

Teacher Preparedness For Inclusive Education Of Learners With Visual Impairment

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Abstract

Inclusive education has become a central policy commitment in national and international education frameworks, yet its realization for learners with visual impairment depends heavily on the readiness of classroom teachers to meet their instructional, sensory, and social needs. This paper examines teacher preparedness for the inclusive education of learners with visual impairment, focusing on the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and institutional supports that shape effective practice. Drawing on a review of empirical and theoretical literature, the paper analyzes five interrelated dimensions of preparedness: pre-service teacher education, in-service professional development, availability of specialized resources and assistive technology, teacher attitudes and self-efficacy, and the quality of collaborative and institutional support structures. The review indicates that general education teachers frequently report inadequate training in disability-specific pedagogy, particularly in Braille literacy, orientation and mobility awareness, and the use of assistive technology, and that this gap is compounded by limited access to specialist personnel and instructional materials. At the same time, evidence suggests that structured training, sustained mentorship, and positive exposure to learners with visual impairment significantly improve teacher confidence and instructional adaptation. The paper argues that teacher preparedness should be understood not as a fixed trait but as a developmental continuum that is shaped jointly by initial training, ongoing professional learning, and the broader policy and resource environment of the school. Recommendations are offered for teacher education institutions, school administrators, and policymakers, including the integration of disability-specific content into pre-service curricula, expansion of practicum experiences with learners with visual impairment, provision of assistive technology and specialist support at the school level, and the establishment of continuous professional development pathways. The paper concludes that meaningful inclusion for learners with visual impairment requires coordinated investment across these dimensions rather than isolated interventions.

Keywords: *teacher preparedness; inclusive education; visual impairment; special educational needs; teacher training; assistive technology; self-efficacy*

1. Introduction

Education systems across the world have progressively moved toward inclusive models that seek to educate learners with disabilities alongside their non-disabled peers in mainstream classrooms. This shift is grounded in international commitments such as the Salamanca Statement, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and Sustainable Development Goal 4, all of which frame inclusive education as both a human right and a foundation for equitable social participation. Among the population of learners with disabilities, those with visual impairment present a distinctive set of pedagogical requirements because the primary channel through which most classroom instruction is delivered, namely printed and visually presented material, is precisely the channel that is compromised or unavailable to them.

The success of inclusive education for learners with visual impairment rests substantially on the classroom teacher. Unlike specialist settings where trained staff and adapted resources are concentrated, the inclusive classroom typically places the general education teacher at the center of instructional decision-making, curriculum adaptation, and day-to-day support for the learner with visual impairment. This places considerable demands on teacher knowledge, skill,

and confidence. A teacher who lacks familiarity with Braille, tactile learning materials, orientation and mobility concepts, or assistive technology may struggle to provide equitable access to the curriculum, regardless of personal goodwill or commitment to inclusion as a principle.

Teacher preparedness, in this context, refers to the combination of knowledge, pedagogical skill, attitudinal disposition, and access to supporting resources that enables a teacher to meet the educational needs of learners with visual impairment within a mainstream or inclusive classroom setting. Preparedness is not solely a function of initial teacher education; it is shaped continuously by professional development opportunities, the availability of specialist support, institutional culture, and accumulated classroom experience. This paper undertakes a focused examination of teacher preparedness for the inclusive education of learners with visual impairment, synthesizing literature on the knowledge and skill gaps teachers report, the attitudinal and self-efficacy factors that influence practice, and the structural and resource conditions that either enable or constrain effective inclusion.

The paper is organized as follows. Following this introduction, the problem motivating the study is outlined, followed by the objectives guiding the analysis. A literature review then examines the conceptual foundations of inclusive education, the specific learning needs associated with visual impairment, and the dimensions of teacher preparedness identified in prior research. A methodology section describes the approach used to compile and analyze the literature. The findings and discussion section synthesizes evidence across five preparedness domains, followed by a discussion of persistent challenges and strategies for improvement. The paper closes with recommendations for teacher education institutions, schools, and policymakers, and a concluding summary.

