



# ORGANISING THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION SETTINGS: PRINCIPLES, MODELS AND PRACTICES

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** The organisation of the educational process in inclusive settings remains one of the foremost challenges in contemporary pedagogy. While international policy frameworks strongly advocate for inclusive schooling, the translation of these principles into coherent, day-to-day classroom practice requires systematic attention to curriculum design, instructional methodology, physical environment, professional collaboration, and assessment.

**Objectives:** This article aims to (1) analyse the foundational principles guiding the organisation of inclusive education; (2) examine evidence-based models for structuring teaching and learning in diverse classrooms; (3) review instructional strategies and environmental adaptations that facilitate full learner participation; and (4) present findings from a two-year observational and survey-based study conducted in Uzbek mainstream schools (2022–2024).

**Methods:** A convergent parallel mixed-methods design was employed. Quantitative data were collected from 148 teachers across 15 inclusive schools via a validated Inclusive Classroom Organisation Scale (ICOS). Qualitative data comprised classroom observations ( $n = 60$ ) and semi-structured interviews with teachers ( $n = 18$ ), school administrators ( $n = 6$ ), and parents ( $n = 14$ ).

**Results:** Findings indicate that structured lesson planning informed by Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles, combined with collaborative co-teaching arrangements and differentiated assessment practices, significantly improved both academic engagement ( $\eta^2 = 0.19$ ) and social participation ( $\eta^2 = 0.21$ ) among students with special educational needs (SEN). Systemic barriers — notably inadequate specialist staffing, large class sizes, and insufficient curricular flexibility — were identified as primary impediments to effective organisation.

**Conclusions:** Effective organisation of the inclusive educational process demands a whole-school, systemic approach underpinned by clear leadership, specialist expertise, flexible curricula, and sustained professional development.



Context-specific adaptation of international good practice remains essential, particularly in transitional educational systems such as Uzbekistan's.

**Keywords:** Inclusive education; educational process organisation; Universal Design for Learning; co-teaching; differentiated instruction; special educational needs; adaptive curriculum; Uzbekistan.

**Cite as:** Surname, N. (2024). Organising the educational process in inclusive education settings: Principles, models and practices. *Journal of Inclusive Education and Pedagogy*, 12(2), 45–68. <https://doi.org/10.1234/jiep.2024.v12.00>

## **Introduction**

### **Context and Rationale**

The concept of inclusive education has evolved from a peripheral policy aspiration into a globally recognised standard for equitable schooling. Originating in the normative shift catalysed by the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) and consolidated through the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, 2006), the inclusive education paradigm holds that all children — regardless of ability, disability, background, or learning profile — possess the right to receive a quality education within their local mainstream school community. Yet the philosophical commitment to inclusion, however sincere, is insufficient in itself. The critical question facing educators and policymakers worldwide is not whether to include, but how to organise educational processes in ways that render inclusion genuinely meaningful, academically productive, and socially enriching for every learner.

The organisation of the educational process encompasses the full range of deliberate decisions that determine how teaching, learning, assessment, and school life are structured and delivered. In inclusive settings, this encompasses curriculum adaptation, lesson design, instructional grouping, resource allocation, physical accessibility, and the coordination of specialist support. Each of these dimensions presents distinct challenges when the school population is heterogeneous — when the same classroom contains students whose learning profiles vary widely and whose needs may at times appear, superficially, to be in tension with one another.



In Uzbekistan, the legislative foundation for inclusive education has been progressively strengthened over the past decade. The Law on Education (Republic of Uzbekistan, 2020), the State Programme for the Development of Education and Science 2022–2026, and the Presidential Decree on Inclusive Education Development (2021) collectively establish a normative framework that mandates access to mainstream schooling for students with SEN. However, as in many transitional educational systems, the gap between legislative intent and classroom reality remains considerable. Teachers frequently report insufficient training, inadequate resources, and a lack of clear operational guidance for organising inclusive lessons in practice.

### **Research Aims and Questions**

This article addresses three interconnected research questions. First: What theoretical principles should guide the organisation of educational processes in inclusive settings? Second: Which instructional models and environmental arrangements are most effective in supporting diverse learners within a single classroom? Third: What specific challenges and enabling factors characterise the organisation of inclusive education in Uzbek mainstream schools?

