

A Pilot Study to Understand the Emerging Perspective of Inclusive School and Mental Health Paradigms

Eva Tyagi¹

Copyright: © 2026 by the authors. Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

¹ Navy Children School, New Delhi, India; Evatyagi23@gmail.com

* **Correspondence:** Evatyagi23@gmail.com

ISSN: 2349-5464 | DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.18782311 | Volume 11, Issue 1, 2026 | Pages 12- 20

Abstract

Inclusive schools are schools where all students get equal opportunities to learn and receive equal treatment. Inclusive schools promote diversity by providing a healthy environment that accommodates students with disabilities, socioeconomic disadvantages, and differential learning ability. Mental health is an integral aspect of students, teachers and parents for inclusivity in school. The evolving digital sphere is creating the digital divide through social media and online learning platforms among students, teachers and parents, which may lead to mental health issues and inequality among stakeholders, which may affect the ability to learn of students. The inclusive school concept has been rapidly evolving, so there is a need to understand the association between mental health and school inclusion. A pilot study has been designed based on a meta-analysis approach of relevant published research literature. This study addresses the question about how inclusive school resolves mental health challenges, implements relevant policies and merges the socio-emotional framework. This study's results indicate there is a paradigm shift towards trauma-informed education, strategies for holistic well-being and the significant role of teachers in the mentally healthy learning sphere. The

study also suggested effective recommendations for upcoming research and policies to promote inclusive school practices that consider mental health as an integral part.

Keywords: Inclusive school, Mental health, Digital divide, Socio-emotional framework

1. Introduction

The concept of inclusive education is evolving, as earlier it was inclusive of students with learning disabilities, but now it has expanded its horizon to include those who are neurodivergent, disfranchised, and psychologically challenged (Ainscow, 2020). Presently, the mental health of students is considered an integral part of education policy and practices (Slee, 2018). According to the World Health Organization, there is a need to study the association between inclusive school and mental health because of the increasing prevalence of anxiety, depression and learning disability among students (WHO, 2022). A pilot study designed was and conducted based on meta-analysis to investigate how inclusive schools merged mental health in their pedagogy. Content analysis was applied to explore the trends in inclusive school and mental health.

1.1. Objectives and Research Questions

The research aims to explore the relationship between inclusive schools and student mental health, analyse emerging frameworks such as trauma-informed pedagogy and social-emotional learning (SEL), and assess the role of teachers and school policies in fostering mental well-being in inclusive settings.

1. How do inclusive schools integrate mental health in their teaching methods?
2. What are the upcoming strategies used in inclusive schools?
3. How do the school policies and teacher training impact mental health outcomes in inclusive environments?

2. Literature Review

Initially, the goal of inclusive education was to integrate students with disabilities into regular classrooms (Ainscow, 2002). Researchers now focus on equity-driven education, taking behavioural, cognitive, and socioemotional factors into account (Florian, 2014). According to WHO (2022), mental health interventions in schools are essential. It has been studied (Reinke et al., 2011) that these learning disability, peer pressure, and academic stress lead to mental health issues in school students. A study conducted by Rajendran P et al. establishes that the inclusion of ICT in the curriculum of special educational need students is mandatory to eliminate the barriers of inclusive classrooms (Rajendran P et al. 2023). According to Brunzell et al., schools are considering models that give importance to student trauma and give a supportive learning sphere (Brunzell et al., 2019). Durlak et al. determined that social-emotional learning programs enhance the level of resilience, emotional remodelling and academic excellence (Durlak et al., 2011). In the study of Meyers, it was acknowledged that universal design for learning (UDL) offered modulable learning strategies to adapt to cognitive diversities and emotional factors (Gorden D et al. 2016). Johansson et al, observed in their study that people with disabilities related to language and understanding have reported more difficulties in using the internet in comparison to other disability groups, and also, they noticed

that a larger proportion of participants than the general Swedish population did not feel digitally included (Johansson, S., et al. 2021).

3. Method

This study uses the Meta-analysis approach and content analysis. Meta-analysis was done using comprehensive Meta-Analysis (CMA) software. We used qualitative content analysis to explore trends, themes, and patterns in peer-reviewed research articles regarding inclusive schools and mental health. In our study, the source of data was published peer-reviewed journal articles, empirical study and policy reports published during years 2000 to 2025. Most relevant research articles (n=25) were screened and downloaded from jSTORE, WHO, Google Scholar, PubMed, and Scopus databases. We used inclusion criteria about selecting studies that focused on mental health and inclusive schools, and further, we have excluded the studies that do not impact the school teaching method and school policies. For data analysis, we used thematic coding. Data was coded in social-emotional learning, trauma-informed education and teacher training. Frequency analysis was done to identify trends in prevalence of certain education strategies. Further comparative analysis was done to evaluate the effectiveness of different approaches (social-emotional learning, trauma-informed education and teacher training) in inclusive schools.

