



Review of Research about the Effects of Inclusive Education: A Summary

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Overview

This literature review aims to identify contemporary international research on the academic and social-emotional effects of inclusive education for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities and children and young people without SEND. The review of literature aimed to draw implications for policy, practice and future research in the field of inclusive education.

Methods

The researchers undertook a two-stage process to identify the papers. Initially, they identified papers from 2010-2020 that were already known to them, followed by a database search. As a result, ten papers were chosen to be reviewed (Appendix 1). The papers were authored in Europe or the United States.

Findings

It was found that research into inclusive education examines both academic and social and emotional effects on children and young people with and without SEND. A range of variables are taken into account when considering the conclusions and findings of inclusive education research. These include:

- types of need
- educational phase
- quality of support or learning
- teacher knowledge and skills
- teacher attitude/efficacy and
- structural class and school factors

This is helpful information to inform further research. These findings imply that, in order to avoid a [confirmation of fixed positions](#), a nuanced approach to research is required through a generalised empirical approach. It is suggested that an 'on balance' position is desirable, allowing for an exploration of the interaction between the positive, neutral and negative effects of the inclusion of

Academic effects on children and young people with SEND	Academic effects on children and young people without SEND
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some reviews found that inclusion in the mainstream demonstrated positive gains in literacy and numeracy for pupils with SEND (Hehir et al., 2016; Szumski et al., 2017, Cole et al., 2019). • Oh-Young and Filler (2015) undertook a meta-analysis of journal articles which demonstrate that the majority of students with disabilities in more inclusive settings had better academic outcomes whilst Rujis and Peetsma (2009) found positive or neutral results with regard to the effects of inclusive education on academic outcomes for students with SEN. • Scharenberg et al. (2019) found that positive effects were dependent on the socio-economic context of the class in which the students were included. Students with SEN in more economically advantaged classes had higher levels in reading. • Sermier Dessemontet et al. (2012) found that children with learning difficulties made comparable academic progress in both mainstream and special settings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On balance most studies show more neutral or positive than negative effects on non-disabled students (Hehir et al., 2016) • Some reviews indicate that positive effects are associated with positive teacher attitudes, their training, strategies geared to diverse needs and problem-solving oriented schools (Rujis and Peetsma, 2009). • The reviews were mixed about the negative effects of students with emotional/behaviour difficulties, one indicating negative effects (Rangvid, 2019) and another neutral effects not just for these difficulties but also students with more severe SEN (Kristoffersen et al., 2015). • Dyssegaard and Larsen (2013) considered the academic effects on the mainstream class when children with SEN were included in their lessons. They found that there were no negative effects on the mainstream pupils' academic development. • Fletcher (2010) found that having a classmate with an emotional problem decreased maths and reading scores at the end of kindergarten. There were moderate racial and gender differences in the effects. • Gottfried and Harven (2015) had similar findings although a higher percentage of girls in a class appeared to be a protective factor. • Szumski et al. (2017) found that the overall effect was positive and weak but statistically significant: in some circumstances, it may be beneficial for pupils without SEN. On average, the presence of pupils with social and emotional difficulties and severe SEN in the classroom did not negatively influence the achievement of their peers without SEN.
Social and emotional effects on children and young people with SEND	Social and emotional effects on children and young people without SEND
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three sources showed mixed results for the impact of inclusion on social-emotional effects (Rujis and Peetsma, 2009; Oh-Young and Filler, 2015; Scharenberg et al., 2019). • Hehir et al. (2016) found that there were more positive effects for children with SEND in mainstream classes. These effects included higher social engagement, greater peer acceptance, fewer behaviour issues, greater participation in school and community groups and improved independence and social skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was relatively little research on this aspect. Where there was (in reviews), it indicated positive effects, such as, on discriminating attitudes, increased acceptance and understanding. • There was stronger evidence of positive impact on the social and emotional development of non-disabled peers, e.g. reduction in discriminating attitudes and higher responsiveness to the needs of others, in relation to Down syndrome specifically: and for pupils in primary school with broader intellectual disabilities (Hehir et al., 2016) • Rujis and Peetsma (2009) found that there has been very little research on the social effects of inclusive education on children without SEN. However, where children with more severe SEN are included in the classroom, there was increased acceptance, understanding and tolerance of individual differences.

students with SEND in mainstream settings. The research reviewed often examines the way in which the individual, class and school factors interact to enable children and young people to be included.

