclusive classrooms is grounded in fundamental human development theories and validated by global empirical research. Together, these frameworks and studies explain how human connection, responsive pedagogy, and systemic environments interact in elementary education.

Theoretical Foundations and Global Frameworks

- Humanistic Theory: Abraham Maslow (1954) and Carl Rogers (1969) argue that children cannot learn effectively until basic emotional, psychological, and security needs are fulfilled through empathy and unconditional positive regard.
- Social Learning Theory: Albert Bandura (1977) emphasizes that teacher serves as vital role models, demonstrating social behaviors like fairness, cooperation, respect, and inclusiveness for students to mirror.
- Social Constructivist Theory: Lev Vygotsky (1978) highlights the social nature of learning, placing teacher as facilitators who creates collaborative experiences, peer interactions, and instructional scaffolding.
- Ethics of Care Theory: Nel Noddings (1984) emphasizes that caring relationships shape the foundation of meaningful education, where teacher prioritize empathy, trust, dialogue, and emotional well-being to enhance learning.
- Inclusive Frameworks: International rights-based mandates, including UNESCO's Salamanca Statement-1994, Education for All (EFA)-2000, and Sustainable Development Goal-4 (SDG-4) (UN, 2015), and NEP-2020 legally bind systems to respect learner diversity and eliminate participation barriers.

III. Review of Related Literature

Empirical studies bridge these theoretical models with real-world primary school experiences. Recent qualitative investigations emphasize the critical role of student-teacher relationships and positive classroom climates. Research demonstrates that a conducive, trust-based school climate directly nurtures students' socio-emotional development and creates a safe, respectful environment (Pablo, 2026; Koksai & Gunbey, 2025). Similarly, Olsson and Hansson (2025) describe the student-teacher relationship as a vital bridge that fosters a welcoming environment, though its success heavily relies on external factors like staffing and co-teaching.

To transform these relationships into academic outcomes, researchers highlight responsive instructional design. Ranjan et al. (2026) noted that mainstreaming demands flexible teaching strategies to promote equity, quality, diversity, accessibility, and active participation. In alignment with constructivist scaffolding, Debasu & Yitayew,

(2024) identify creative teaching strategies and student feedback loops as critical tools for modifying environments to fit student needs, while Sunil (2024) illustrates how flexible curricula and professional collaboration enhance academic and personal development for students of determination.

However, implementing these strategies force teachers to navigate severe institutional and personal barriers. Medina (2025) underscores that ensuring ‘no child is left behind’ requires massive commitment from teachers to constantly upgrade their skills and teaching methods. This burden often results in systemic strain. Hein et al. (2025) pointed out that contemporary inclusion efforts often overemphasize curriculum while ignoring crucial factors like teacher diversity and the unique contributions of underrepresented teachers. Research revealed that structural challenges persist which includes, large class sizes, scarcity of resources, systemic inequalities, inappropriate attitudes, limited professional understanding, and demographic variables like teachers’ age or stress levels continue to hinder successful inclusive practices implementation (Pati & Khamari, 2022; Sunil, 2024).

Why we need a Caring Classroom?

When we discuss about education, we are not simply talking about the transmission of knowledge, but it is the process of cultivating human potential, their values, and their social responsibilities that they wish to do. To make their dreams true educational practices act as a nucleus to encourage both emotional and cognitive growth of the students in the classroom. Nel Nodding (1984) argued that Care is the foundation of moral education, without which teaching becomes exclusive, mechanical and detached. In present world, policy makers, aligning with inclusive education system, try to keep all students in a single roof. In order to achieve this goal there is growing need to create caring classroom where students not only get access to education but feels empathetic, valued, and supported not academically but also emotionally. Caring classroom demands positive relationship between teacher and students, teachers’ empathy, encouragement, and to create an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect. In a caring classroom teacher promotes students social, academic, and emotional development by ensuring their inclusion in classroom activities. This leads not only academic achievements but students’ well-being and their holistic development. In this way, caring classroom is necessary for the development of inclusive learning environment. Some other points of necessity may include but not limited to:

- **Emotional Safety:** When students feel safe, respected, and secure, they participate in the classroom activities without any fear. By providing emotional safety, teacher reduces students’ anxiety, overwhelmed and can foster resilience and risk-taking in learning. Cohen et al. (2009) highlights direct relationship between emotionally safe classroom and students’ participation in the classroom activities.
- **Equity and inclusion:** In a classroom where diverse students are present, if teacher adopt caring practices, it can prevent students’ exclusion and promotes their equal participation in classroom. Florian (2015) stresses that inclusive pedagogy does not mean to fit the student into the present classroom, but the motive is to adopt

such teaching strategies that meet the needs of diverse students who are present in the classroom.