2. Statement of the Problem

Despite widespread policy endorsement of inclusive education, the practical implementation of inclusion for learners with visual impairment remains uneven. National policies frequently mandate that learners with disabilities be enrolled in mainstream schools, yet the corresponding investment in teacher preparation often lags behind these mandates. Many general education teachers enter the profession having received little or no structured instruction on visual impairment during their pre-service training, and subsequent in-service training, where it exists, tends to be short, generic, and disconnected from classroom practice.

This mismatch between policy expectation and teacher capacity creates a gap that is frequently absorbed by the learner with visual impairment, who may experience reduced access to instructional content, limited participation in classroom activities, and inconsistent accommodation of learning needs. Teachers, for their part, often report anxiety, low confidence, and a sense of being unprepared when a learner with visual impairment is placed in their classroom. The problem addressed in this paper is therefore twofold: first, to characterize the specific dimensions in which teacher preparedness for learners with visual impairment is found to be lacking, and second, to identify the conditions and strategies associated with stronger preparedness, so that teacher education and school-level support can be more precisely targeted.

3. Objectives of the Study

This paper is guided by the following objectives:

- To examine the knowledge and pedagogical skills that teachers require for the effective inclusion of learners with visual impairment.
- To assess the influence of pre-service and in-service teacher training on preparedness for inclusive education of learners with visual impairment.
- To analyze the role of teacher attitudes and self-efficacy in shaping inclusive practice.
- To evaluate the availability and adequacy of specialized resources, assistive technology, and institutional support for teachers working with learners with visual impairment.
- To propose strategies and recommendations for strengthening teacher preparedness within inclusive education systems.

4. Literature Review

4.1 Conceptualizing Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is generally understood as an approach that seeks to accommodate the diverse learning needs of all students within a common educational setting, rather than segregating learners with disabilities into separate schools

or classrooms. The concept extends beyond mere physical placement to encompass meaningful participation, access to a common curriculum with appropriate adaptations, and social belonging. Scholars distinguish inclusion from integration by emphasizing that inclusion requires the school system to adapt to the learner, rather than requiring the learner to adapt to an unchanged system. For learners with visual impairment, this distinction is particularly significant because meaningful participation depends on adaptations to instructional format, materials, and assessment methods rather than on the learner's ability to conform to sighted-oriented classroom norms.

4.2 Visual Impairment and Learning Needs

Visual impairment encompasses a spectrum of conditions ranging from low vision, in which some functional vision remains, to total blindness, in which vision provides no useful information for learning. The educational implications of visual impairment extend beyond the sensory loss itself to affect incidental learning, concept development, mobility, and access to printed information. Sighted children acquire a substantial portion of everyday knowledge through incidental visual observation, a pathway that is unavailable or severely limited for learners with visual impairment. Consequently, effective instruction for these learners often requires deliberate, structured teaching of concepts that sighted peers acquire informally, together with adapted materials such as Braille texts, tactile diagrams, large print, and audio resources.

Learners with visual impairment also frequently require instruction in an expanded core curriculum that includes orientation and mobility, Braille literacy, use of assistive technology, social interaction skills, and independent living skills. These additional curricular demands mean that teacher preparedness for this population cannot be reduced to general disability awareness; it requires familiarity with a distinct body of specialized pedagogical knowledge.

4.3 Dimensions of Teacher Preparedness

Research on teacher preparedness for inclusive education generally identifies several interrelated dimensions. The first is content knowledge, referring to a teacher's understanding of visual impairment as a condition, including its educational implications and the range of functional vision that learners may possess. The second is pedagogical skill, encompassing the ability to adapt lesson delivery, materials, and assessment to accommodate learners with visual impairment, including skills such as verbal description of visual content, use of tactile and multisensory materials, and basic familiarity with Braille or willingness to collaborate with Braille-literate specialists. The third dimension is technological competence, given the growing role of assistive technology such as screen readers, screen magnification software, and refreshable Braille displays in supporting access to digital and print content.