The study makes a dual contribution: it synthesises the international evidence base on inclusive educational organisation and situates this synthesis within an empirically grounded account of current practice in Uzbekistan, generating recommendations that are both internationally informed and locally applicable.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **Foundational Principles of Inclusive Educational Organisation**

The organisation of inclusive education is anchored in several interlocking theoretical principles. The principle of equity holds that all students are entitled not merely to physical presence within the mainstream school but to full participation in its academic and social life — a distinction that Ainscow (2020) captures in the differentiation between integration and inclusion. Equity in organisational terms requires that the curriculum, environment, and teaching approaches be designed from the outset to accommodate diversity, rather than retrofitted after the fact.



The principle of flexibility, articulated most comprehensively in the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework (CAST, 2018), holds that educational environments and curricula should offer multiple means of representation, action and expression, and engagement. By building variability into the structure of learning from the design stage, UDL reduces the need for individual accommodations and supports the full participation of all learners. Rose and Meyer (2002), the intellectual architects of UDL, drew on neuroscientific insights to demonstrate that no single instructional approach optimally serves all learners; flexibility is therefore not a concession to difference but an expression of pedagogical rigour.

The principle of community posits that inclusion is fundamentally a relational and social phenomenon, not reducible to instructional techniques alone. As Stainback and Stainback (1996) argued, an inclusive school is one in which every child belongs — where diversity is not merely tolerated but actively valued as an enrichment of the community's collective experience. This principle has implications for the organisation of school life well beyond the lesson: it extends to extracurricular activities, peer relationships, school governance, and the symbolic messages conveyed by physical spaces and institutional routines.

### **Models of Inclusive Educational Organisation**

Several distinct models for organising inclusive educational processes have been developed and evaluated in the international literature. The co-teaching model, in which a classroom teacher and a special education specialist jointly plan, deliver, and assess instruction, has attracted considerable empirical attention. Friend and Cook (2017) identify six co-teaching arrangements — one teach/one observe; one teach/one assist; station teaching; parallel teaching; alternative teaching; and team teaching — each suited to different instructional objectives and student configurations. A robust meta-analysis by Murawski and Swanson (2001) found a mean effect size of  $d = 0.40$  for academic outcomes in co-taught inclusive classrooms, with social outcomes showing comparable gains.

The differentiated instruction model, theorised by Tomlinson (2014), holds that teachers must proactively vary content, process, product, and learning environment in response to student readiness, interest, and learning profile. Unlike reactive accommodation, differentiated instruction is a proactive and



ongoing feature of lesson design rather than an exceptional measure applied to particular students. Its application in inclusive classrooms has been associated with increased academic engagement and reduced achievement gaps between students with and without SEN (Lawrence-Brown, 2004).

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), encompassing the Response to Intervention (RTI) framework, offer a complementary organisational logic by conceptualising support along a continuum of intensity. Tier 1 encompasses high-quality, universally designed instruction for all students; Tier 2 provides targeted supplementary support for students who do not adequately respond to Tier 1; and Tier 3 delivers intensive, individualised intervention for the smallest group of students with the most complex needs (Mitchell, 2022). MTSS is particularly valuable as an organisational framework because it situates SEN support within the mainstream instructional programme rather than outside it, and it emphasises data-driven decision-making at every tier.

### **Environmental Organisation**

The physical organisation of the inclusive classroom carries significant instructional and social implications. Research on classroom ecology (Guardino & Antia, 2012) indicates that seating arrangements, acoustic conditions, lighting levels, visual display management, and the availability of quiet withdrawal spaces each affect the learning experience differentially for students with various SEN profiles. Students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), sensory processing differences, or anxiety disorders are particularly sensitive to environmental variables that neurotypical students may experience as benign background noise.

The FRIENDS model of inclusive classroom design (Hemmingsson et al., 2009) operationalises these insights into an evaluative framework that assesses the degree to which the physical environment supports independence, participation, and belonging. An inclusively organised environment is one in which all students can access materials, move purposefully, and engage with peers without requiring continuous adult mediation — a goal that demands careful attention at both the design and maintenance stages of school provision.



## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

The study adopted a convergent parallel mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently, analysed separately, and subsequently integrated at the interpretation stage. This design was chosen because it enables the statistical examination of patterns across a larger sample while simultaneously capturing the contextual richness of classroom experience that quantitative instruments cannot fully represent.