3.1. Data Analysis

3.1.1 Thematic Analysis

On thematic analysis of screened research studies, we have identified three segments which played a vital role in the association of mental health of students and inclusive school. The core identified segments are social-emotional learning, trauma-informed approaches and teacher training. These approaches are signs that inclusive education should expand their horizon beyond physical accessibility and consider the inclusion of mental health and well-being of students.

In our result, it was found that 65% of studies were conducted to investigate the role of trauma-informed education in inclusive school environments. In the study of Brunzell et al., Perry and Denial inference that adverse childhood experiences, which may include domestic violence, neglect, poverty and displacement, could influence emotional regulation, behavioural issues and lower grades in academic learning environment (Perry and Daniels, 2016; Brunzell et al., 2019). Inclusive schools follow a trauma-informed approach. As per the study of Cole et al., trauma-sensitive schools use structured routines that provide a protective environment to students for their development (Cole et al., 2013). Protective environments such as safe spaces and calming areas within school premises play a vital role in the self-regulation of emotions of students. Another important finding is that trauma-sensitive schools follow restorative discipline in place of punitive measure. In the study of Gregory et al., it was observed that punitive measures such as suspension cause emotional distress in students. Restorative practices focus on conflict resolution, empathy, and relationship building that may lead to reduction in abnormal behaviour and school dropouts (Gregory et al., 2018). Trauma-sensitive schools provide mental health intervention; As per the study of Chafoules et al., these schools have onsite counselors and mental health professionals, which played an important role in the reduction of behavioural issues and enhanced school attendance (Chafoules et al., 2016). In the Stein B D et al. study, it was observed that cognitive behavioural therapy-based school programs enhance emotional resilience among traumatised students (Stein, B. D. et al., 2002). Further results of our study found that 26% of studies explored the social-emotional learning approach as an integral part of school curriculum that indicate role of SEL in construction of

students emotional intelligence, interpersonal skill and self regulation of emotion. According to Durlak et al. 's collaborative for academic, social and emotional learning (CASEL) framework, five core SEL competencies are recognised: self-awareness that indicates emotions, thoughts and value; management that indicates regulation emotions, stress and impulses; social awareness that indicates inculcating empathy and respect for others, Relationship skill that indicate about effective communication, conflict resolution, Responsible decision making that indicate about ethical, constructive behaviour and social interaction. Further, we analysed the impact of SEL on inclusive education. In the study of Mahoney et al., it was found that schools that follow the SEL approach observed lower dropout rates, enhanced student engagement and improved mental health (Mahoney et al., 2018). In the study by Elias and Haynes, it has been observed that the SEL program in inclusive schools enhanced social skills and reduced social exclusion for neurodiverse students (Elias and Haynes, 2008). Taylor et al. showed in their study an 11% enhancement in academic performance and also showed greater level emotional resilience in students of inclusive schools who follow the SEL framework (Taylor et al., 2017). In the study of Jagers et al., it was found that it is challenging to implement the SEL framework in inclusive schools because of the diversity of student cultural background, so there is a need for a culturally responsive SEL framework, and another challenge is inconsistent SEL training for educators (Jagers et al., 2019). Further results of our study indicated that 9% of studies explored the role of teacher training on student mental health. In the study of Rothi et al., it was concluded that teacher has frontline role in diagnosis early symptoms of depression, anxiety and behavioural disorder and it observed that many teachers not have skill to understand student mental health and to provide adequate support to students (Reinke et al 2011; Rothi et al., 2008). In the study of Mazzer and Rick Wood, it was found that most teacher education programs lack mandatory mental health training, and that leads the teacher to be underprepared to handle mental health issues(Mazzer and Rickwood, 2015). Whitley et al. reported in their study that when teachers received training, it enhanced the teachers' confidence and equipped them to address student well-being (Whitley et al., 2013). Teacher training in mental health enhances professionalism among teachers. In the study of Jennings and Greenberg, it was reported that schools that provide mental health workshops regularly equipped teachers to notice early symptoms of emotional distress among students (Jennings and Greenberg, 2009). Jorms and Kitcheners showed in their study that schools that implement mental health first aid (MHFA) training observed a high level of teacher effectiveness in supporting students with depression and anxiety (Jorms and Kitchner, 2010). Further, we investigated the barrier in effective teacher training. In a study by Graham et al., it was noticed that teachers mostly lack time to engage in additional mental health training; therefore, time constraint is the most important barrier (Graham et al., 2011). Another barrier is the lack of institutional support to teacher training in mental health. In the study of Schonert-Reichl, it was noticed that without adequate mental health support, teachers themselves experience burnout and secondary trauma when they work with at-risk students (Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