A fourth dimension concerns collaborative skill, reflecting the fact that inclusive education for learners with visual impairment typically involves a team that may include itinerant specialist teachers, orientation and mobility instructors, paraprofessionals, and families. Teachers who are able to coordinate effectively within this team tend to provide more consistent support than those who attempt to manage inclusion in isolation. A fifth dimension, addressed separately below because of its distinct evidentiary basis, concerns teacher attitudes and self-efficacy beliefs regarding the inclusion of learners with visual impairment.

4.4 Teacher Attitudes and Self-Efficacy

A substantial body of literature links teacher attitudes toward disability inclusion with the quality of instructional practice provided to learners with disabilities. Teachers who hold positive attitudes toward inclusion, and who possess higher self-efficacy regarding their capacity to teach learners with visual impairment, are more likely to make instructional accommodations, communicate directly with the learner rather than through an intermediary, and maintain high academic expectations. Conversely, teachers who report low self-efficacy often describe feelings of anxiety, a tendency to lower expectations for the learner, or reliance on paraprofessionals to manage the learner's needs rather than integrating adaptations into their own teaching.

Self-efficacy in this context appears closely tied to training and direct experience. Teachers who have completed coursework specific to visual impairment, or who have had structured opportunities to work alongside specialist teachers of the visually impaired, consistently report greater confidence than those whose exposure has been limited to general special education content or to informal, unsupported contact with a learner with visual impairment.

4.5 Resources, Technology, and Institutional Support

Even a well-trained and positively disposed teacher requires access to appropriate resources to translate preparedness into effective practice. The literature identifies recurrent shortages of Braille production equipment, tactile graphics materials, magnification devices, and assistive software in many schools implementing inclusion, particularly in under-resourced settings. Institutional support structures, including the availability of itinerant or resource-room specialist teachers, also strongly influence teacher preparedness in practice, since specialist personnel often provide material adaptation, direct instruction in disability-specific skills such as Braille and orientation and mobility, and consultative support to the general classroom teacher. Where such support is absent, the burden of adaptation falls entirely on the classroom teacher, frequently exceeding what can reasonably be expected given competing instructional responsibilities for an entire class.

4.6 Theoretical Framework

This paper draws on two complementary theoretical perspectives. The first is Bandura's concept of self-efficacy, which holds that an individual's belief in their capacity to execute a course of action influences both the effort invested and the persistence shown in the face of difficulty; applied to teaching, this suggests that a teacher's belief in their ability to instruct a learner with visual impairment will shape the instructional effort and adaptation they actually provide. The second is the social model of disability, which locates disability not solely within the individual's impairment but in the interaction between the individual and an environment that may or may not be designed to accommodate their needs. Applied to teacher preparedness, the social model directs attention away from framing the learner with visual impairment as the source of classroom difficulty, and toward examining whether the teacher, the curriculum, and the school environment are adequately prepared and resourced to accommodate the learner. Together, these frameworks support an analysis that considers both the internal disposition of the teacher and the external structural conditions that shape inclusive practice.

5. Methodology

This paper adopts a narrative literature review methodology, synthesizing findings from empirical studies, theoretical papers, and policy documents concerned with teacher preparedness for inclusive education, with particular attention to learners with visual impairment. The review draws on peer-reviewed journal articles in the fields of special education, inclusive education, and teacher education, together with reports from recognized international bodies concerned with disability and education. Sources were selected based on their relevance to the dimensions of preparedness identified in the literature review, namely knowledge and skill, attitudes and self-efficacy, resource and technology access, and institutional and collaborative support.