- Well-being and Resilience: A caring classroom can enhance the socio-emotional skills among students. Teachers' social and emotional competences have direct impact on classroom climate that helps to shape the well-being of students.
- Academic Engagement: When teachers create caring environment for their students, they feel motivated and take active participation in school activities. Students think creatively, discuss their creative ideas with others that will contribute to their academic success.
- Ethical Imperative: Teachers' basic responsibility is to teach the students. Beside teaching the subjects, they should create a conducive environment in the classroom that help student to become a good citizen, having moral and ethical values; and act as an active member of the society to overcome the problems and uplift the society. Unfortunately, we are witnessing that our education system is producing knowledgeable individuals but at the same time they lack empathy and social responsibility which must be the priority of our education system.

Understanding Caring Classrooms and Inclusive Learning Environments

Conceptual Understanding of Caring Classroom: A caring classroom refers to a learning environment where students feel emotionally safe, respected, valued, supported, and connected. In a caring classroom, teachers demonstrate empathy, fairness, encouragement, emotional responsiveness, and concern for students' well-being. A caring classroom promotes positive student-teacher relationships, peer cooperation, emotional security, mutual respect, student participation, democratic interaction, and psychological safety. This concept is closely associated with Nel Noddings' Ethics of Care theory (1984), which emphasizes relationships, empathy, responsiveness, and human connection as essential elements of education.

Characteristics of a Caring Classroom

A caring classroom serves as a vital foundation for a child's academic, social, moral, and personal growth, expanding education far beyond mere standardized test performance (Medina, 2025). The prominent characteristics of such an environment can be organized into the following core structural components.

- Safe and Supportive Atmosphere: In caring classrooms, teachers establish a safe, secure, and non-threatening emotional space by implementing clear yet flexible rules (Pablo, 2026). This predictability directly lowers student anxiety, invites positive self-reflection, and ensures that young learners feel safe to express their thoughts and take creative risks without fear of failure (Debasu & Yitayew, 2024).
- Positive Student-Teacher Relationships: Such classrooms are built on a foundation of genuine empathy, mutual respect, and interpersonal warmth; these connections form the backbone of successful pedagogy (Olsson and Hansson, 2025). When students receive consistent emotional support, encouragement, and sensitivity toward their needs, they interact openly and share ideas confidently with both peers and administrators (Koksal and Gunbey, 2025).

- Empathy and Cultural Responsiveness: In this type of classroom, teachers genuinely value and respect diverse student backgrounds, languages, cultures, and individual abilities (Hein et al., 2025). Teachers can ensure that every student feels recognized, valued, and respected by accepting diversity, showing kindness, and adjusting instructional approaches, (Ranjan et al., 2026).
- Inclusive & Collaborative Learning Culture: Caring classrooms eliminate discrimination and social isolation by providing equal participation opportunities for all (Ranjan et al., 2026). Teachers design interactive spaces through cooperative learning cultures, community collaboration, peer support, and joint rule-setting to foster team spirit (Sunil, 2024).
- Empowered Student Voice and Motivation: This classroom incorporates student voice, choices, and active engagement thereby encourages individual autonomy (Pablo, 2026). Such deliberate combination of motivation, high expectations, and respectful communication significantly strengthens student self-esteem, confidence, and emotional self-regulation (Koksal and Gunbey, 2025).

Eventually, these interconnected dynamics create a cohesive, child-friendly ecosystem that dramatically enhances student engagement and academic achievement, ensuring well-rounded child development (Medina, 2025).

