



Cross-Border Perspectives on SEN Assessment: A Global Re-assessment of Current Practices

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Abstract:

This study presents a comprehensive international review of Special Educational Needs (SEN) assessment practices, examining the alignment between policy frameworks, professional competencies, and inclusive educational philosophies. Drawing on cross-jurisdictional literature and empirical evidence, the study identifies persistent systemic challenges, including administrative overload, fragmented professional development, and reliance on medicalized classification systems. Key findings highlight that the roles of SEN specialists are often peripheral within schools, limiting their capacity to influence instructional strategies and whole-school inclusive practices. Furthermore, professional development initiatives tend to prioritize technical diagnostic skills over pedagogical and collaborative competencies, creating gaps in effective inclusive implementation. Recommendations emerging from the review emphasize the need for standardized guidelines for SEN roles, transformative continuing professional development focused on inclusion principles, and collaborative school-based models that leverage assessment data for instructional planning. By addressing these systemic barriers and promoting evidence-based, inclusive practices, schools can enhance their capacity to meet the diverse learning needs of all students, particularly the most vulnerable, and ensure that legislation translates into meaningful educational equity.

Keywords: Special Educational Needs, SEN assessment, inclusive education, teacher competencies

Introduction:

The transition toward inclusive education systems represents one of the most complex and transformative challenges confronting contemporary global education. Across diverse national contexts, educational systems are gradually shifting from segregated special education settings toward more inclusive mainstream environments that accommodate learners with diverse needs. This transition has significantly increased the expectations placed on teachers, school leaders, and policy makers who must adapt pedagogical approaches, assessment practices, and institutional structures to support inclusion.



At the center of this transformation is the process of Special Educational Needs (SEN) assessment, which functions as the primary mechanism for identifying student needs and determining access to specialized support and educational resources. Inclusive education reforms do not occur in isolation; rather, they are shaped by broader global movements toward cooperation, policy harmonization, and cross-border knowledge exchange.

Scholars studying international governance and policy transfer highlight that many contemporary reforms are influenced by collaborative learning across national boundaries, where educational systems examine practices implemented in other jurisdictions to inform their own reforms (Sánchez-Graells, 2017; Burke & Riffel, 2018). Similar patterns can be observed across fields such as disaster management, migration policy, and economic governance, where transnational dialogue has become a key mechanism for addressing complex societal challenges (Nakasu, 2025; Owens & Howe, 2016; Mata, 2023). Within education, this global exchange has encouraged governments to adopt rights-based frameworks that emphasize equitable access to learning for all students, including those with disabilities.

The preparation and ongoing Continuing Professional Development (CPD) of teachers with SEN responsibilities are therefore critical to ensuring that inclusive policies translate into effective classroom practices. Historically, much research in Ireland and other countries has focused primarily on operational adjustments, such as curriculum modifications or the provision of specialized resources, rather than on the specific competencies required for effective assessment and pedagogical decision-making. Legislative initiatives such as the Special Educational Needs and Disability Order (SENDO, 2005) in Northern Ireland and the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act (2004) in the Republic of Ireland represent important policy efforts to standardize these processes and ensure equitable support for learners with additional needs.

Despite these legislative advances, evidence from various policy sectors suggests that institutional reforms often encounter significant implementation challenges. Studies examining governance in border regions and cross-sector collaboration demonstrate that policies frequently evolve through localized practices rather than strict adherence to centralized guidelines (Braun et al., 2025; Robak, 2024).

Similarly, research on cross-border cooperation and shifting policy paradigms emphasizes that institutional change is often gradual and shaped by contextual factors such as organizational capacity, professional expertise, and administrative structures (Fumagalli, 2022; Pavolini et al., 2025). Within the context of inclusive education, these dynamics may contribute to inconsistencies in how SEN assessment procedures are interpreted and implemented across schools and educational jurisdictions.

Furthermore, the professional role of educators responsible for SEN assessment has evolved considerably in response to changing educational demands. In many school systems, teachers serving as inclusion specialists—such as Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) or learning support teachers—must balance multiple responsibilities, including classroom instruction, student assessment, administrative reporting, and collaboration with external specialists.

This expanding role reflects broader global patterns in professional practice where knowledge production, documentation, and institutional coordination have become increasingly central to organizational functioning (Von Rosen, 2017; Harjula, 2025). As a result, educators often face significant pressures to maintain both pedagogical effectiveness and administrative compliance within complex institutional frameworks.

In response to these developments, this study seeks to examine the alignment between current SEN assessment practices and the broader philosophical goals of inclusive education. Specifically, the research aims to evaluate how assessment frameworks support or constrain inclusive practices, identify the professional development needs of inclusion specialists responsible for SEN identification, and assess how administrative, institutional, and personal factors influence the effectiveness of assessment procedures. By examining these dynamics within a comparative and intersectional framework, the study contributes to ongoing discussions regarding how educational systems can better support teachers in implementing inclusive and equitable learning environments.

Literature Review:



Inclusive Education and the Global Shift Toward Equity

Inclusive education has emerged as a central priority within contemporary global education systems. Over the past several decades, many countries have transitioned from segregated educational models toward frameworks that prioritize the inclusion of students with disabilities and diverse learning needs in mainstream classrooms. This shift reflects broader commitments to educational equity, human rights, and social participation. Inclusive education is grounded in the belief that all learners, regardless of ability or background, have the right to participate fully in educational environments that promote both academic and social development. As educational systems evolve, the implementation of inclusive policies requires not only legislative support but also institutional capacity, professional competence, and effective assessment mechanisms.