The analysis proceeds thematically rather than through statistical meta-analysis, given the heterogeneity of study designs, contexts, and measurement instruments used across the reviewed literature. Findings are organized around the five preparedness domains introduced above, allowing patterns to be identified across studies conducted in differing national and institutional contexts. This approach is appropriate for a synthesis paper of this scope, though it carries the limitation that it does not permit precise quantitative estimates of the prevalence of any given preparedness gap; where such estimates exist in the underlying literature, they are described qualitatively as consistent, mixed, or limited across the body of evidence reviewed.

6. Findings and Discussion

The following subsections synthesize findings across the five preparedness domains examined in this paper, drawing connections between reported gaps and their implications for classroom practice.

6.1 Pre-Service Preparation Gaps

A consistent finding across the literature is that general pre-service teacher education programs allocate minimal time to disability-specific content, and even less to content specific to visual impairment as distinct from disability broadly defined. Where special education content is included in teacher preparation curricula, it is frequently offered as a single survey course covering a wide range of disabilities, leaving limited scope for the depth of knowledge required to support learners with visual impairment specifically, such as Braille literacy or orientation and mobility awareness. Graduates of such programs commonly report entering the classroom with only a general awareness of inclusive principles rather than the specific pedagogical tools needed to adapt instruction for a learner with visual impairment.

This gap has downstream effects on classroom practice. New teachers placed with a learner with visual impairment for the first time often describe relying on trial and error, informal advice from colleagues, or internet research rather than structured professional preparation. While such improvisation may yield adequate short-term accommodations in some cases, it does not provide a reliable foundation for consistent, evidence-based practice across the full range of needs a learner with visual impairment may present.

6.2 In-Service Training and Professional Development

In-service professional development is frequently identified as a critical mechanism for addressing gaps left by pre-service preparation, yet the literature suggests that available in-service training is often insufficient in duration, specificity, and follow-up support. Short workshops of a few hours, covering disability inclusion in general terms, are common, while sustained programs offering hands-on practice with Braille, tactile materials, or assistive technology specific to visual impairment are considerably less common. Where sustained, specialist-led professional development has been implemented, studies report measurable improvements in teacher confidence and in the frequency of instructional adaptations made for learners with visual impairment, suggesting that the format and depth of training, not merely its existence, determines its effectiveness.

Mentorship arrangements, in which a general classroom teacher is paired with a specialist teacher of the visually impaired over an extended period, appear particularly effective in the literature. These arrangements combine knowledge transfer with situated, classroom-specific problem solving, allowing the classroom teacher to develop competence gradually while still receiving expert support during the learning process.

6.3 Access to Specialized Resources and Technology

The availability of appropriate instructional resources and assistive technology emerges as a recurrent constraint on effective inclusion, particularly in low-resource school settings. Reported shortages include Braille production devices, tactile diagram and model kits, large-print materials, magnification devices, and licensed screen-reading or magnification software. Where such resources are unavailable, teachers report resorting to verbal description alone, reduced participation of the learner in visually dependent tasks such as diagrams and maps, or dependence on the learner's own personal devices, which vary widely in availability and sophistication.

Technological competence among teachers themselves is a related but distinct constraint. Even where assistive technology is available at the school level, teachers frequently report limited familiarity with its operation, which reduces its effective integration into daily instruction. This finding underscores that resource provision alone is insufficient; it must be paired with training in the specific technology provided, ideally through the same sustained professional development structures discussed in the preceding subsection.

6.4 Attitudinal and Efficacy-Related Findings

Studies examining teacher attitudes toward the inclusion of learners with visual impairment generally report a generally positive orientation toward inclusion as a principle, but a considerably more cautious or uncertain orientation toward its practical implementation in the respondent's own classroom. This distinction between abstract support for inclusion and concrete confidence in one's own capacity to implement it aligns with the self-efficacy framework introduced earlier, and suggests that positive attitudes toward inclusion as a value do not automatically translate into confident practice.