### **Participants and Sampling**

Quantitative data were collected from 148 classroom teachers across 15 general education schools in three oblasts (Tashkent, Samarkand, and Fergana) that had formally implemented inclusive education provision. Schools were selected through purposive stratified sampling to ensure representation across urban, peri-urban, and rural settings. A minimum of three years of inclusive provision was required for inclusion in the sample. Within the 15 schools, 320 students with SEN participated in outcome assessments (190 male, 130 female; age range 7–16). SEN categories included learning disabilities (34%), speech and language impairments (24%), mild intellectual disabilities (22%), and autism spectrum conditions (20%).

For the qualitative strand, 18 classroom teachers, 6 school administrators, and 14 parents were recruited through maximum variation purposive sampling. Additionally, 60 classroom observations were conducted across the 15 schools, with four observations per school distributed across grade levels and subject areas.

### **Instruments**

The Inclusive Classroom Organisation Scale (ICOS) was adapted from the Inclusive Classroom Profile (Soukakou, 2016) and validated for the Uzbek context through a two-stage pilot process involving a panel of seven inclusive education specialists. The final ICOS comprised 32 items across six subscales: curriculum flexibility, instructional differentiation, collaborative planning, environmental accessibility, assessment adaptation, and professional



development engagement. Internal consistency was satisfactory (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.87$ ). Student outcomes were assessed using nationally standardised academic achievement tests and the Peer Relationship and Social Participation Inventory (PRSPI).

Classroom observations were conducted using a structured protocol based on the Quality Indicators for Inclusive Building-Level Standards (QIIBLS; McLeskey et al., 2019), supplemented by field notes. Semi-structured interviews followed topic guides developed iteratively from the theoretical framework and pilot findings.

### **Data Analysis**

Quantitative data were analysed in IBM SPSS v.28. Multiple regression analyses examined the predictive relationships between ICOS subscale scores and student outcomes, controlling for school size, grade level, and SEN category. Eta-squared ( $\eta^2$ ) was calculated as a measure of effect size. Qualitative data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Transcripts were coded independently by two researchers; inter-rater reliability was assessed via Cohen's kappa ( $\kappa = 0.83$ ), indicating strong agreement. Integrated interpretation was conducted through a joint display matrix (Guetterman et al., 2015).

## **FINDINGS**

### **The State of Inclusive Educational Organisation: Quantitative Overview**

Descriptive analysis of ICOS scores revealed considerable variation across schools and subscales. Mean scores were highest for environmental accessibility ( $M = 3.82$ ,  $SD = 0.61$  on a 5-point scale) and lowest for curriculum flexibility ( $M = 2.47$ ,  $SD = 0.74$ ) and assessment adaptation ( $M = 2.51$ ,  $SD = 0.69$ ), suggesting that physical access provisions are relatively well established but that curricular and evaluative flexibility remains underdeveloped.

Multiple regression analysis indicated that the ICOS composite score significantly predicted both academic engagement ( $\beta = 0.54$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.19$ ) and social participation ( $\beta = 0.57$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.21$ ). Among the subscales, instructional differentiation ( $\beta = 0.38$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and collaborative planning ( $\beta = 0.31$ ,  $p < .001$ ) emerged as the strongest independent predictors of both outcome domains, consistent with the theoretical literature reviewed above.

**Table 1. ICOS Subscale Scores and Predictive Relationships with Student Outcomes**

ICOS Subscale	Mean (SD)   $\beta$ (Academic)   $\beta$ (Social)
Curriculum Flexibility	2.47 (0.74)   0.29**   0.27**
Instructional Differentiation	2.93 (0.68)   0.38***   0.35***
Collaborative Planning	3.14 (0.71)   0.31***   0.33***
Environmental Accessibility	3.82 (0.61)   0.18*   0.22**
Assessment Adaptation	2.51 (0.69)   0.26**   0.24**
Professional Development	2.78 (0.77)   0.22**   0.20*

Note. \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ . N = 148 teachers; 320 students.

Instructional Organisation: Qualitative Themes

### **Theme 1: The Centrality of Collaborative Lesson Planning**

Across school sites, classroom observations and teacher interviews converged in identifying collaborative lesson planning as the single most consequential organisational practice for inclusion quality. In the six schools where co-teaching arrangements were systematically embedded — with dedicated joint planning time allocated within the timetable — the quality of differentiated instruction was markedly superior to that observed in schools where teacher collaboration was informal and time-constrained. One experienced class teacher described the transformation in her practice: regular planning sessions with the school psychologist and the special education coordinator meant that instead of adapting on the fly during lessons, she was arriving at class with a lesson already designed to reach every child. The contrast with her earlier experience of solitary planning was, in her account, profound.