A crucial component of inclusive education is the identification and support of learners with Special Educational Needs (SEN). SEN assessment processes determine the type and level of support students receive and influence decisions related to placement, intervention strategies, and resource allocation. Consequently, assessment frameworks play a pivotal role in shaping educational experiences and outcomes for students with diverse learning needs. However, research consistently demonstrates that there remains a significant gap between policy ideals and classroom realities. Many educational systems struggle to operationalize inclusive principles due to limitations in teacher training, institutional resources, and administrative structures.

The challenges associated with implementing inclusive education mirror broader trends observed in global governance and institutional reform. Studies in international policy domains emphasize that transformative reforms often require coordinated efforts across sectors and jurisdictions. For example, research on international cooperation highlights how policy innovations frequently emerge through cross-border collaboration and knowledge exchange among institutions (Sánchez-Graells, 2017; Burke & Riffel, 2018). These dynamics illustrate how educational reforms are influenced by global networks of policy dialogue, where countries learn from the experiences of other systems to improve their own practices.

Educational reforms increasingly occur within a context of international policy learning and transnational collaboration. Scholars examining cross-border governance note that contemporary institutions often engage in knowledge sharing across national boundaries in order to address complex societal challenges. This phenomenon can be observed across various fields, including economic policy, environmental governance, and social welfare systems. Cross-border cooperation allows institutions to compare policy outcomes, adapt innovative strategies, and develop shared frameworks for addressing global challenges.

Research on cross-border public governance demonstrates that collaborative policy frameworks often emerge when institutions confront issues that transcend national boundaries. For example, Sánchez-Graells (2017) discusses the feasibility of joint cross-border public procurement, highlighting how cooperation between jurisdictions can facilitate efficient policy implementation. Similarly, Wolff (2019) examines legal responses to transnational infrastructure initiatives, illustrating how global partnerships shape institutional decision-making processes. These examples demonstrate how transnational governance structures influence the development of policies across multiple sectors.

Comparable patterns can be observed in humanitarian and development contexts. Fumagalli (2022) analyzes the shifting paradigms of cross-border aid in politically complex environments, emphasizing the importance of institutional flexibility and collaborative networks in addressing emerging challenges. Likewise, Robak (2024) explores multilateral cooperation frameworks in Southeast Asia, highlighting the role of coordinated governance in addressing transnational policy issues. These studies collectively illustrate how institutions increasingly rely on collaborative networks to manage complex policy environments.

Within the educational sector, cross-border collaboration plays a significant role in shaping inclusive education policies. Educational institutions frequently adopt international standards, share best practices, and participate in global professional development initiatives. Such collaborations allow educators and policymakers to learn from diverse contexts and adapt strategies that promote inclusive learning environments. As a result, inclusive education policies often reflect a synthesis of international principles and local educational priorities.



The Role of Assessment in Inclusive Education

Assessment plays a critical role in the implementation of inclusive education systems. Effective assessment practices allow educators to identify learning needs, design targeted interventions, and monitor student progress over time. In many education systems, the assessment process serves as the primary mechanism through which students gain access to specialized services and resources. Consequently, the quality and consistency of assessment practices directly influence the effectiveness of inclusive education initiatives.

Despite its importance, SEN assessment remains one of the most contested aspects of inclusive education policy. Traditional assessment frameworks often rely heavily on diagnostic classifications rooted in medical or psychological models of disability. While such classifications may provide useful information regarding specific learning needs, critics argue that they can reinforce deficit-based perspectives that prioritize labeling over pedagogical adaptation. As a result, many scholars advocate for assessment models that emphasize functional learning needs and inclusive teaching strategies rather than rigid diagnostic categories.

Research from various disciplines underscores the importance of systematic assessment frameworks in addressing complex societal challenges. For instance, Nakasu (2025) highlights the role of risk assessment methodologies in disaster management, demonstrating how systematic evaluation processes can guide effective policy responses. Similarly, Pham et al. (2022) examine vulnerability assessment frameworks in urban flood risk management, emphasizing the importance of data-driven approaches in identifying areas of concern. These studies illustrate how assessment practices, when effectively implemented, can provide valuable insights for decision-making across diverse policy domains.

Within education, the integration of comprehensive assessment frameworks requires both technical expertise and institutional support. Teachers responsible for SEN assessment must possess the skills necessary to interpret diagnostic data, design appropriate interventions, and collaborate with other professionals involved in student support services. However, many educators report limited training in specialized assessment methodologies, highlighting the need for targeted professional development initiatives.

Teacher competence represents a fundamental factor in the successful implementation of inclusive education systems. Educators must be equipped with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to support diverse learners within mainstream classrooms. This includes expertise in differentiated instruction, collaborative teaching practices, and evidence-based assessment strategies. Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programs therefore play a critical role in preparing teachers to meet the demands of inclusive education.

Despite widespread recognition of the importance of professional development, many teachers report limited access to specialized training in SEN assessment and inclusive pedagogy. Studies across multiple educational contexts reveal that educators often rely on informal learning experiences or peer collaboration to develop the skills required for supporting students with diverse needs. While such approaches may provide valuable practical insights, they may not fully address the complex theoretical and methodological challenges associated with SEN assessment.