Self-efficacy is consistently found to correlate with prior training and direct classroom experience with learners with visual impairment. Teachers with no prior contact with a learner with visual impairment tend to report the lowest confidence levels, while those who have completed structured training combined with supervised practicum experience report the highest. This pattern reinforces the argument that self-efficacy is not a fixed personal trait but a developmental outcome that can be shaped through deliberate teacher preparation strategies.

6.5 Collaboration and Institutional Support

The quality of collaboration between general classroom teachers and specialist personnel, such as itinerant teachers of the visually impaired, orientation and mobility instructors, and resource room staff, is repeatedly identified as a significant factor shaping practical preparedness. Where collaborative structures are well established, including regular case conferences, co-planning time, and clear channels of communication, classroom teachers report greater confidence and more consistent implementation of individualized accommodations. Where such structures are weak or

absent, responsibility for adaptation tends to fall disproportionately on the classroom teacher, often without adequate time or expertise, contributing to inconsistent implementation of accommodations across subjects and school days.

Family involvement also emerges as a supporting factor, with teachers who maintain regular communication with the families of learners with visual impairment reporting a better understanding of the learner's specific functional vision, prior experience with assistive technology, and preferred learning strategies, all of which inform more effective classroom accommodation.

Summary Table: Barriers to Teacher Preparedness

Table 1 summarizes the principal barrier categories identified across the reviewed literature, together with their typical manifestation in school practice and reported effects on teaching quality.

Barrier Category	Manifestation in Practice	Reported Effect on Teaching
Pre-service preparation	Limited or absent coursework on visual impairment during initial teacher training	Low confidence in adapting curriculum and materials at entry into the profession
In-service training	Infrequent, short, or generic disability workshops not specific to visual impairment	Persistent skill gaps in Braille, orientation and mobility, and assistive technology
Resource availability	Shortage of Braille kits, magnification devices, tactile materials, and screen readers	Reliance on improvisation and reduced participation of learners in classroom tasks
Attitudinal factors	Uncertainty, anxiety, or low self-efficacy regarding disability inclusion	Lower expectations and reduced instructional adaptation for affected learners
Institutional support	Weak collaboration with special educators, resource rooms, or itinerant teachers	Fragmented support and inconsistent implementation of individualized plans
Policy implementation	Gap between national inclusive education policy and school-level practice	Uneven access to accommodations across schools and regions

Table 1. Barriers to teacher preparedness for inclusive education of learners with visual impairment, synthesized from the reviewed literature.

7. Challenges to Teacher Preparedness

Building on the findings above, several cross-cutting challenges can be identified that constrain progress toward stronger teacher preparedness for the inclusive education of learners with visual impairment.

7.1 Curriculum Overload in Teacher Education

Teacher education programs face substantial time and content constraints, with disability-specific content competing against a broad range of required subject matter. Expanding content on visual impairment specifically often requires displacing other curriculum content, creating institutional resistance even where the value of such training is acknowledged.

7.2 Uneven Distribution of Specialist Personnel

Specialist teachers of the visually impaired and orientation and mobility instructors are frequently concentrated in urban or well-resourced areas, leaving rural and under-resourced schools with limited or no access to specialist consultation. This creates significant disparities in the practical support available to classroom teachers depending on school location.

7.3 Resource Constraints

The cost of Braille production equipment, tactile materials, and assistive technology licenses places a genuine budgetary constraint on many schools, particularly in low-income contexts. Even where national policy mandates the provision of such resources, implementation is often delayed or incomplete.

7.4 Sustainability of Professional Development

One-time or short-duration training initiatives, while more feasible to organize than sustained programs, show limited durability in the literature, with reported gains in teacher confidence and skill diminishing over time without follow-up support, coaching, or refresher training.