Conceptual Understanding of Inclusive Learning Environment: An inclusive learning environment is a space where all learners—regardless of their unique abilities, disabilities, socio-economic backgrounds, culture, language, region, religion, gender, ethnicity, learning styles, or emotional and behavioral needs—are welcomed, respected, supported, and provided equitable learning opportunities. Grounded in the principle that quality education is a universal human right, inclusive pedagogy aims to remove structural barriers to learning and participation within a common educational setting. At the elementary school level, inclusivity is a vital pedagogical necessity that shapes foundational skills, values, and democratic attitudes among young learners. True inclusion goes far beyond the physical placement of diverse students under a single roof; it demands authentic acceptance, a deep sense of belonging, and meaningful participation. Within this framework, elementary teachers play a pivotal role by implementing flexible, evidence-based teaching strategies that ensure every single student feels valued, respected, and fully empowered to succeed.

Characteristics of Inclusive Learning Environments

An inclusive learning environment ensures that no child feels excluded, marginalized, or inferior by structurally embedding equitable access and support into daily routines. The important characteristics of such an environment build a cohesive framework across the following dimensions:

- Positive Student-Teacher Relationships and Belongingness: In an inclusive learning environment, teachers show empathy, listen to student concerns, build mutual trust, strengthen the bonding, and prioritize overall well-being. This type of positive climate fosters an authentic sense of belongingness where learner diversity is

actively accepted and enjoyed; ensuring every student feels valued and secured enough to share her/his ideas freely.

- **Respect for Individuality and Diversity:** Such environment has a deep respect for individual differences. Teachers successfully navigate diversity by integrating multi-cultural, linguistic, and varied social perspectives directly into their instruction, which teaches students to respect differences both inside and outside the school.
- **Responsive Pedagogy and Differentiated Instruction:** This type of environment relies on flexible methods and differentiated instruction designed to meet the distinct needs of diverse learners. It includes using collaborative learning, peer interactions, and non-discriminatory practices to offer equal learning opportunities to all.
- **Accessible Curriculum and Assessment Methods:** In this environment teachers modify teaching-learning materials, curricula, and assessment methods to facilitate meaningful, barrier-free participation. Supportive, flexible assessments accommodate unique learning styles rather than relying on rigid, standardized evaluations.
- **Encouraging Active Participation:** A basic characteristic of true inclusion is ensuring that every student actively engages in classroom dynamics. Teachers purposefully design discussions, group tasks, and problem-solving activities so that all children can contribute, ask questions, and share their voices.
- **Reflective and Improved Teaching Practices:** Inclusive environment exhibits the reflective and improved teaching practices over the time. Inclusion is a continuous process of professional growth. Teachers should regularly evaluate their teaching effectiveness by seeking students' feedback and participate in continuous professional development courses to refine their inclusive teaching skills.

IV. Relationship between Caring Classroom and Learning Environment

Caring classrooms and inclusive learning environments are inherently deeply interconnected, interdependent, and mutually reinforcing concepts (Medina, 2025). Together, they establish the essential psychological, social, emotional, physical, and instructional conditions that directly enhance student learning experiences (Pablo, 2026).

While a caring classroom prioritizes personal values such as respect, trust, empathy, and emotional well-being, whereas an inclusive environment operationalizes these values by removing structural barriers and creating equitable opportunities for all diverse learners (Koksal & Gunbey, 2025; Ranjan et al., 2026).

The profound, multi-dimensional relationship between the two can be understood across several parallel dynamics:

Caring Classroom	Inclusive Learning Environment
Promotes Emotional Security: It cultivates a safe, secure, non-threatening space that actively reduces student anxiety (Pablo, 2026).	Promotes Equitable Participation: It formulates the essential psychological pillar for students to engage actively and meaningfully (Debasu & Yitayew, 2024).
Encourages Empathy and Kindness: It builds a supportive social fabric driven by sensitivity toward individual needs (Koksal and Gunbey, 2025).	Encourages Acceptance of Diversity: It promotes respect for differences across culture, background, and learning styles (Hein et al., 2025).
Builds Positive Relationships: It fosters genuine warmth and trust between teachers, peers, and administrators (Olsson and Hansson, 2025).	Reduces Exclusion and Discrimination: It minimizes social isolation, bullying, and hidden marginalization in the classroom (Sunil, 2024).
Supports Student Well-being: It enhances the overall academic, social, moral, and personal growth of young learners (Medina, 2025).	Supports Learner Diversity: It ensures appropriate pedagogical modifications so that no child is left behind (Ranjan et al., 2026).
Enhances Belongingness: It creates a child-friendly atmosphere where every individual feels connected and supported (Sunil, 2024).	Ensures Equal Opportunities: It delivers accessible curriculum and administer flexible tools and techniques of assessments under a single educational roof (Ranjan et al., 2026).