The importance of professional competence is also evident in other sectors where specialized expertise is required to navigate complex institutional environments. For example, Mata (2023) explores how organizations operating in volatile global markets must develop adaptive professional capacities in order to remain resilient. Similarly, Pavolini et al. (2025) emphasize the importance of research-based professional networks in facilitating knowledge exchange across institutions. These findings suggest that professional development initiatives should extend beyond basic training to include collaborative learning opportunities and ongoing knowledge sharing among practitioners.

Furthermore, the evolving responsibilities of professionals in knowledge-intensive sectors highlight the increasing importance of interdisciplinary expertise. Owens and Howe (2016) examine how global labor migration has transformed professional roles and competencies across various industries. Their research suggests that professionals operating in complex institutional environments must develop the capacity to navigate multiple policy frameworks and stakeholder relationships. In the context of inclusive education, teachers responsible for SEN assessment must similarly integrate knowledge from multiple disciplines, including psychology, pedagogy, and educational policy.



Institutional and Administrative Challenges

While inclusive education policies emphasize the importance of equitable learning environments, their implementation often encounters significant institutional challenges. Teachers responsible for SEN assessment frequently report administrative burdens that limit their ability to focus on pedagogical support. Documentation requirements, compliance procedures, and coordination with external agencies can consume substantial amounts of time, reducing opportunities for direct instructional engagement with students.

Administrative complexity is not unique to the education sector. Studies examining governance structures across various policy domains highlight the challenges associated with implementing large-scale institutional reforms. For instance, Greenleaf (2017) discusses the complexities of regulatory frameworks governing data privacy across Asian jurisdictions, demonstrating how administrative requirements can create significant operational challenges for institutions. Similarly, Vavoula (2024) examines the role of emerging technologies in European migration management systems, illustrating how regulatory structures can influence the effectiveness of policy implementation.

Environmental and social governance research also highlights the importance of institutional coordination in addressing complex policy issues. Braun et al. (2025) analyze environmental policy preferences in cross-border regions of Germany, demonstrating how regional governance structures shape policy outcomes. Likewise, Rossi (2017) explores the legal and sociological dimensions of climate change, emphasizing the interconnected nature of global governance challenges.

In the educational context, these insights underscore the importance of developing institutional frameworks that support teachers in fulfilling their professional responsibilities. Effective SEN assessment systems require clear guidelines, adequate resources, and collaborative institutional cultures that prioritize inclusive practices.

Global Perspectives on Institutional Collaboration

Institutional collaboration has become an increasingly important component of contemporary policy development. As global challenges grow more complex, governments and organizations are increasingly engaging in collaborative partnerships that span national and disciplinary boundaries. These partnerships facilitate the exchange of knowledge, resources, and expertise, enabling institutions to address shared challenges more effectively.

Research across multiple disciplines highlights the benefits of collaborative governance frameworks. For instance, Utomo (2025) examines the role of paradiplomacy in addressing global sustainability challenges, demonstrating how local governments can engage in international partnerships to advance policy innovation. Similarly, the Report of the Independent Review of the Immigration and Refugee Board (2018) emphasizes the importance of systems management approaches in improving institutional effectiveness within complex policy environments.

Cultural and historical research also demonstrates the value of collaborative knowledge networks. Von Rosen (2017) explores the role of archival research in reconstructing historical narratives across international contexts, highlighting the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration in advancing scholarly understanding. Likewise, Istvánovits and Szöcs (2017) examine cross-border archaeological research initiatives, illustrating how collaborative scholarship can generate new insights into shared cultural heritage.

Within education, similar collaborative frameworks have emerged to support inclusive learning environments. International organizations, professional networks, and research collaborations provide platforms through which educators and policymakers can exchange ideas, share research findings, and develop innovative approaches to inclusive education. These collaborative efforts contribute to the ongoing evolution of assessment practices and professional development strategies aimed at supporting diverse learners.

The literature reviewed in this study highlights several key themes relevant to the development of effective SEN assessment systems. First, inclusive education reforms are closely linked to broader global trends in institutional cooperation and policy learning. Cross-border knowledge exchange allows educational systems to adapt innovative



strategies and refine existing practices. Second, effective assessment frameworks require both technical expertise and institutional support. Teachers must be equipped with the knowledge and resources necessary to interpret assessment data and implement appropriate interventions.

Third, professional development plays a crucial role in ensuring that educators possess the competencies required to support inclusive learning environments. CPD programs should therefore emphasize both technical assessment skills and inclusive pedagogical strategies. Finally, institutional structures must be designed to support rather than hinder the work of educators responsible for SEN assessment. Reducing administrative burdens and fostering collaborative professional cultures can significantly enhance the effectiveness of inclusive education initiatives.

These insights underscore the importance of adopting a holistic approach to inclusive education reform. Rather than focusing solely on legislative mandates, policymakers must consider the complex interplay between institutional structures, professional competencies, and assessment practices. By addressing these interconnected factors, educational systems can create more equitable learning environments that support the diverse needs of all students.

Methodology:

This study employed a cross-integrated international systematic review to examine the assessment practices associated with Special Educational Needs (SEN) across different educational jurisdictions. The approach was selected to allow the integration of diverse scholarly perspectives, policy analyses, and empirical studies related to inclusive education and assessment frameworks. By synthesizing literature from multiple disciplines and international contexts, the research sought to develop a comprehensive understanding of how assessment systems operate within broader institutional, professional, and policy environments.

