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Intersections of Teacher Well-Being, Inclusive Education and Professional Development: A Narrative Review

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This narrative integrative review examines the interrelations among teacher well-being, professional development, and inclusive education. Drawing on recent empirical, theoretical, and policy-oriented literature across educational sciences and psychology, the review applies a thematic-interpretive analytical procedure organised around three conceptual axes: teacher well-being as a dynamic balance between personal resources and professional demands; inclusive education as a transformative project oriented toward participation, belonging, and equity; and professional development as a mediating condition that supports inclusive practice. The literature shows that teacher well-being is shaped not only by stress and burnout, but also by workload, leadership, accountability regimes, and institutional support; that inclusive education involves more than placement and requires changes in curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and school culture; and that professional development is most effective when grounded in human rights, inclusive values, Universal Design for Learning, collaboration, and sustained school-based learning. The review further indicates that these three dimensions are mutually reinforcing and must be understood as an integrated triad rather than as separate domains. Its main contribution is to advance a systemic framework that explains why fragmented interventions are insufficient and why sustainable inclusion depends on aligning policy, leadership, professional learning, and teacher well-being. The review concludes that inclusive education should be approached as a whole-school and context-sensitive project that addresses structural barriers while enabling teachers' professional flourishing and collective responsibility for all learners.

Keywords: teacher well-being, inclusive education, professional development, narrative review, whole-school approach

INTRODUCTION

Research on teacher well-being increasingly conceptualises it as a multidimensional, dynamic state that reflects the balance between personal resources and professional demands rather than a static trait (Pollard & Lee, 2003). Drawing on the theoretical framework of Ryff (1989), recent studies emphasise cognitive, affective, physical and relational dimensions, showing how overwork, low autonomy and poor school climate erode this balance and heighten risks of stress, burnout and attrition (Cherkowski & Walker, 2018; Samela-Aro et al., 2019; Roorda et al., 2011). However, much of this work remains descriptive and individualised, tending to underplay structural determinants such as policy pressures, funding regimes and broader socio-economic inequalities that shape teachers' working conditions (Collie et al., 2012; Klassen et al., 2013).

Inclusive education literature, in turn, has shifted from a focus on placement to a broader concern with participation, belonging and the transformation of school cultures, curricula, and assessment (Ferreira, 2022a; Florian et al., 2017). Empirical studies show that teachers' beliefs, values and self-efficacy are decisive in whether diversity is treated as a resource or a problem, with positive attitudes associated

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with richer collaboration and more varied pedagogical strategies, and negative attitudes linked to covert segregation (Peterson & Jensen, 2025). Yet many contributions celebrate inclusion as a normative ideal while offering limited analysis of the contradictions teachers face in under-resourced, accountability-driven systems when trying to enact inclusive pedagogies (Corcoran et al., 2019; Kauffman et al., 2022).

The intersection between teacher well-being and inclusive education remains comparatively under-theorised, despite indications that inclusive demands can simultaneously function as stressors and as sources of professional meaning and alignment with social justice values.

This narrative review adopted an integrative design to synthesise empirical and theoretical literature concerning the interrelations among teacher well-being, inclusive education and professional development. This approach was chosen to capture the multidimensional, interconnected nature of the topic and to accommodate diverse conceptual frameworks (Torraco, 2005; Whittemore & Knafl, 2005). This methodological choice reflects the multidimensional character of the topic, where teacher well-being cannot be meaningfully explored in isolation from the pedagogical and organisational contexts in which teachers operate. Studies of professional development and inclusive education often use different vocabularies, conceptual traditions, and units of analysis, ranging from individual resilience and coping mechanisms to institutional policies and classroom-level practices (Montalbano et al., 2024). The integrative design accommodates such heterogeneity by applying a coherent analytical framework that connects psychological, organisational, and systemic perspectives.

Existing studies identify "virtuous" and "vicious" cycles in which well-designed policies and professional development enhance well-being and inclusive practice (Donath et al., 2023; Vimala, 2023), whereas under-resourced inclusion contributes to emotional exhaustion and more exclusionary responses (Corcoran et al., 2019).