In the long term, a classroom cannot become genuinely inclusive unless students first feel emotionally safe, respected, and valued (Pablo, 2026). Reciprocally, empathetic caring practices naturally drive structural inclusion by dismantling discriminatory biases (Ranjan et al., 2026). Caring pedagogical relationships therefore serve as the foundational bedrock upon which a successful, welcoming, and high-quality inclusive learning environment is built (Olsson and Hansson, 2025). This cohesive ecosystem ultimately ensures the holistic development and long-term academic success of elementary school students (Medina, 2025).

Role of Teachers in Creating Caring classroom

Teachers play a pivotal role in shaping classroom culture, emotional climate, and interpersonal relationships, especially when dealing with diverse students. To cultivate an environment rooted with trust, empathy, and mutual respect, teachers should fulfill the following interconnected professional responsibilities:

- **Building Positive Student-Teacher Relationships:** Teachers should create trusting and respectful relationships by demonstrating warmth, patience, and understanding, which serve as a bridge for elementary schools students. These strong interpersonal bonds significantly increase active student participation, reduce anxiety, improve motivation, and strengthen classroom belongingness.
- **Promoting Emotional and Psychological Safety:** Teachers should establish a non-threatening space by avoiding humiliation, responding sensitively to individual learner needs, and treating mistakes as valuable parts of the learning process. This deep sense of safety encourages open discussions, allowing children to express their thoughts and concerns freely without fear or hesitation.
- **Encouraging Empathy and Mutual Respect:** Teachers should foster empathy and care by integrating storytelling, group activities, role-play, reflective discussions, and cooperative learning into daily routines. These activities help students appreciate diversity, respect individual differences, and prevent bullying or discrimination.
- **Supporting Student Well-being and Confidence:** Teachers should identify stress and fear among the children, reduce them, and appreciate student efforts through continuous academic support and constructive feedback. Creating these joyful learning experiences enhances the emotional and psychological well-being of students, which is essential for building their confidence and ensuring healthy development.
- **Creating a Democratic Classroom Culture:** A caring environment empowers student voice by allowing them to express views openly, participate in decision-making, and collaborate with peers. This democratic approach promotes equality and inclusion while teaching students the values of self-care and care for others.
- **Using Positive Classroom Management:** Implementing supportive discipline strategies rather than punishing approaches encourages self-regulation and maintains classroom harmony. Teachers should also collaborate with parents, colleagues, and other professionals to ensure a unified support system that advances the holistic development of every child.

Role of Teachers in Creating Inclusive Learning Environments

Teachers serve as the primary architects of inclusive education, transforming structural policy into daily classroom practices that ensure equal opportunities for all children. In order to successfully manage a diverse classroom and establish a supportive, high-quality learning ecosystem, teachers should execute the following interconnected roles:

- **Accepting Learners Diversity:** Inclusive teachers proactively recognize and value individual differences in student abilities, cultural backgrounds, interests, languages, and learning paces. Rather than viewing student diversity as an instructional obstacle, they embrace it as a collective classroom strength that enriches the educational experience.
- **Promoting Participation and Belongingness:** Teachers should ensure that every child feels explicitly welcomed, valued, and safe from the moment she/ he enter the school. Teachers should also build confidence among students, help them in

experiencing academic success, and motivate them to engage actively without fear of judgment by developing an authentic sense of belongingness.