One of the themes that emerged from the papers was the **kinds of inclusion that are in scope** where comparisons are drawn between mainstream and special school classrooms and settings. Sermier Dessemontet et al. (2012) described inclusive mainstream settings as including children in ‘general education’ along with a level of support from a special education teacher and therapists. Cole et al. (2019) captured the idea of ‘high inclusion’, ‘mixed inclusion’ and ‘low inclusion’ which was dependent on the percentage of time spent in general education. The table below outlines the findings of the different papers in relation to the academic and social and emotional effects.

Conclusions

One conclusion is to adopt an ‘on balance’ position; here the balance of evidence is to neutral or small positive effects as opposed to negative effects. But, when undertaking research that considers inclusive education, different types of SEND and phases of schooling should be taken into account. There are also other intersecting factors to consider that are outlined below:

Effects of inclusion		
What effects?	Subject learning (literacy, maths, other) Affective and social participation	
For whom?	Student with SEN and student without SEN	
What areas of SEN?	Specific Learning Difficulty, Social Emotional and Mental Health, ASD etc	
SEN intersection with other areas	Gender, age, ethnicity, in care etc.	
What counts as inclusion?	Full-time (FT), FT with support (varied types) Part-time with withdrawal (different degrees)	
	Compared to what is not inclusion: special school, special class	
Context	School factors	e.g. experience of accommodating / capability with SEN
	Class factors	e.g. size, grouping and teaching strategies
	Pupil factors	e.g. gender of other pupils

There is a need for more nuanced studies and policy conclusions which is a counter to the commonly found ideological preferences that often tend to look for generalised empirical relationship to confirm positions (the pervasive confirmation bias). This need applies to different starting positions: pro general ‘inclusion’, pro selective ‘inclusion’ and pro selective ‘separation’ preferences.

Appendix 1

Cole, S., Murphy, H., Frisby, M., Grossi, T. and Bolte, H. (2019) *A longitudinal study to determine the impact of inclusion on student academic outcomes: executive summary report*. Available at <https://iiedc.indiana.edu/cell/what-we-do/pdf/Inclusion-study-handout.pdf>

Dyssegaard, C. B. and Larsen, M.S. (2013) *Evidence on inclusion*. Copenhagen: Danish Clearinghouse for Educational Research. Department of Education. Aarhus University.

Fletcher, J. (2010) Spillover Effects of Inclusion of Classmates with Emotional Problems on Test Scores in Early Elementary School. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 29 (1), 69–83

Gottfried, M.A. & Harven, A. (2015) The Effect of Having Classmates with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders and the Protective Nature of Peer Gender, *The Journal of Educational Research*, 108 (1), 45-61,

Hehir, T., Grindal, T., Freeman, B., Lamoreau, R., Borquaye, Y. & Burke, S. (2016) *A Summary of The Evidence on Inclusive Education*. Cambridge, MA: Instituto Alana, Harvard Graduate School of Education

Kefallinou, A., Symeonidou, S. and Meijer, C.J.W. (2020) Understanding the value of inclusive education and its implementation: A review of the literature. *Prospects* 49, 135-152

Kristoffersen, J.H.G., Krægpøth, M.V. Nielsen, H.S. and Simonsen, M. (2015) Disruptive school peers and student outcomes. *Economics of Education Review*, 45, 1-13

Oh-Young, C. and Filler, J. (2015) A meta-analysis of the effects of placement on academic and social skill outcome measures of students with disabilities. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 47, 80-92.

Rangvid, B. S. (2019). Returning special education students to regular classrooms: Externalities on peers' reading scores. *Economics of Education Review*, 68, 13-22

Ruijs, N.M. and Peetsma, T.T.D. (2009) Effects of inclusion on students with and without special educational needs reviewed. *Educational Research, Review* 4, 67–79.

Scharenberg, K., Rollett, W. and Bos, W. (2019) Do differences in classroom composition provide unequal opportunities for academic learning and social participation of SEN students in inclusive classes in primary school? *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 30 (3), 309-327

Sermier Dessemontet, R., Bless, G. and Morin, D. (2012) Effects of inclusion on the academic achievement and adaptive behaviour of children with intellectual disabilities. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, 56 (6), 579–587.

Szumski, G., Smogorzewska, J. and Karwowski, M. (2017) *Academic achievement of students without special educational needs in inclusive classrooms: A meta-analysis*. *Educational Research Review*. 21, 33-54

Szumski, G., Smogorzewska, J. and Karwowski, M. (2017) Academic achievement of students without special educational needs in inclusive classrooms: A meta-analysis. *Educational Research Review*, 21, 33-54,