Although research on teacher well-being, professional development, and inclusive education has expanded substantially over the last decade, most contributions remain anchored in a single primary lens, leading to a fragmented knowledge base. Psychological studies typically conceptualise teacher well-being in terms of stress, burnout, and coping, focusing on individual-level risks and resources, while treating organisational and policy conditions as background variables rather than constitutive elements of the phenomenon (Kurrle & Warwas, 2025). Organisational and leadership research, in turn, often examines school climate, collaboration, and professional learning cultures, but only tangentially addresses how these structures interact with teachers' subjective well-being or with concrete, inclusive pedagogical practices (Barnová et al., 2022). Policy-oriented analyses often focus on the design and implementation of inclusive education reforms, accountability regimes and resourcing models. Yet, they rarely consider how these arrangements are experienced by teachers in their everyday work or how they shape possibilities for meaningful professional learning (Norwich et al., 2024).

There is a lack of explanatory frameworks that can simultaneously account for teachers' psychological experiences, the organisational conditions of their work, and the policy environments that regulate inclusion and professional learning. This review responds to that gap by mobilising an integrative lens that explicitly treats teacher well-being, inclusive education and professional development as mutually shaping dimensions of school life.

Teacher well-being, professional development, and inclusive education are frequently addressed in the literature as distinct fields, even though their conceptual boundaries often overlap. Teacher well-being is sometimes approached as a predominantly individual psychological matter, centred on stress, coping, resilience, or burnout, whereas other studies emphasise the organisational and relational conditions that shape it, such as workload, leadership, autonomy, and collegial support. In parallel, inclusive education is variously framed as a rights-based commitment to participation and belonging,

a pedagogical challenge of differentiation, or a systemic reform requiring changes in curriculum, assessment, and school culture. Professional development is likewise understood in divergent ways, from short-term technical training to sustained, collaborative, and inquiry-based learning. These differences reveal unresolved debates about the level at which inclusion should be analysed, the nature of teacher learning, and the extent to which teacher well-being is an individual or structural phenomenon.

An integrated triad framework is therefore theoretically necessary because the three dimensions are not merely associated; they are mutually constitutive. Inclusive education places new demands on teachers, shaping their workload, emotional experience, and sense of efficacy, while teacher well-being influences the extent to which teachers can engage productively with diversity and sustain inclusive practice. Professional development mediates this relationship by enabling teachers to translate inclusive principles into classroom action, but its effectiveness depends on the conditions under which it is designed and supported. A framework that treats these dimensions separately risks obscuring the tensions and interdependencies that structure everyday school life. By contrast, a triad perspective makes it possible to explain why fragmented reforms often produce limited results and why sustainable inclusion requires alignment between professional learning, teacher well-being, and school pedagogical conditions.

METHOD

Review design

This study adopted a narrative review design to synthesise empirical and theoretical literature on the interrelations among teacher well-being, professional development, and inclusive education. A narrative review was appropriate because the topic cuts across distinct disciplinary traditions, conceptual languages, and methodological approaches, making an integrative and interpretive synthesis more suitable than a narrowly aggregative design. The aim was not to estimate effect sizes or claim exhaustive coverage, but to develop conceptual coherence and identify the main positions, tensions, and gaps in the literature (Sukhera, 2022).

Search strategy

The literature was identified through a structured search strategy designed to capture relevant studies across education, psychology, and policy-related fields. Searches were guided by combinations of terms related to the three focal domains, including teacher well-being, teacher stress, burnout, professional development, teacher education, inclusive education, inclusion, Universal Design for Learning, collaborative learning, and school culture. Additional terms were used to capture adjacent concepts and alternative terminologies employed across different research traditions. Priority was given to recent literature, while seminal publications were retained where they were necessary to clarify key conceptual foundations or to trace the development of the field.