- Preventing Exclusion and Discrimination: Teachers should maintain a zero-tolerance environment for harmful behaviors such as ragging, bullying, stereotyping, labeling, and overt or covert discrimination. They explicitly protect the dignity of every student regardless of their disability, gender, caste, creed, language, religion, or socio-economic status, and establish an equitable community built on mutual respect.
- Using Differentiated Instruction: Teachers should implement learner-centered instruction to accommodate varying educational needs of the children. This approach utilizes flexible teaching methods, diverse learning materials, individualized support systems, and multiple assessment approaches, ensuring that every learner can access the curriculum at their own level.
- Adapting Teaching Materials and Methods: Beyond basic differentiation, inclusive teachers should actively modify the physical and pedagogical environment. They customize instructional strategies, adjust classroom seating arrangements, refine communication methods, and adapt learning resources to eliminate barriers and enable meaningful, hands-on student participation.
- Encouraging Collaborative Learning: Teachers should foster cooperative classroom practices by systematically organizing diverse group activities, co-teaching models, and peer-learning opportunities. Collaborative learning directly reduces social isolation, increases constructive student interactions, and builds long-term collaborative and social skills among learners.

Importance of Caring and Inclusive Classrooms in Elementary Education

The elementary stage of education serves as the vital foundation for lifelong learning, significantly shaping a child's academic, social, and emotional trajectories. Because elementary children are particularly sensitive to emotional experiences and social relationships, caring and inclusive environments contribute in their personality deeply for healthy development. When schools prioritize respect, trust, and empathy, every student feels valued, supported, and motivated to learn according to their unique needs.

The significance of establishing such classrooms can be synthesized across several core dimensions:

- Equity and Accessibility in Learning: Caring and inclusive classrooms promote overall equity by ensuring that all diverse students receive equal access to learning, personalized support, and high-quality educational opportunities.
- Enhanced Emotional Well-Being: Teachers can successfully reduce students' fear, isolation, and anxiety by empathy and continuous emotional support. This safe atmosphere builds school connectedness and a strong psychological foundation necessary for learning.
- Improved Academic Engagement and Growth: When students from diverse backgrounds feel accepted and unjudged, they are significantly more likely to participate actively, express ideas, and experience structural success, which directly enhances their overall academic performance.

- Development of Self-Esteem and Confidence: Recognizing individual student abilities and offering positive, constructive feedback allows teachers to strengthen young learners' self-worth, motivation, and confidence during their critical formative years.
- Dismantling Bullying and Discrimination: A teacher can minimize hidden marginalization, labels, and exclusionary practices, significantly lowering the incidence of bullying through nurturing a shared culture of kindness, tolerance, and respect.
- Cultivation of Social and Collaborative Skills: Teacher can enable students of diverse backgrounds and abilities to work together by designing classrooms that encourage collaborative learning. This integration builds vital skills in peer cooperation, conflict resolution, and mutual support.
- Promotion of Respect for Diversity and Democratic Values: Through enjoying individual differences in elementary education, a teacher can foster social harmony and mutual appreciation, preparing children to become empathetic, responsible citizens who understand equality and social justice in a diverse world.

In due course, uniting relational care with structural inclusion creates a child-friendly ecosystem that supports holistic child development, transforming early education into an empowering experience that allows all learners to have a fair opportunity to succeed.

Challenges faced by Teachers while Promoting Caring and Inclusive Classrooms

While teachers recognize the importance of care and inclusion, transforming these concepts into practice creates significant hurdles. Teachers are frequently forced to balance rigid academic schedules and their time-bound goals with the diverse emotional, social, and physical needs of their students. These multi-dimensional challenges can be categorized into two major domains, namely- A. Institutional and Systemic Barriers, and B. Professional and Personal Constraints. These are discussed below:

Institutional and Systemic Barriers

- Large Classroom Sizes and Overcrowded Environments: Managing an exceptionally large number of diverse students, within a single classroom especially in such a diverse Indian country, reduces the amount of time teachers can spend with each student. This structural constraint makes it incredibly difficult to deliver individualized support or build deep, meaningful relationships with young learners.
- Heavy Workloads and Severe Time Constraints: Elementary teachers, especially in Indian context, are frequently overburdened with administrative responsibilities, heavy teaching loads, and intense pressure to complete exam-oriented curricula. This systemic pressure often forces teachers to prioritize curriculum coverage over relational care, reducing socio-emotional support to a secondary preference.
- Scarcity of Essential Resources and Support Services: In developing country, such as India, a distinct lack of basic infrastructure, specialized teaching aids, assistive technologies, flexible instructional materials, and institutional support services are witnessed. These constraints delimit the teacher's capacity to implement responsive, differentiated practices for students with diverse learning abilities.