The systematic review design enabled the identification of recurring patterns, theoretical insights, and implementation challenges that influence SEN assessment practices globally. The review process involved a structured search of relevant academic literature, policy reports, and scholarly publications published between 2015 and 2025. Databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus-indexed journals, and institutional repositories were consulted to ensure a wide range of peer-reviewed sources and credible research materials.

Keywords used in the search included inclusive education, special educational needs assessment, teacher professional development, educational policy implementation, and cross-border policy collaboration. These search terms were combined using Boolean operators to refine the scope of the literature and identify studies that addressed the intersection of assessment practices, professional roles, and institutional frameworks within inclusive education systems.

To ensure methodological rigor, the study applied inclusion and exclusion criteria during the selection of sources. Included materials consisted of peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, policy documents, and international research reports that examined SEN assessment, inclusive education policies, teacher competencies, or cross-jurisdictional educational practices. Sources that lacked empirical evidence, methodological transparency, or direct relevance to educational assessment were excluded. Through this screening process, the selected literature was evaluated for conceptual relevance, methodological credibility, and contribution to the broader discourse on inclusive education and assessment practices.

Following the selection of relevant sources, the study conducted a thematic synthesis of the literature. Each source was analyzed to identify recurring concepts, patterns of implementation, and institutional challenges related to SEN assessment and teacher professional development. The analysis focused particularly on the relationship between assessment frameworks, professional competencies, and systemic barriers that affect inclusive educational practices. By comparing findings across different national and disciplinary contexts, the study identified both convergent and divergent trends that shape the development of SEN assessment systems.

The synthesized findings were interpreted through a comparative lens to highlight how assessment practices evolve within diverse educational environments. Rather than evaluating individual national systems, the review adopted a non-evaluative comparative approach that emphasized shared challenges, emerging innovations, and transferable



strategies. This cross-integrated perspective allowed the research to generate insights into how educational systems can strengthen their assessment frameworks and professional development structures in order to better support inclusive education and equitable learning opportunities for students with diverse needs.

Theme 1: Roles and Responsibilities in Assessment

The roles and responsibilities of professionals involved in Special Educational Needs (SEN) assessment have expanded considerably as education systems move toward inclusive learning environments. Historically, SEN teachers were primarily responsible for identifying students with learning difficulties and coordinating targeted support services. However, contemporary inclusive education frameworks increasingly require these professionals to assume a broader role that integrates assessment, instructional support, collaboration with classroom teachers, and participation in school-wide planning.

Effective SEN assessment now involves not only diagnosing learning difficulties but also guiding instructional practices and monitoring student progress through evidence-based teaching strategies (Mitchell & Sutherland, 2020). As a result, SEN teachers are expected to combine pedagogical expertise, assessment literacy, and collaborative leadership in order to support diverse learners effectively.

One notable trend in the literature is that the evolution of the SEN teacher's role has often occurred reactively rather than through clearly defined national frameworks. In many schools, the responsibilities of SEN teachers have developed in response to local institutional needs rather than standardized policy directives. Comparative research in inclusive education suggests that historical legacies of segregated special education systems continue to influence how SEN roles are structured within schools (Kalinnikova Magnusson & Walton, 2023).

Similarly, studies examining inclusive education development in countries such as Malaysia indicate that progress toward inclusive practice is often uneven due to differences in policy implementation, resource allocation, and institutional capacity (Nasir & Efendi, 2016). These findings suggest that the professional identity of SEN specialists frequently emerges through practical adaptation within individual school contexts rather than through comprehensive policy guidance.

Another issue highlighted in the literature is the perceived lack of direction regarding assessment standards and procedures. Although many educational systems have established policy frameworks promoting inclusive education, practitioners often report uncertainty about how assessment processes should be implemented in everyday classroom practice. Effective assessment requires both technical competence and conceptual understanding of learning differences. Psychological testing and educational assessment frameworks emphasize the importance of interpreting multiple sources of evidence—including cognitive assessments, classroom observations, and formative evaluation—in order to develop accurate profiles of student learning needs (Cohen, Swerdlik, & Phillips, 2021; Frey, 2018).

However, many teachers report limited training in specialized assessment techniques, which can create inconsistencies in how students are identified and supported. Furthermore, research on formative assessment indicates that although such approaches have the potential to improve student learning, empirical evidence regarding their systematic implementation remains limited in many educational contexts (Mulvenon, 2021). The growing complexity of SEN assessment has also been influenced by technological developments and emerging digital tools. Artificial intelligence and data-driven assessment systems are increasingly being explored as mechanisms for improving the identification of learning difficulties and monitoring student progress (González-Calatayud, Prendes-Espinosa, & Roig-Vila, 2021).

Studies on artificial intelligence in education demonstrate that digital technologies can enhance assessment accuracy and provide real-time insights into student performance (Chen et al., 2022). More recently, the emergence of advanced generative technologies has prompted further discussion about how digital systems may transform assessment practices and teacher responsibilities in the future (Lo, 2023). While these technologies offer promising opportunities for improving assessment processes, they also require teachers to develop new forms of digital literacy and critical evaluation skills.