Selection criteria

Studies were selected according to their conceptual and substantive relevance to the review aims. Sources were included if they addressed at least one of the three domains directly or examined their interrelations at the theoretical, empirical, or policy level. Both qualitative and quantitative studies were considered, as well as conceptual papers, reviews, and policy analyses, provided that they offered meaningful insight into teacher well-being, inclusive education, professional development, or their intersections. Studies that were too narrowly technical or that lacked clear relevance to the triad were excluded. The final corpus was intentionally heterogeneous to reflect the multidimensional character of the topic and to support a broad interpretive synthesis (Campbell et al., 2020).

Analytical procedure

The analysis proceeded through an iterative reading and coding process. In the first stage, the literature was read to identify the main conceptual positions associated with each domain and to note recurring themes, assumptions, and tensions. In the second stage, the material was examined comparatively to determine how authors conceptualised teacher well-being, inclusive education, and professional development, and how they explained the relationships among them (Campbell et al., 2020). The synthesis was organised around three analytical axes: teacher well-being as a dynamic balance between professional demands and personal resources; inclusive education as a transformative project oriented toward participation, belonging, and equity; and professional development as a mediating condition for inclusive practice. These axes served both as a framework for organising the literature and as an interpretive device for comparing divergent positions across studies (Sukhera, 2022).

Synthesis of findings

The synthesis was conducted thematically, with attention to areas of convergence, divergence, and conceptual silence. Studies were grouped according to the level at which they located the problem, whether individual, classroom, organisational, or systemic, and according to the kind of explanation they offered, whether psychological, pedagogical, relational, or structural. This process made it possible to compare competing understandings of teacher well-being, identify unresolved debates about the meaning of inclusion, and assess how professional development was framed in relation to teacher agency and school improvement. Rather than summarising each study separately, the review integrated findings across sources to construct a higher-order interpretation of the field and to justify the need for an integrated triad framework.

Methodological stance

This review was interpretive rather than exhaustive. Its purpose was to build conceptual clarity from a diverse body of literature and to show why teacher well-being, professional development, and inclusive education should be understood as mutually shaping dimensions of school life (Ainscow, 2020; OECD, 2022). By combining structured searching with flexible thematic interpretation, the method supports a rigorous but context-sensitive account of the field and offers a clear basis for the analytical argument developed in the remainder of the manuscript.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Teachers' well-being and its challenges

Teachers' well-being is portrayed as a complex, multi-dimensional construct with cognitive and affective components, typically expressed in terms of life satisfaction and emotional experience (happiness, pleasant and unpleasant affects) (Pollard & Lee, 2003). Dodge et al. (2012) defined well-being as a dynamic balance between personal resources (psychological, social, physical) and the challenges faced; when demands outweigh resources, equilibrium and well-being are compromised. In the school context, well-being is particularly important because teachers are key in-school factors in students' achievement, satisfaction, and long-term success (OECD, 2014; Roorda et al., 2011). Teaching, however, is increasingly described as demanding, due to heterogeneous student populations, inclusive education reforms, digitalisation, bureaucratic workload, and resource constraints, often with low autonomy and high non-teaching duties (Ferreira, 2022b). These conditions increase stress, the risk of burnout, and emotional exhaustion, thereby decreasing job satisfaction, commitment, and instructional quality. This can result in absenteeism and turnover, negatively impacting students and overall school functioning (Cherkowski & Walker, 2018). Teachers' well-being is shaped by objective dimensions (working conditions, relationships, socio-economic and infrastructural factors) and subjective dimensions (needs, values, beliefs, life projects

and Ryff's (1989) psychological well-being elements such as autonomy and self-acceptance) (Siqueira & Padovam, 2008). Table 1 synthesises teacher well-being as an equilibrium-based construct linking professional demands, personal resources, and school conditions.