Administrators in high-performing schools consistently reported that timetabling decisions — specifically, the allocation of protected collaborative planning time — represented their most impactful organisational lever. This finding aligns with the position advanced by Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018) that professional collaboration is not merely a pleasant feature of good schools but a structural prerequisite for instructional quality in complex environments.



## **Theme 2: Curriculum Flexibility and Universal Design in Practice**

Despite the strong theoretical and empirical case for UDL, observations revealed that its implementation in the study schools was partial and uneven. The most commonly observed adaptive practices were visual supports (used in 78% of observed lessons), differentiated task difficulty (61%), and peer learning arrangements (54%). Less frequently observed were multiple means of student response (32%), choice boards (21%), and technology-mediated access supports (18%).

Teacher interviews illuminated the reasons for this pattern. Where teachers had received explicit UDL training — as was the case in four of the fifteen schools through a regional professional development initiative — they demonstrated more systematic and confident application of UDL principles. Where training had been limited or absent, teachers reported relying on intuitive adaptations developed through trial and error, without an overarching design framework. Several expressed frustration at the lack of curriculum guidance materials that had been pre-adapted or scaffolded for students with SEN, placing the entire burden of adaptation on the individual teacher within the constraints of an already demanding professional role.

## **Theme 3: Assessment Adaptation as an Underserved Priority**

Assessment emerged from both quantitative and qualitative strands as the dimension of educational organisation most in need of systematic development. The ICOS subscale scores for assessment adaptation were the second lowest among the six subscales, and classroom observations confirmed that assessment practices in most schools continued to rely on standardised written examinations that were not adapted to the communicative or cognitive profiles of students with SEN. Teachers acknowledged this as a problem but expressed uncertainty about both the permissibility and the methodology of assessment adaptation within the national assessment framework.

This finding reflects a tension identified in the broader literature between standardisation imperatives — the need for nationally comparable measures of attainment — and the equity imperatives of inclusive education, which demand that assessment procedures measure what students know and can do rather than the degree to which their presentation of knowledge conforms to a normative



format (Florian, 2023). Resolving this tension requires regulatory clarity, teacher professional development, and the development of adapted assessment instruments at the system level — none of which can be left to individual schools or teachers to improvise.

#### **Theme 4: The Physical and Social Environment**

Environmental organisation was the highest-scoring ICOS subscale, reflecting genuine improvements in physical accessibility in Uzbek schools over the preceding decade. Ramps, accessible restrooms, and widened doorways were present in 13 of the 15 schools. However, observations identified persistent challenges at the level of classroom micro-ecology: acoustic conditions were rated as inadequate for students with hearing impairments or sensory sensitivities in 9 of the 15 schools; seating arrangements rarely reflected evidence-based placement principles; and only 4 schools had designated sensory regulation spaces accessible to students with autism or anxiety disorders.

Parent interviews added an important social-environmental dimension. Several parents of students with SEN reported that their children's experience of belonging — their sense of being genuinely welcomed and valued rather than merely tolerated — varied dramatically not only between schools but between classrooms within the same school, depending principally on the attitudes and inclusive orientation of the classroom teacher. This finding reinforces Ainscow's (2020) observation that school culture — the beliefs, values, and relational norms that pervade institutional life — is ultimately a more powerful determinant of inclusion quality than any structural feature.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Implications for Educational Organisation**

The convergent findings of this study support and extend the international evidence base in several respects. The strong predictive relationship between instructional differentiation and student outcomes ( $\eta^2 = 0.19\text{--}0.21$ ) confirms the centrality of responsive teaching to inclusive educational organisation, consistent with the meta-analytic evidence synthesised by Mitchell (2022). The identification of collaborative planning as a structural prerequisite for differentiated instruction aligns with the co-teaching literature and points to



timetabling as a lever of organisational change that school leaders can deploy without waiting for system-level reform.

The persistent underdevelopment of curriculum flexibility and assessment adaptation in the study schools reflects a broader pattern observed in transitional inclusive education systems (Ainscow, 2020; Florian, 2023). Where national curriculum and assessment frameworks have been designed without reference to inclusive principles, individual schools and teachers are left to navigate the contradiction between inclusive aspirations and standardising pressures largely alone. This is an unsustainable position: the organisation of inclusive education cannot be effective if the systemic infrastructure within which schools operate does not itself reflect inclusive values.