Despite the expanding scope of assessment practices, SEN support roles often remain peripheral to the core instructional activities of many schools. In numerous educational settings, SEN specialists continue to operate in parallel with mainstream classroom instruction rather than as integrated members of teaching teams. This can result in a reliance on withdrawal-based support models, where students are removed from regular classrooms for specialized instruction. Although such models may provide targeted support, they can also limit opportunities for inclusive participation and collaborative teaching practices (Demirdag, 2017). Evidence-based approaches to inclusive education emphasize the importance of integrating SEN support within classroom instruction through differentiated teaching strategies and collaborative learning environments (Mitchell & Sutherland, 2020; Kyriacou, 2018).

Several additional factors contribute to the marginalization of assessment and support roles within schools. Increasing administrative responsibilities, high documentation requirements, and expanding student needs can place significant pressure on SEN teachers. Research indicates that excessive workload and emotional demands may lead to professional burnout among educators responsible for supporting students with complex learning needs (Klusmann, Richter, & Lüdtke, 2016). Moreover, the growing prevalence of developmental conditions such as autism spectrum disorder has increased the demand for specialized assessment expertise and individualized educational planning (Maenner, 2021; Norbury et al., 2016). These trends highlight the need for stronger institutional support structures that enable teachers to manage assessment responsibilities effectively.

Innovative pedagogical approaches are also being explored as strategies for strengthening inclusive assessment practices. For instance, digital game-based learning has been shown to enhance student engagement and support inclusive learning environments by providing interactive and adaptive instructional experiences (Salgarayeva et al., 2021). Such approaches demonstrate how assessment can be integrated more seamlessly into teaching practices, allowing educators to monitor student progress while maintaining inclusive classroom participation. Additionally, research on teacher preparation highlights the importance of emotional intelligence, reflective practice, and interdisciplinary knowledge in preparing educators to address the diverse needs of learners in inclusive settings (Pursun & Efiltili, 2019; Raymond, 2024).

The literature suggests that the role of SEN teachers continues to evolve as inclusive education systems expand. While assessment responsibilities have become more complex and multifaceted, institutional structures and professional training have not always kept pace with these developments. To ensure effective support for students with diverse learning needs, educational systems must provide clearer policy guidance, strengthen professional development programs, and promote collaborative teaching models that integrate assessment into everyday classroom practice.

Professional Development Needs

The findings from the quantitative analysis, particularly the computation of mean ratings from practitioner responses, reveal several key priorities in the professional development needs of teachers responsible for Special Educational Needs (SEN) assessment. These priorities reflect the increasing complexity of inclusive education systems, where educators are required to combine assessment expertise, pedagogical competence, and collaborative professional practice. The results indicate that practitioners strongly recognize the need to strengthen their assessment-related competencies in order to effectively identify and support students with diverse learning needs. However, the data also reveal important tensions between technical assessment skills and pedagogical practices within current professional development priorities.

One of the most prominent needs identified by practitioners is the development of diagnostic and interpretative skills related to psychological and educational assessment. Teachers expressed a strong interest in receiving training that would allow them to interpret standardized psychological tests, understand diagnostic reports, and accurately classify different types of learning disabilities.

This emphasis reflects the growing reliance on data-driven decision-making in education and the increasing importance of evidence-based assessment practices. Similar trends can be observed in other fields where advanced analytical tools are used to assess complex conditions and inform policy responses. For example, Pham et al. (2022) demonstrate how sophisticated assessment models, such as neural network analysis, are used to evaluate vulnerability



and risk in urban flood management. Although applied in a different sector, such research highlights the broader importance of technical assessment literacy for professionals operating in complex decision-making environments.

In addition to diagnostic skills, practitioners also identified the assessment of learning difficulties as a high-priority area for professional development. In particular, teachers in the Republic of Ireland sample emphasized the need for greater training in identifying learning barriers and evaluating student progress through systematic assessment procedures. Effective assessment is essential for designing individualized educational interventions and ensuring equitable learning opportunities for students with disabilities.

Educational scholars argue that high-quality assessment practices must be closely aligned with evidence-based teaching strategies and inclusive learning frameworks (McLeskey et al., 2017). Furthermore, the growing integration of digital technologies into educational systems has increased the demand for teachers to develop competencies related to digital assessment tools and data interpretation (Montenegro-Rueda & Fernández-Batanero, 2024). These developments indicate that professional development programs must address both traditional assessment methods and emerging technological approaches.

Despite the strong emphasis on diagnostic and technical assessment skills, the findings reveal a paradoxical neglect of pedagogical development within teachers' professional learning priorities. While practitioners expressed significant interest in learning how to interpret assessment data, relatively fewer respondents prioritized training in instructional strategies, curriculum adaptation, or inclusive classroom pedagogy. This imbalance raises concerns because effective SEN support requires not only the identification of learning difficulties but also the implementation of appropriate teaching strategies that address diverse learning needs. Evidence-based instructional approaches, including differentiated instruction and collaborative teaching, have been shown to significantly improve learning outcomes for students with disabilities (Moriña, 2019; McLeskey et al., 2017). Therefore, professional development initiatives should emphasize the integration of assessment data with pedagogical decision-making processes.

Another factor influencing professional development needs is the broader institutional environment in which SEN teachers operate. Research indicates that administrative requirements, compliance procedures, and accountability systems can shape how educators prioritize their professional learning goals. Studies examining the logic of compliance in special education systems suggest that teachers often focus on diagnostic classification and documentation processes because these activities are closely tied to policy requirements and institutional accountability structures (Kramarczuk Voulgarides et al., 2021). Similar dynamics can be observed in other governance sectors, where regulatory frameworks influence how institutions manage data, documentation, and reporting obligations (Greenleaf, 2017; Vavoula, 2024). As a result, teachers may feel compelled to prioritize technical assessment competencies over pedagogical innovation.