Table 1
Teacher well-being as a dynamic balance between professional demands and personal resources

Dimension	Synthesis
1. Conceptualisation of teacher well-being	Teacher well-being is a multidimensional construct involving cognitive and affective experiences, especially life satisfaction and emotional states such as happiness or stress.
2. Dynamic balance model	Well-being depends on the balance between professional demands and personal resources; when demands outweigh resources, well-being is weakened.
3. Professional demands	Teaching involves stressors such as heterogeneous classrooms, reforms, digitalisation, administrative workload, limited autonomy, and other non-teaching duties.
4. Personal resources	Teachers rely on psychological, social, and physical resources, including resilience, self-efficacy, support from others, health, autonomy, purpose, and self-acceptance.
5. Objective dimensions	Well-being is shaped by concrete school and work conditions such as infrastructure, salary, workload, relationships, and the broader socio-economic context.
6. Subjective dimensions	Teachers' values, beliefs, needs, and sense of meaning also shape how they experience well-being.
7. Outcomes of (im)balance	When balance is maintained, teachers show satisfaction, commitment, and effectiveness; when it is disrupted, burnout, absenteeism, and turnover become more likely.
8. Implications for schools	Teacher well-being is essential for educational quality and student success, so schools should promote supportive leadership, healthy cultures, and professional development that strengthen resilience and self-care.

Teachers' well-being is a complex, multidimensional construct involving cognitive and affective components, especially life satisfaction and emotional experience. From a dynamic balance perspective, well-being results from the interaction between professional demands and personal resources; when demands outweigh resources, equilibrium is disrupted. In teaching, this balance is affected by heterogeneous classrooms, inclusive reforms, digitalisation, bureaucratic workload, and limited autonomy, which may increase stress and burnout risk. At the same time, teacher well-being is shaped by objective conditions and subjective dimensions such as autonomy, self-acceptance, values, and life projects.

Inclusion in practice: progress and challenges

Inclusion is framed not only as physical presence but as a genuine sense and practice of belonging, where students actively participate, and the school assumes responsibility for each student's learning and development (Booth & Ainscow, 2011). An inclusive school restructures curriculum and organisation to respond to diversity, valuing differences as assets that enrich the learning community and promote social justice (UNICEF, 2021). Despite progress, there are ongoing challenges to inclusive education, including uneven school practices, the rethinking of special schools, resource allocation problems, insufficient teacher training, and gaps in transitions to adulthood and the labour market.

Teachers are central to inclusive education because their knowledge, beliefs and values shape classroom environments (Ferreira, 2022a). Positive attitudes towards inclusion are linked to more dynamic, interactive roles, richer collaboration, and a broader range of strategies to support all learners, whereas negative attitudes and low self-efficacy can lead to covert segregation and

ineffective pedagogical responses (Jardinez & Natividad, 2024). Empirical studies have shown that many teachers still feel unprepared, overloaded, lacking resources and specialised training, which fuels doubts about including students with specific needs in large classes (Ferreira & Reis-Jorge, 2022; Moscato & Pedone, 2024).

Differentiated instruction, as a principle of positive discrimination, is essential for ensuring equal opportunities in learning by tailoring teaching to each student's developmental level, pace, style and interests (Corcoran et al., 2019). Differentiated instruction involves reorganising activities, grouping, time, space and materials to create varied, challenging and motivating learning pathways in which differences are expected and valued, not tolerated as exceptions (Booth & Ainscow, 2011). To this end, learning activities must be relevant and authentic, engage students in exploration, questioning, application and reflection, and be supported by clear objectives, explicit expectations, anticipation of difficulties, and diverse resources and representations. Table 2 presents inclusive education as a transformative practice aimed at participation and belonging, emphasizing school responsibility, teacher agency, and differentiated instruction as central to equitable learning.