- Rigid Curricula, Examination Pressures, and Policy-Practice Gaps: A significant divide exists between ideal macro-level educational guidelines and actual classroom realities. This mismatch, combined with an intense institutional focus on competitive exam outcomes, discourages child-centered, empathetic pedagogical approaches.

Professional and Personal Constraints

- Limited Professional Training and Inadequate Qualifications: Most of the Indian teachers lack comprehensive pre-service or in-service professional training in inclusive pedagogy, special educational needs (SEN), socio-emotional learning (SEL), and diverse classroom management. This leaves them unequipped to accurately identify student needs or create positive learning environment.
- Complex Classroom Diversity and Behavioral Management: Dealing a classroom with varied linguistic, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds, like in India, requires advanced competencies. Teachers frequently struggle to handle behavioral issues, student disruptions, and peer conflicts while trying to maintain the balance between empathy and strict disciplinary order.
- Social Biases, Stereotypes, and Prejudices: Teachers may unconsciously carry deep-rooted societal biases related to gender-stereotype, disability, language, caste, or socio-economic status. These hidden prejudices can unintentionally impair fairness and compromise the delivery of equitable opportunities.
- Teacher Emotional Burnout and Compromised Well-Being: Satisfying continuous emotional demands without adequate institutional support leads to extreme stress, fatigue, and burnout. High levels of stress in teachers diminish their patience, capacity for unconditional warmth, and overall ability to sustain caring relationships with students.

V. Strategies for Strengthening Caring and Inclusive Practices

It is necessary to create and sustain a caring and inclusive environment in each and every elementary school in India, which requires an integrated approach that connects proactive instructional frameworks, peer collaboration, relational dynamics, and overall institutional support. In order to bridge the policy-practice gap and eliminate barriers to participation, our educational system should implement the following strategic interventions:

1. Pedagogical and Instructional Interventions

- Universal Design for Learning (UDL): Our teachers should adopt UDL as a proactive framework to value diversity, allowing every student to learn at their own pace and removing distinctions between "special" and "non-special" students. It is grounded in a philosophical view that requires teachers to learn and improve skills over the time, effective inclusion under UDL involves three critical steps: adopting different ways to access information, using different methods to interact and implement new skills, and offering multiple communication channels to understand a subject.

- Differentiated Instruction and Flexible Assessment: Teachers should modify teaching methods, and evaluation practices to match the readiness levels, learning styles, and interests of diverse students. If teacher provides individual support to the students alongside flexible curriculum modifications, this may ensure a meaningful participation and equitable access to information.
- Culturally Responsive Teaching: Teachers should recognize and value students' diverse cultural backgrounds, life experiences, and languages. Integrating culturally relevant content, pedagogy and diverse perspectives directly into the curriculum creates an environment where young learners feel respected and enjoy their uniqueness.

2. Collaborative and Peer-Based Learning

- Collaborative Learning: Group activities should be systematically designed to motivate students to learn from each other's culture and religion. This collective setup directly enhances social inclusion, builds mutual respect, and boosts academic achievement.
- Peer-Tutoring: Pairing students so that one acts as a 'teacher' and the other as a 'learner' strengthens both academic and social capacities. This targeted interaction builds self-confidence, self-esteem, minimizes social isolation, and fosters positive peer relationships.
- Peer-Teaching Models: When we involve two or more teachers in the instructional planning and delivery process, it improves the pupil-teacher ratio, and allows the school to better address complex, and diverse needs of learners.

3. Relational and Socio-Emotional Interventions

- Building Positive Student-Teacher Relationships: Empathetic teachers always listen carefully to students' concerns and show genuine care for their well-being. This ongoing relational support establishes mutual trust, encourages students to share ideas freely, and enhances their sense of belongingness.
- Integrating Social-Emotional Learning (SEL): Explicitly teaching SEL concepts to students enable them equip with essential skills in empathy, self-awareness, socio-emotional control, and relationship-building, which naturally neutralizes ragging, bullying, labeling, and discrimination.

4. Institutional and Professional Support Systems

- Teacher Education and Continuous Professional Development (CPD): As Indian National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 suggests Teachers should participate in CPD (50 hours annually) to update their inclusive and learner-centric competencies. So, our teacher education programs including CPD should contain inclusive pedagogy, empathy development, emotional intelligence, classroom diversity management, and specialized education frameworks.
- Promoting Reflective Teaching: Teachers should regularly engage in reflective practices to analyze their classroom interactions, discover unconscious and hidden personal biases, evaluate instructional methods in accordance with diversified needs, and adjust them as per learners' characteristics.