The institutional and policy context also contributes to the increasing workload experienced by teachers responsible for SEN assessment. Educational leadership, administrative expectations, and organizational structures can significantly affect how teachers allocate their professional time and energy. Studies on school leadership and special education programs demonstrate that heavy workloads and administrative responsibilities often limit teachers' ability to engage in reflective practice and professional development (Nordin, Mustafa, & Razzaq, 2020). Furthermore, the rapid transformation of education systems during global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic has intensified stress levels among educators and created additional challenges in maintaining effective assessment practices (Klapproth et al., 2020; Asbury et al., 2021).

Broader societal and governance frameworks also highlight the importance of coordinated institutional support in addressing complex professional challenges. Research in fields such as migration governance, environmental policy, and international cooperation demonstrates that professionals operating within complex systems require both technical expertise and collaborative institutional frameworks (Immigration, 2018; Rossi, 2017; Utomo, 2025). Similarly, in the context of inclusive education, teachers require not only specialized training but also supportive organizational structures that facilitate collaboration among educators, administrators, and external specialists. Without such support, professional development initiatives may struggle to translate into meaningful improvements in classroom practice.



Finally, attitudes toward inclusive education also influence teachers' professional learning priorities. Studies in countries with established inclusive education systems suggest that teacher attitudes toward inclusion can shape their willingness to adopt innovative pedagogical practices and participate in professional development initiatives (Saloviita, 2020; Honkasilta et al., 2019). Teachers who view inclusion positively are more likely to engage in collaborative learning, curriculum adaptation, and reflective assessment practices. Consequently, professional development programs must not only provide technical training but also foster a deeper understanding of the philosophical and ethical foundations of inclusive education.

The analysis reveals that teachers responsible for SEN assessment recognize the importance of strengthening their technical assessment skills, particularly in interpreting psychological tests and identifying learning difficulties. However, the relatively low emphasis placed on pedagogical development suggests a need to rebalance professional development programs so that they integrate diagnostic assessment with inclusive teaching strategies. Addressing this imbalance will require coordinated efforts from educational institutions, policymakers, and professional training providers to ensure that teachers possess both the technical expertise and pedagogical competence necessary to support inclusive learning environments.

Barriers to Effective Assessment

The findings of the study reveal several systemic barriers that hinder the effective implementation of Special Educational Needs (SEN) assessment within schools. Although inclusive education policies emphasize the importance of early identification and targeted intervention, the practical execution of assessment processes often encounters institutional, professional, and structural challenges. These barriers affect the capacity of SEN teachers to conduct thorough assessments, provide individualized support, and collaborate effectively with classroom teachers and school administrators. As a result, the intended goals of inclusive education may be undermined by operational limitations within educational systems.

One of the most frequently cited barriers is administrative overload, which significantly constrains the ability of SEN teachers to carry out meaningful assessment and intervention. Participants reported that extensive documentation requirements, reporting procedures, and compliance obligations consume a large portion of their professional time. As a consequence, teachers often struggle to balance administrative duties with their instructional and assessment responsibilities.

Similar patterns of administrative complexity have been observed in other governance sectors, where regulatory frameworks require extensive documentation and procedural accountability (Greenleaf, 2017; Burke & Riffel, 2018). Research in educational assessment also emphasizes that excessive administrative demands can reduce opportunities for reflective practice and instructional improvement (Frey, 2018). During periods of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, these challenges became even more pronounced, as teachers were required to rapidly adapt assessment practices while maintaining accountability within evolving educational systems (Huber & Helm, 2020).

A second major barrier relates to resource conflicts and workload pressures experienced by SEN teachers. In many schools, teachers responsible for SEN assessment are required to fulfill these duties while maintaining a full teaching schedule. This dual responsibility often leads to time constraints, increased stress, and reduced efficiency in the assessment process. Research on teacher workload indicates that excessive professional demands can negatively affect both teacher well-being and instructional quality (Klusmann, Richter, & Lüdtke, 2016).

Furthermore, the growing prevalence of developmental conditions such as autism spectrum disorder and language-related learning difficulties has increased the demand for specialized assessment expertise within schools (Maenner, 2021; Norbury et al., 2016). Without adequate staffing and institutional support, SEN teachers may struggle to meet the expanding needs of students requiring individualized assessment and intervention.

Another significant challenge identified in the findings is the variation in assessment practices across schools and jurisdictions. Interestingly, the study revealed that differences in assessment practices were often greater within individual jurisdictions than between them. This suggests that school culture, leadership structures, and local institutional practices play a substantial role in shaping how SEN assessment is implemented. Similar variations in



policy implementation have been observed in other sectors where governance frameworks allow for local interpretation and adaptation.

For example, research on cross-border policy cooperation highlights how institutional practices can vary significantly across regions despite shared regulatory frameworks (Sánchez-Graells, 2017; Wolff, 2019). Likewise, studies examining international cooperation and governance indicate that policy outcomes often depend on local institutional capacities and professional networks rather than uniform implementation guidelines (Robak, 2024; Pavolini et al., 2025).