Table 2
Inclusive education as transformative practice

Dimension	Synthesis
1. Inclusion as belonging	Inclusion goes beyond physical placement and implies belonging, participation, and shared responsibility for each student's learning and development.
2. Inclusive school change	Inclusive schools reorganise their curricula and structures to respond to diversity, treating differences as assets that enrich learning and support social justice.
3. Progress and limits	Although inclusion has advanced, implementation remains uneven and marked by persistent structural and pedagogical challenges.
4. Key barriers	Common barriers include limited resources, insufficient teacher training, debates about special schools, and weak transitions to adulthood and the labour market.
5. Teacher role	Teachers are central because their knowledge, beliefs, and values shape classroom practice and the lived experience of inclusion.
6. Attitudes and efficacy	Positive attitudes support collaboration, flexibility, and broader teaching strategies, whereas negative attitudes and low self-efficacy may lead to covert segregation.
7. Teacher preparedness	Many teachers still report feeling overloaded, under-resourced, and insufficiently prepared to teach diverse learners in large classes.
8. Differentiated instruction	Differentiated instruction is essential for equity because it adapts teaching to students' developmental level, pace, interests, and learning style.
9. Classroom implementation	Effective inclusion requires flexible grouping, time, space, materials, and activities that support diversity and value it.
10. Learning design	Learning tasks should be relevant, authentic, and challenging, with clear objectives, explicit expectations, and diverse resources and representations.

Inclusive education is best understood as a transformative practice that goes beyond physical access to ensure participation, belonging, and full educational engagement. It requires schools to reorganise curriculum, pedagogy, and structure in ways that value diversity and promote social justice. Teachers are central to this process, and differentiated instruction is a key strategy for turning inclusive principles into meaningful classroom practice.

Teacher training and professional development

Teacher training is crucial for helping practitioners to recognise and manage heterogeneous classes (Ferreira & Reis-Jorge, 2022). Effective teaching programmes should address how to build inclusive mindsets grounded in human rights and social justice, while also addressing philosophical, cultural, emotional and ethical dimensions of inclusion (Forlin & Chambers, 2011). Equipping teachers with practical tools for Universal Design for Learning, differentiated instruction, adaptive assessment, and

collaborative problem-solving should be a feature of all continuous teacher training (Lenz et al., 2004).

Literature also emphasises critical reflection on teachers' personal beliefs and biases to promote strength-based perspectives (Lauermann & König, 2016), and to integrate social and emotional learning to create belonging and positive relationships in classrooms (Florian et al., 2017). Positioning teachers as reflective practitioners and, potentially, researchers of their own practice, encourages them not only to adjust classroom strategies but also to challenge structural and policy barriers, allowing lifelong professional growth (Schleicher, 2018). Teacher education is considered essential for preparing educators for the complex and evolving realities of inclusive education (Forlin & Chambers, 2011; Moscato & Pedone, 2024).

Inclusive education is best understood as an ongoing, contested process rather than a stable product or checklist to be completed (Jardinez & Natividad, 2024). Progress, therefore, depends on sustained investment in teacher development, collaborative school cultures, more flexible curricula and assessment, and open dialogue among all participants to negotiate tensions and refine inclusive principles in context. Table 3 This table summarises teacher training and professional development as essential conditions for inclusive education, emphasising both pedagogical competence and reflective, value-based practice.

Table 3
Teacher training and professional development as conditions for inclusive education

Dimension	Implications for inclusive practice
1. Teacher preparation	Initial and continuous teacher education should prepare educators to work with diversity as a normal feature of schooling.
2. Inclusive mindset	Training should address the philosophical, cultural, emotional, and ethical dimensions of inclusion, grounded in human rights and social justice.
3. Pedagogical tools	Professional learning should connect conceptual understanding with practical strategies such as Universal Design for Learning, differentiated instruction, adaptive assessment, and collaborative problem-solving.
4. Critical reflection	Reflective tasks, mentoring, and peer discussion can help teachers examine their beliefs, assumptions, and biases and adopt a strength-based perspective.
5. Social and emotional learning	Teachers need relational skills that support classroom climate, empathy, and student connection, fostering belonging and positive relationships.
6. Reflective practitioner role	Positioning teachers as reflective practitioners, and sometimes researchers of their own practice, encourages continuous adjustment of teaching and deeper engagement with inclusion.
7. Structural awareness	Teachers should be prepared to identify and challenge structural constraints, not only to adapt instruction at the classroom level.
8. Ongoing development	Sustained professional growth depends on lifelong learning, collaboration, and continuous reflection, since inclusive education is an ongoing and contested process.
9. School support	Schools should create collaborative cultures, flexible curricula, and open dialogue so teachers can engage in shared problem-solving and refine inclusive practices.