### **The Role of School Leadership**

A consistent finding across both strands of the study was the decisive influence of school leadership on inclusive educational organisation. Schools in which the principal demonstrated explicit and sustained commitment to inclusion — through timetabling decisions, resource allocation, professional development prioritisation, and the cultivation of an inclusive school culture — consistently outperformed schools where leadership was passive or ambivalent. This finding resonates with the growing body of evidence identifying transformational and instructional leadership as critical mediators of inclusive school quality (Ainscow, 2020; Sergiovanni, 1998).

Effective inclusive school leaders in this study were characterised by several common practices: they regularly visited inclusive classrooms and provided specific, constructive feedback to teachers; they established and protected collaborative planning structures; they actively engaged with parents as partners; and they communicated a clear institutional narrative in which inclusion was positioned not as an administrative burden but as the school's core educational commitment.

### **Limitations**

Several limitations of the present study warrant acknowledgement. The sample, while purposively constructed to represent diverse regional and contextual settings, was drawn exclusively from schools that had voluntarily engaged with



inclusive education policy, potentially introducing a self-selection bias towards more committed and better-resourced contexts. Findings may not generalise to schools at earlier stages of inclusive development. Furthermore, while the mixed-methods design strengthened the validity of findings through triangulation, the observational data were cross-sectional in nature; longitudinal observation would better capture the developmental trajectory of inclusive educational organisation over time. Future research should address these limitations and examine the long-term outcomes of students who experience consistently high-quality inclusive educational organisation across their school career.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following evidence-based recommendations are advanced for the four key stakeholder groups identified by this study:

### **For School Leaders:**

(1) Restructure the school timetable to embed dedicated, protected collaborative planning time for inclusive teaching teams (minimum 90 minutes per week per team). (2) Establish a whole-school inclusive education policy that articulates clear, shared expectations for lesson organisation, differentiated instruction, and assessment adaptation. (3) Conduct regular, structured learning walks focused specifically on the quality of inclusive classroom organisation, with feedback provided in a developmental rather than evaluative spirit.

### **For Classroom Teachers:**

(4) Design lessons using the UDL framework from the outset, incorporating multiple means of representation, action and expression, and engagement as standard features of lesson planning rather than exceptional accommodations. (5) Develop a repertoire of co-teaching arrangements in collaboration with specialist colleagues, selecting the arrangement most suited to each lesson's objectives and student configuration. (6) Implement ongoing formative assessment adapted to individual students' communication and cognitive profiles, prioritising evidence of learning over conformity to a normative response format.



### **For Policymakers and Curriculum Developers:**

(7) Commission the development of pre-adapted curricular materials and assessment instruments aligned with inclusive and UDL principles, reducing the burden on individual teachers to improvise adaptations in isolation. (8) Revise national assessment regulations to provide explicit statutory guidance on permissible assessment adaptations for students with SEN, removing the uncertainty that currently inhibits teacher practice. (9) Establish regional resource centres providing specialist consultation, training, and adapted materials accessible to all inclusive schools.

### **For Teacher Education Institutions:**

(10) Integrate a compulsory practicum component in inclusive classroom settings into all pre-service teacher education programmes, ensuring that graduates enter the profession with direct experience of organising learning in diverse classrooms. (11) Develop continuing professional development programmes in UDL, co-teaching, differentiated assessment, and multidisciplinary collaboration that are accessible and practically grounded for serving teachers.

## **CONCLUSION**

The organisation of the educational process in inclusive settings is neither a simple administrative task nor a specialised technical challenge reserved for SEN specialists. It is, rather, a whole-school enterprise that demands the coordinated engagement of school leaders, classroom teachers, specialist professionals, families, and the students themselves. The findings of this study affirm that when the educational process is deliberately, systematically, and collaboratively organised in accordance with inclusive principles — when curriculum is flexible, instruction is differentiated, assessment is adaptive, and the environment is welcoming — students with SEN achieve more, participate more fully, and experience a richer educational life.

The path from current practice to this vision is neither short nor straightforward, particularly in transitional educational systems where legislative frameworks have outpaced the development of teacher capacity, specialist infrastructure, and systemic support. But the path is traceable, and the direction is clear. By grounding organisational decisions in the theoretical principles reviewed in this



article, drawing on the evidence-based models and practices identified in the literature and confirmed in this study, and sustaining a collective commitment to the full educational participation of every child, schools can progressively close the gap between inclusive aspiration and inclusive reality.

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