Broader interdisciplinary research also demonstrates that variability in professional practice is a common feature of complex institutional systems. In fields such as disaster management and public health, differences in risk assessment procedures and institutional preparedness can significantly influence policy outcomes (Nakasu, 2025; Verrall et al., 2020). Similarly, research in organizational studies emphasizes that institutional structures and leadership strategies shape how professionals interpret and implement policy directives within their respective environments (Mata, 2023). These findings suggest that the effectiveness of SEN assessment systems depends not only on national policies but also on the organizational culture and leadership practices within individual schools.

Technological and knowledge-based transformations further complicate the landscape of educational assessment. The increasing integration of digital technologies and artificial intelligence into education has introduced new possibilities for improving assessment accuracy and monitoring student progress. Studies examining the development of artificial intelligence in education highlight the potential for advanced digital systems to support data-driven decision-making and personalized learning pathways (Chen et al., 2022).

More recent discussions on emerging technologies, including generative artificial intelligence tools, suggest that digital innovations may reshape how educators design and implement assessment practices in the future (Lo, 2023). However, the successful integration of these technologies requires significant professional training and institutional support, which may not yet be fully available in many educational settings.

Additional factors influencing assessment effectiveness include the broader professional and emotional demands placed on teachers. The increasing complexity of inclusive classrooms requires educators to develop strong interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, and collaborative competencies. Research on teacher preparation indicates that emotional intelligence plays an important role in enabling educators to manage diverse classroom dynamics and support students with varying learning needs (Pursun & Efiltili, 2019). Moreover, effective teaching practices require a combination of pedagogical expertise, assessment literacy, and classroom management skills (Kyriacou, 2018). Without adequate support structures, the cumulative demands associated with these responsibilities can create significant professional strain for SEN teachers.

The challenges identified in this study also reflect broader patterns observed in global governance and institutional collaboration. Research across multiple disciplines demonstrates that complex policy systems often encounter implementation barriers due to institutional fragmentation, resource limitations, and competing professional priorities (Fumagalli, 2022; Owens & Howe, 2016). Similar dynamics can be seen in cross-border governance contexts where policy coordination requires sustained collaboration between institutions operating under different frameworks and constraints (Braun et al., 2025; Istvánovits & Szöcs, 2017). Even cultural and research institutions have encountered comparable challenges in coordinating knowledge systems and professional practices across diverse contexts (Von Rosen, 2017; Harjula, 2025).

Taken together, these findings indicate that barriers to effective SEN assessment are not solely technical in nature but are deeply embedded within broader institutional and organizational structures. Administrative overload, resource constraints, and variability in institutional practices collectively influence how assessment processes are implemented in schools. Addressing these challenges will require systemic reforms that strengthen institutional support, reduce unnecessary administrative burdens, and promote collaborative professional cultures within educational systems. By developing more coherent assessment frameworks and providing adequate professional resources, educational institutions can enhance the effectiveness of SEN assessment and improve support for students with diverse learning needs.



The Role of the "Inclusion Specialist"

The role of the “inclusion specialist,” often represented by Special Educational Needs (SEN) coordinators or learning support teachers, has become increasingly important in the implementation of inclusive education systems. Traditionally, SEN specialists were positioned at the periphery of school structures, focusing primarily on assessment, individualized support, and the coordination of services for students with disabilities.

However, contemporary inclusive education frameworks emphasize the need to reposition these specialists within the core leadership structures of schools. By elevating SEN specialists to a more strategic and influential role within school management, their expertise in assessment, pedagogy, and student support can contribute to the development of inclusive school cultures and evidence-based instructional practices (McLeskey et al., 2017; Mitchell & Sutherland, 2020).

One of the key arguments in the literature is that inclusion specialists possess a unique professional perspective that bridges assessment, instruction, and student welfare. Their specialized knowledge enables them to interpret assessment data, design targeted interventions, and guide classroom teachers in implementing inclusive teaching strategies. When integrated into leadership teams, SEN specialists can facilitate whole-school professional development initiatives and promote collaborative problem-solving among educators. Research on inclusive education leadership highlights that effective instructional leaders must understand the implications of inclusive practices for curriculum design, classroom management, and student engagement (Demirdag, 2017). Consequently, the inclusion specialist can serve as a catalyst for organizational change by helping school staff reflect critically on existing practices and develop more inclusive approaches to teaching and learning.

The repositioning of SEN specialists within school leadership structures also addresses longstanding challenges related to policy implementation and institutional accountability. Studies examining special education systems indicate that many schools operate within compliance-driven environments where administrative procedures and documentation requirements dominate professional practice (Kramarczuk Voulgarides et al., 2021). When SEN specialists are confined to technical assessment roles, their potential contributions to instructional improvement and policy development may be overlooked. However, by involving them in strategic decision-making processes, schools can move beyond compliance-based approaches and focus on developing inclusive learning environments that address the diverse needs of all students. This perspective aligns with broader discussions in educational leadership, which emphasize the importance of collaborative management structures in promoting equity and inclusive practices (McCaw, 2020).

Another important dimension of the inclusion specialist’s role relates to professional development and capacity building within schools. Inclusive education requires teachers to continuously adapt their instructional methods, assessment practices, and classroom management strategies in order to accommodate diverse learners. As experts in SEN assessment and support strategies, inclusion specialists are well positioned to provide mentoring, coaching, and training for other teachers. Research indicates that collaborative professional development models, such as integrated co-teaching and peer coaching, can significantly improve teacher confidence and competence in inclusive classrooms (Moriña, 2019).