Key links between well-being and inclusion

Teacher well-being and inclusive education are deeply interconnected (Gupta, 2020; Koenig et al., 2018). Inclusive practices and demands can increase stress and burnout, but when teachers are well-prepared and supported, inclusive efforts can also enhance professional satisfaction and sense of purpose (Jardínez & Natividad, 2024). Fostering teacher well-being is therefore a precondition for high-quality inclusive education, not an optional add-on (Rae et al., 2017).

Inclusive classrooms often mean increased workload and complex processes of differentiation and behaviour support, which are consistently associated with higher stress, burnout, and emotional

exhaustion when support is limited (Çetinkaya, 2024; Corcoran et al., 2019). Teacher attitudes toward inclusion and feelings of self-efficacy are strongly related to their mental well-being (Rae et al., 2017); positive attitudes and confidence correlate with higher well-being and more successful inclusive practices (Donath et al., 2023; Vimala, 2023). Teacher well-being shapes classroom interactions and climate (Collie et al., 2024), which, in turn, affects students' social, emotional, and academic development in inclusive settings (Florian et al., 2017).

Several risks are associated with teacher well-being in inclusive settings: a) workload and role demand: planning individualised supports, adapting materials and managing diverse behavioural and learning needs substantially increases time pressure and cognitive load (Sawatske et al., 2024). b) insufficient preparation and resources: many teachers report feeling under-trained and under-resourced for inclusive education, which undermines self-efficacy and elevates anxiety and frustration (Herman et al., 2020). c) limited collaboration and isolation: weak collaboration with special education staff, aides, and leadership leaves teachers feeling alone with complex problems, contributing to burnout (Corcoran et al., 2019).

There are also some opportunities and protective factors that teachers can rely on. a) professional purpose and fulfilment: when teachers feel competent and supported, inclusive practice is linked with greater job satisfaction, a stronger sense of accomplishment and alignment with professional values of equity and social justice (Rae et al., 2017). b) positive school climate: supportive leadership, collegial relationships and an inclusive school culture protect teacher mental health and are associated with better outcomes for students with and without additional needs (Collie et al., 2024).

Triad of teacher well-being, professional development, and inclusive education

Several major international frameworks have addressed the three dimensions in question, but typically from complementary rather than unified perspectives, which helps to clarify the gap this review seeks to fill. Taken together, these international references provide strong legitimisation for the importance of teacher well-being, robust professional development, and inclusive education as pillars of contemporary schooling: 1. psychological and organisational lenses (OECD occupational well-being framework) (OECD, 2025); 2. rights-based and curricular lenses (UNESCO inclusive education guidance) (UNESCO, 2017); 3. capacity-building and professional-learning lenses (OECD professional development and competency frameworks) (OECD, 2022).

Teacher well-being, professional development, and inclusive education can be understood as a mutually reinforcing triad: each one is both a condition for and an outcome of the others. When aligned, this triad supports sustainable teaching, higher-quality learning environments, and more equitable educational outcomes. Training that most improves teacher confidence in inclusive classrooms is sustained, practice-oriented, and explicitly focused on inclusion, behaviour, and diversity rather than on generic pedagogy (Lenz et al., 2004; Schleicher, 2018). The strongest effects come when coursework is combined with real or simulated classroom practice, feedback, and collaboration structures that mirror the complexity of inclusive settings (Ferreira, 2022a). Programmes that include behaviour support, functional assessment, and positive behaviour interventions particularly strengthen teachers' sense that they can manage challenging situations in diverse classes (Moscato & Pedone, 2024). Training that embeds micro-teaching, classroom simulations, and supervised practicum in inclusive classrooms leads to greater confidence than lecture-based formats alone (Tuerah, 2025).