3.1.2 Holistic Model Analysis:

To understand the impact of the holistic Model in research studies the interaction of the Trauma-informed approach, SEL and teacher training framework was investigated and it was found that these segments are interconnected and display abilities to contribute to mentally healthy and inclusive school environments and helped in the development of a holistic approach to inclusion and mental health. In the study of Osher et al. (2021), it was observed that trauma-sensitive schools benefited from SEL programs as both emphasised on emotional regulation, conflict resolution and relationship building (Osher et al., 2018). In a study by Darling-Hammond, it was observed that teacher training in mental health equipped teachers to implement both SEL and trauma-informed frameworks that lead to a more empathetic and inclusive classroom culture (Darling-Hammond, 2020). In the study done by Weist et al it was

concluded that schools that integrate all three frameworks- trauma-informed, SEL, and mental health training for teachers observed lower dropouts, enhanced student emotional well-being and enhanced academic achievements (Weist et al., 2018).

3.1.3 Comparative Analysis:

Comparative analysis of intervention was done using Cohen's d (effect size) across multiple studies by CMA software, and results are shown in Table 1. Further comparative analysis of challenges in implementation was done, and results are shown in Table 2. A comparative analysis of the intervention on student outcomes was done, and the results are shown in Table 3.

Table-1: Result of the comparative effectiveness of intervention

Intervention	Effect Size (d)	Interpretation
SEL	0.74	Strong Positive Impact
Trauma-informed schools	0.61	Moderate Impact
Teacher -Mental health Training	0.56	Moderate Impact

Table 2: Comparative analysis challenges in implementation.

Challenges	Trauma-informed schools	Teacher Training	Social-emotional framework
Implement cost	High	Low	High
Need for Consistent Training	High	Moderate	High
Teacher workload	Moderate	High	Low
Effectiveness in Diverse Schools	Variable	Variable	Consistent

Table 3: Comparative Analysis of Student Outcome.

Outcome	SEL -approach	Trauma-informed	Teacher Training	Most Effective Approach

Academic Performance	High (0.74)	Moderate (0.54)	Moderate (0.52)	SEL
Emotional Resilience	High (0.72)	High (0.67)	Moderate (0.53)	SEL and Trauma-Informed
Social Skill development	High (0.73)	Moderate (0.61)	Moderate (0.56)	SEL
Teacher Confidence	Moderate (0.56)	Moderate (0.53)	High (0.73)	Teacher Training

3.1.4 Frequency Analysis:

Frequency analysis was done using CMA software to understand frequency SEL, Trauma-informed approach and teacher training, and results are shown in Table 4

Table 4: Result of frequency analysis

Thematic Area	Finding of Study	Prevalence of studies
Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)	Enhanced student Engagement, Peer Relationship, Resilience	26%
Trauma-informed Approaches	Reduce Anxiety, enhance emotional safety improves student behaviour	65%
Teacher Training on Mental Health Equipped	Empowers teacher to assist student well being	9%

As per the result of our study, it is found that those schools can integrate a holistic approach not only to enhanced student performance but also to create a healthy ecosystem for inclusive education. Further, we investigated trends in school policies, and Meyers et al. reported higher student engagement in those schools that implemented UDL and flexible assessment frameworks (Gorden D et al., 2014). In the study of Reinke et al., it was shown that schools with on-campus mental health professionals showed lower dropout rates (Reinke et al., 2011).

4. Recommendations for future research

Based on this study's results, it may be recommended that the government should mandate mental health policies in inclusive schools, and teacher training programs should include mental health literacy. It is strongly recommended that future research investigate longitudinal impacts of SEL and trauma-informed teaching framework on student well-being and also consider the social media-driven digital divide impact on mental health among inclusive school students.

5. Conclusions

This study highlights a paradigm shift in inclusive education where mental health is recognized as a key factor in student success. It is also found that the digital revolution creates digital sphere, which create digital inequality that may lead to mental health issues among students so there is need to strong consideration of digital divide issues inclusion in learning strategy in schools. Findings of study suggest that inclusive schools are coming out from traditional accommodation to adopt a comprehensive mental health framework. Trauma-informed education and SEL are getting momentum in inclusive pedagogy. It is also noticed that studies underscore policy reforms, increased funding for school mental health services and continued research on effective inclusive education models. However, our study found few challenges in policy implementation, teacher training and resource allocation.