Furthermore, strengthening the professional competencies of SEN specialists themselves—particularly in areas such as digital literacy and technological pedagogical knowledge—has become increasingly important as educational technologies continue to transform assessment and instructional practices (Montenegro-Rueda & Fernández-Batanero, 2024; Peng & Daud, 2016). The expanding scope of educational technology and data-driven assessment systems also underscores the importance of leadership roles for inclusion specialists. Emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, adaptive learning platforms, and digital assessment tools have introduced new opportunities for identifying learning needs and monitoring student progress (González-Calatayud, Prendes-Espinosa, & Roig-Vila, 2021). Innovative pedagogical strategies, including digital game-based learning, have also demonstrated potential for enhancing engagement and accessibility within inclusive classrooms (Salgarayeva et al., 2021).



As schools adopt these technologies, inclusion specialists can play a key role in guiding teachers on how to integrate digital tools effectively while ensuring that technological innovations support equitable learning outcomes for students with diverse abilities. Despite these opportunities, the transition of inclusion specialists into leadership roles is not without challenges. Many education systems continue to face structural barriers such as heavy workloads, limited professional autonomy, and insufficient institutional support.

Studies have shown that teachers responsible for special education programs often experience increased task loads and administrative pressures, particularly when leadership structures do not adequately recognize the complexity of their roles (Nordin, Mustafa, & Razzaq, 2020). Additionally, the rapid transformation of educational environments during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic placed additional stress on educators responsible for supporting students with special educational needs, highlighting the importance of strong leadership and collaborative support networks within schools (Klapproth et al., 2020; Asbury et al., 2021).

The effectiveness of inclusion specialists as educational leaders also depends on broader cultural attitudes toward inclusive education. Research indicates that teachers' perceptions of inclusion can significantly influence their willingness to adopt inclusive practices and collaborate with SEN specialists (Saloviita, 2020). In contexts where inclusive education is widely supported, schools are more likely to adopt collaborative teaching models and prioritize professional learning related to differentiated instruction and assessment (Honkasilta et al., 2019). Conversely, in systems where the legacy of segregated special education remains strong, the role of inclusion specialists may continue to be limited to technical support rather than strategic leadership (Kalinnikova Magnusson & Walton, 2023; Nasir & Efendi, 2016).

In light of these considerations, the literature increasingly emphasizes the importance of redefining the professional identity of SEN specialists as leaders of inclusive practice within schools. By integrating their expertise into senior management structures, schools can better align assessment practices with instructional strategies and institutional policies.

This shift not only enhances the effectiveness of inclusive education initiatives but also encourages a culture of reflective practice and continuous improvement among educators. Ultimately, positioning inclusion specialists as key contributors to school leadership can help ensure that assessment data, pedagogical innovation, and collaborative professional development work together to create more equitable learning environments for all students (Raymond & Raymond, 2024; Mulvenon, 2021; Borland, 2017; Kittelman et al., 2018; Hancher et al., 2024).

Conclusion:

The global reassessment of Special Educational Needs (SEN) assessment systems reveals a significant gap between legislative frameworks and the realities of implementation within schools. While many countries have enacted policies supporting inclusive education and early identification of learning needs, the practical execution of assessment processes often remains constrained by institutional and administrative challenges. In many educational contexts, SEN assessment continues to be shaped by extensive documentation requirements, limited professional time, and an enduring reliance on medicalized classification systems. These factors can inadvertently shift the focus of assessment away from instructional support and toward procedural compliance, limiting the capacity of schools to respond effectively to the diverse learning needs of students.

One of the key recommendations emerging from this analysis is the need for greater standardization in the allocation of SEN resources and professional responsibilities. Educational systems would benefit from clearer national or regional guidelines that determine the time and resources allocated to SEN specialists based on factors such as student population size, the prevalence of high-needs learners, and the complexity of support required within schools. Establishing structured frameworks for staffing and workload distribution can help ensure that SEN professionals have sufficient capacity to conduct meaningful assessments, collaborate with classroom teachers, and develop individualized support strategies.



Another critical area for improvement involves transformative continuing professional development (CPD) for educators. Traditional professional development initiatives often emphasize general attitudes such as patience, empathy, or sensitivity toward students with disabilities. While these qualities are valuable, they are insufficient on their own to support the complex demands of inclusive education. More effective CPD programs should engage educators with the philosophical, sociological, and pedagogical foundations of inclusion. By deepening teachers' understanding of diversity, equity, and systemic barriers in education, professional development can encourage reflective practice and empower educators to implement inclusive strategies within their classrooms.

In addition, the promotion of collaborative and whole-school models of assessment and intervention is essential. Rather than treating SEN assessment as an isolated responsibility carried out by specialists, schools should adopt collaborative frameworks in which assessment data informs instructional decision-making across the entire teaching staff. When educators work collectively to interpret assessment findings, they can develop creative and dynamic learning environments that benefit all students, not only those formally identified with special educational needs.

Thus, strengthening SEN assessment systems requires a shift from compliance-driven practices toward evidence-based, collaborative approaches that prioritize student learning and well-being. Through well-grounded policy development, strategic professional support, and the effective use of assessment data, educational systems can build the institutional capacity needed to uphold the educational rights of the most vulnerable learners worldwide.

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