Professional learning that trains teachers to work in co-teaching models (general–special education partnerships, classroom aides, multidisciplinary teams) reduces feelings of isolation, promotes a sense of belonging and well-being (Sawatske et al., 2024) and increases confidence in handling diverse needs (Donath et al., 2023). Such training typically includes guided self-reflection on identity and bias, strategies for inclusive curriculum representation, and dialogic approaches to sensitive topics, all

of which support more assured classroom decision-making (Forlin & Chambers, 2011; Kromkhan, 2026).

Regular, sustained professional learning communities, coaching, and short cycles of inquiry into inclusive practice are more effective for confidence than one-off workshops (Ferreira, 2022b). Contextualised professional development that uses teachers' own students, data, and case discussions helps them see tangible impact, reinforcing self-efficacy and willingness to experiment with inclusive strategies (Vimala, 2023).

Teacher well-being both shapes and is shaped by professional development and inclusive education; each pairing can create either virtuous or vicious cycles within schools. Table 4 presents a synthesis focused on the triad of teacher well-being, professional development, and inclusive education.

Table 4
Triad of teacher well-being, professional development, and inclusive education

Analytical focus	Synthesis from the literature and main implications
a) Teacher well-being	Teacher well-being is understood as a dynamic balance between professional demands and personal resources, shaped by emotional, cognitive, and relational dimensions. It is not a separate outcome; it conditions teachers' capacity to teach, adapt, collaborate, and sustain inclusive practice.
b) Professional development	Professional development is most effective when it is continuous, reflective, and grounded in inclusive pedagogy. It strengthens teachers' competence and confidence, which in turn supports both well-being and inclusive action.
c) Inclusive education	Inclusive education is framed as participation, belonging, and shared responsibility rather than mere placement, requiring flexible pedagogy and organization. It depends on teachers who are both professionally prepared and emotionally supported.
d) Interdependence of the triad	The literature suggests that the three dimensions are inseparable: well-being sustains engagement in development, development equips teachers for inclusion, and inclusive environments reinforce meaning, efficacy, and commitment. School improvement should therefore treat them as a single system rather than isolated initiatives.
e) School-level conditions	Collaborative cultures, flexible curricula, adequate resources, and supportive leadership are key enabling conditions for the triad to function well. Structural support is necessary to translate the triad into sustainable practice.
f) Critical conclusion	A review of the literature indicates that teacher well-being, professional development, and inclusive education are mutually reinforcing and should be addressed together in research, policy, and practice. Integrated approaches are more likely to improve teacher sustainability, instructional quality, and student participation.

The three dimensions, teacher well-being, professional development, and inclusive education, either reinforce or undermine each other depending on macro, meso, and micro-level conditions: a) At the system/policy level, coherent, resourced inclusion reforms aligned with teacher-centred professional learning strategies promote synergy. b) At the school level, whole-school approaches that blend participatory leadership, collaborative work cultures, and time-protected professional learning spaces facilitate integration. c) At the classroom level, practice-oriented support that connects reflection, feedback, and co-teaching to concrete inclusive strategies strengthens the alignment between teachers lived experience and policy goals.

Professional learning communities that share values and vision, assume collective responsibility, and engage in cooperative, reflective learning are portrayed as protective environments that can counter emotional exhaustion and foster flourishing teachers (Gupta, 2020). Progress in inclusive education, therefore, depends on sustained investment in teacher well-being and professional development, supported by collaborative school cultures, more flexible curricula and assessment, and open dialogue among all educational agents.

At the same time, the literature suggests that inclusive education is experienced by teachers in ambivalent and sometimes contradictory ways. On the one hand, it can deepen professional purpose by aligning teaching with ethical commitments to equity, participation, and the recognition of learner

diversity. On the other hand, when inclusion is introduced without adequate staffing, specialist support, planning time, or professional learning, it may increase emotional labour, intensify workload, and heighten uncertainty about how to respond to diverse needs in ordinary classrooms. In these circumstances, inclusion risks being experienced less as a shared educational project and more as a demand placed on individual teachers to solve structural problems through personal effort and goodwill.