- **School-Wide Inclusive Culture and Leadership:** School administration should establish a collaborative attitude rooted with respect to diversity, emotional safety, and anti-discriminatory rules, embedding inclusion directly into the institutional identity.
- **Stakeholders' Involvement:** Our schools can create strong collaborations among key stakeholders that allow establishing a comprehensive, external support network that nurtures holistic development of student.
- **Supporting Teachers' Well-Being:** In order to establish and sustain caring practices in the schools, administrator should consider teachers' well-being by offering systematic emotional support, managing academic workloads, and providing professional recognition to them.

Implications for Educational Policy and Practices

The synthesized conclusion from this study carries significant actionable implications for various stakeholders within the educational system to bridge the gap between policy guidelines and classroom realities. These are discussed in the following subsections:

- **For Policymakers:** As aptly recognized by the India's National Educational Policy (NEP) 2020 that the academic and emotional needs of elementary school students are interconnected. There is a dire need for designing concrete strategic roadmaps to ensure the strict implementation of inclusive policies, allocate adequate physical and pedagogical resources, and reduce excessive standardized examination pressure to promote quality, accessible education for all.
- **For Teacher Education Institutions:** Our teacher education programs including pre-service and in-service training curricula should include mandatory courses focused on caring pedagogy, socio-emotional learning, and inclusive frameworks. These programs should strengthen real-world practical exposure to diverse learners while promoting reflective and experiential teaching methodologies.
- **For Schools and Administration:** School leadership should purposefully integrate care and inclusion into the school ethos to develop an emotionally safe, protected, and welcoming culture. School administrators need to encourage cooperative co-teaching arrangements, manage teacher workloads to prevent burnout, and provide direct counseling and student support services. Further, in alignment with the recommendation of NEP-2020, elementary school teachers should nurture compassionate, inclusive, and joyful classrooms by shifting from rote memorization to personalized, empathetic, and culturally responsive mentoring.
- **For Educational Researchers:** Future studies should focus on conducting empirical research on teacher perceptions and field practices. There is an ongoing need to explore the direct relationship between caring classrooms and student outcomes while deeply studying the socio-emotional dimensions of inclusive elementary education.

VI. Conclusion

In the contemporary educational era, caring pedagogy and structural inclusion have emerged as interconnected, mutually reinforcing, and essential dimensions of quality elementary education. Schools are no longer expected merely to transmit academic knowledge; they are morally and operationally responsible for nurturing emotionally secure empathetic, equitable, and socially responsible learning environments. In this context, elementary teachers can play a pivotal role. Their professional responsibilities can be extended far beyond the traditional instructions to encompass emotional guidance, relationship-building, diversity acceptance, and active social inclusion. Elementary teachers, in Indian scenario, can significantly enhance students' academic, emotional, and social development by representing caring attitudes, utilizing differentiated instruction, employing flexible teaching strategies, and maintaining a democratic classroom culture.

However, the ground reality reveals that teachers (specifically those who are dealing with elementary level of school) face substantial challenges that limit their effectiveness. Successfully managing a diverse classroom requires stakeholders to acknowledge and systematically address intense barriers, including a severe scarcity of resources, limited instructional time, administrative workload pressures, large class sizes, and a lack of specialized professional training. In order to minimize these hurdles, teacher should establish a cohesive and supportive environment in the school, which may yields multifaceted, lifelong benefits for young learners—including improved academic learning, enhanced emotional well-being, stronger self-esteem, and a significant reduction in ragging, bullying and discrimination.

In conclusion, creating a school where every child feels respected and included cannot be achieved by teachers alone; it requires a collective effort from families, administrators, and policymakers. Our educational system should recognize that inclusive practices and care are not optional pedagogical add-ons, but rather fundamental, mandatory requirements for achieving equitable and holistic child development. The future of elementary education depends entirely on the strategic ability of schools to support teachers' well-being and provide the professional development necessary to build inclusive classrooms where every child is cared for, protected, valued, and fully empowered to learn.

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