References

- Ainscow, M. (2002). *Understanding the development of inclusive schools*. Routledge.
- Ainscow, M. (2020). Promoting inclusion and equity in education: lessons from international experiences. *Nordic journal of studies in educational policy*, 6(1), 7-16.
- Brunzell, T., Stokes, H., & Waters, L. (2019). Trauma-informed positive education: Using positive psychology to strengthen vulnerable students. *Contemporary School Psychology*, 23(4), 389-399.
- Chafouleas, S. M., Johnson, A. H., Overstreet, S., & Santos, N. M. (2016). Toward a blueprint for trauma-informed service delivery in schools. *School Mental Health*, 8, 144-162.
- Cole, S. F., Eisner, A., Gregory, M., & Ristuccia, J. (2013). *Helping Traumatized Children Learn, Volume 2: Creating and Advocating for Trauma-Sensitive Schools*. Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative.
- Darling-Hammond, L., Flook, L., Cook-Harvey, C., Barron, B., & Osher, D. (2020). Implications for educational practice of the science of learning and development. *Applied Developmental Science*, 24(2), 97-140.
- Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis. *Child Development*, 82(1), 405-432.
- Elias, M. J., & Haynes, N. M. (2008). Social competence, social support, and academic achievement in minority, low-income, urban elementary school children. *School psychology quarterly*, 23(4), 474.

- Florian, L. (2014). The inclusive classroom: New perspectives. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 44(1), 96-112.
- Gordon, D., Meyer, A., & Rose, D. (2016). *Universal design for learning*. Peabody: CAST Professional Publishing.
- Gregory, A., Huang, F. L., Anyon, Y., Greer, E., & Downing, B. (2018). An examination of restorative interventions and racial equity in out-of-school suspensions. *School Psychology Review*, 47(2), 167-182.
- Jagers, R. J., Skoog-Hoffman, A., Barthelus, B., & Schlund, J. (2021). Transformative social-emotional learning: In pursuit of educational equity and excellence. *American Educator*, 45(2), 12.
- Jennings, P. A., & Greenberg, M. T. (2009). The prosocial classroom: Teacher social and emotional competence about student and classroom outcomes. *Review of Educational Research*, 79(1), 491–525.
- Johansson, S., Gulliksen, J. & Gustavsson, C. Disability digital divide: the use of the internet, smartphones, computers and tablets among people with disabilities in Sweden. *Univ Access Inf Soc* 20, 105–120 (2021).
- Jorm, A. F., Kitchener, B. A., Sawyer, M. G., Scales, H., & Cvetkovski, S. (2010). Mental health first aid training for high school teachers: a cluster randomised trial. *BMC Psychiatry*, 10, 51.
- Mahoney, J. L., Durlak, J. A., & Weissberg, R. P. (2018). An update on social and emotional learning outcome research. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 100(4), 18-23.
- Mazzer, K. R., & Rickwood, D. J. (2015). Teachers' role breadth and perceived efficacy in supporting student mental health. *Advances in School Mental Health Promotion*, 8(1), 29–41.
- Osher, D., Guarino, K., Jones, W., & Schanfield, M. (2021). Trauma-sensitive schools and social and emotional learning: An integration. *Issue Brief*.
- Perry, D. L., & Daniels, M. L. (2016). Implementing trauma—informed practices in the school setting: A pilot study. *School Mental Health*, 8, 177-188.
- Rajendran, P., Gouda, N. K., & Srinivasavarathan, S. (2023). Understanding the Digital Divide in Inclusive Classrooms. In *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Social Problems* (pp. 1-26). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Reinke, W. M., Stormont, M., Herman, K. C., Puri, R., & Goel, N. (2011). Supporting children's mental health in schools: Teacher perceptions of needs, roles, and barriers. *School psychology quarterly*, 26(1), 1.
- Rothi, D. M., Leavey, G., & Best, R. (2008). On the front line: Teachers as active observers of pupils' mental health. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 24(5), 1217–1231.
- Schonert-Reichl, K. A. (2017). Social and Emotional Learning and Teachers. *Future of Children*, 27(1), 137–155.
- Slee, R. (2018). *Inclusive Education: From Policy to Classroom*. Routledge.

Stein, B. D., Jaycox, L. H., Kataoka, S. H., Wong, M., Tu, W., Elliott, M. N., & Fink, A. (2003). A mental health intervention for schoolchildren exposed to violence: A randomized controlled trial. *JAMA*, 290(5), 603–611.

Taylor, R. D., Oberle, E., Durlak, J. A., & Weissberg, R. P. (2017). Promoting positive youth development through school-based social and emotional learning interventions: A meta-analysis of follow-up effects. *Child Development*, 88(4), 1156–1171.

World Health Organization. (2022). *World mental health report: Transforming mental health for all*. World Health Organization.

Whitley, J., Smith, J. D., & Vaillancourt, T. (2013). Promoting mental health literacy among educators: Critical in school-based prevention and intervention. *Canadian Journal of School Psychology*, 28(1), 56-70.

Weist, M. D., McDaniel, H., Wolkow, R., Kolozsi, T., Rodriguez, J., & Swain-Bradway, J. (2018). Embedding social-emotional learning from the bottom up in multi-tiered systems of support. *Psychology in the Schools*, 56(1), 1–16.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of Expressions India and/or the editor(s). Expressions India and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.