This tension is further shaped by broader system conditions; Policy pressures and accountability regimes may narrow the meaning of inclusion by encouraging compliance, measurable outputs, and risk management rather than sustained pedagogical transformation. Large class sizes, uneven resource distribution, limited access to specialist services, and weak institutional support all make it harder for teachers to differentiate instruction, collaborate meaningfully, and maintain a sense of efficacy. Leadership is therefore pivotal, not simply in an administrative sense, but as a relational and organisational force that can either reproduce fragmentation or build the conditions for collective responsibility. When school leaders protect time for collaboration, encourage shared problem-solving, and legitimise emotional as well as pedagogical support, they help transform inclusion from an individual burden into a school-wide commitment. In that sense, inclusive education depends not only on teacher values and skills, but also on the institutional arrangements that sustain them.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This review has shown that teacher well-being, professional development, and inclusive education are not separate concerns but interdependent conditions for sustainable and equitable schooling. The literature suggests that inclusion is strengthened when teachers are professionally prepared, emotionally supported, and able to work within collaborative school environments that recognise diversity as a shared responsibility (Collie et al., 2012; Donath et al., 2023; Forlin & Chambers, 2011). At the same time, the review has shown that inclusive reforms can fail when they are implemented as isolated initiatives without attention to workload, resources, leadership, and institutional structures. The central implication is that inclusive education should be understood as a systemic project rather than a classroom-level adjustment (Cherkowski & Walker, 2018; Lauermann & Konig, 2016).

Policy implications

Policy should move beyond symbolic commitments to inclusion and address the material and organisational conditions required for implementation. This includes aligning inclusive mandates with realistic staffing, workload, funding, and support structures, as well as reducing accountability pressures that narrow pedagogical autonomy. Policies should also explicitly recognise teacher well-being as part of educational quality rather than as an optional or private concern. When inclusion is treated as a policy priority, it must be accompanied by the resources and coherence needed to make it sustainable (Moscato & Pedone, 2024).

School leadership

School leaders play a decisive role in translating inclusive policy into everyday practice. Their responsibility is not limited to administrative coordination; it includes building trust, protecting time for collaboration, and fostering a school culture in which teachers do not carry inclusion alone. Leadership should encourage shared problem-solving, collegial dialogue, and distributed responsibility for diverse learners (Neves et al., 2023). In this sense, effective leadership creates the organisational conditions in which teachers can sustain both well-being and inclusive practice.

Teacher education

Initial teacher education should prepare future teachers to understand inclusion as a core principle of schooling, not as an additional speciality (OECD, 2022). Programmes should integrate inclusive values, human rights perspectives, Universal Design for Learning, differentiated instruction, and collaborative work with families and professionals. Teacher education should also address emotional preparedness, reflective practice, and the management of professional uncertainty in diverse classrooms. Preparing teachers for inclusion therefore requires both conceptual depth and practical readiness (Ainscow, 2020).

Professional development

Professional development should be continuous, collaborative, and rooted in the real dilemmas of inclusive practice. One-off workshops are unlikely to produce lasting change unless they are followed by sustained school-based support, coaching, peer learning, and opportunities for reflection. Effective professional development should strengthen both pedagogical competence and teacher agency, while also helping educators manage the emotional demands of inclusion. In this way, professional learning can function as a protective and enabling condition for inclusive schooling.

Future research

Future research should examine more closely how structural conditions shape the relationship between teacher well-being, professional learning, and inclusive education across different contexts. More work is needed on how policies are experienced in schools, how leadership practices affect teacher sustainability, and which professional development models best support inclusive teaching without increasing overload. Comparative and longitudinal studies would be especially valuable for showing how these relationships evolve over time and across educational systems. Research should also attend more directly to teachers lived experiences of inclusion as both a source of meaning and a source of strain.

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