7.5 Variability in Individual Learner Needs

Because visual impairment encompasses a wide range of functional vision and associated needs, training that addresses the population in general terms may not adequately prepare teachers for the specific profile of a given learner, underscoring the importance of individualized, learner-specific guidance in addition to general preparedness training.

8. Strategies for Strengthening Preparedness

The literature reviewed in this paper points toward several strategies with demonstrated or plausible potential to strengthen teacher preparedness for the inclusive education of learners with visual impairment.

8.1 Embedding Disability-Specific Content in Pre-Service Curricula

Teacher education programs can strengthen preparedness by embedding dedicated content on visual impairment within required coursework, rather than treating disability content as a single elective module. This includes foundational knowledge of eye conditions and functional vision, introductory Braille literacy, and orientation to assistive technology.

8.2 Practicum Placements with Learners with Visual Impairment

Structured practicum experiences that place pre-service teachers in classrooms or resource settings alongside learners with visual impairment, under the supervision of a specialist teacher, provide experiential learning that complements classroom-based coursework and is associated with stronger reported self-efficacy.

8.3 Sustained, Specialist-Led Professional Development

In-service training programs that extend over multiple sessions, incorporate hands-on practice, and are led by specialist personnel show stronger outcomes than brief, generic disability-awareness workshops. Embedding follow-up coaching or classroom observation after initial training helps sustain gains in teacher confidence and skill.

8.4 Mentorship and Co-Teaching Models

Pairing general classroom teachers with specialist teachers of the visually impaired in an ongoing mentorship or co-teaching relationship allows knowledge and skill to be transferred in the context of actual classroom practice, addressing the specific needs of the learner or learners present in a given classroom.

8.5 Investment in Resources and Technology, Paired with Training

Provision of Braille production equipment, tactile materials, and assistive technology should be paired with structured training in their use, since resource provision alone does not guarantee effective integration into instruction.

8.6 Strengthening School-Level Collaborative Structures

Establishing regular case-conference routines, co-planning time, and clear communication channels between classroom teachers, specialist personnel, and families supports more consistent implementation of accommodations across subjects and over time.

Summary Table: Preparedness Domains and Development Strategies

Table 2 maps the core domains of teacher preparedness to illustrative competencies and corresponding development strategies discussed above.

Preparedness Domain	Illustrative Competencies	Recommended Development Strategy
Knowledge base	Understanding of eye conditions, functional vision, and implications for learning	Dedicated modules in teacher education curricula
Instructional skill	Braille literacy, tactile graphics, differentiated instruction	Hands-on practicum with certified specialist teachers
Technology use	Screen readers, magnification software, refreshable Braille displays	School-based technology labs and continuous coaching
Collaboration	Co-planning with special educators, families, and orientation specialists	Structured co-teaching and case-conference routines
Attitude and efficacy	Belief in the capability of learners with visual impairment	Mentorship, exposure, and reflective practice

Table 2. Preparedness domains, illustrative competencies, and recommended development strategies.

9. Recommendations

Based on the synthesis of literature presented in this paper, the following recommendations are proposed for the principal stakeholders in teacher preparedness for inclusive education of learners with visual impairment.

9.1 For Teacher Education Institutions

- Integrate dedicated, competency-based content on visual impairment into required coursework rather than relying solely on general special education electives.
- Establish practicum partnerships with schools or resource centers serving learners with visual impairment to provide supervised, hands-on experience.
- Include foundational instruction in Braille literacy, tactile material development, and assistive technology as core competencies for all graduating teachers, not only those specializing in special education.

9.2 For School Administrators

- Facilitate structured collaboration time between classroom teachers and specialist personnel, including regular case conferences and co-planning sessions.
- Prioritize the acquisition and maintenance of assistive technology and adapted materials, paired with training for staff who will use them.
- Support mentorship arrangements pairing less experienced teachers with specialist teachers of the visually impaired where available.

9.3 For Policymakers

- Align resource allocation with inclusive education mandates, ensuring that policy commitments to inclusion are matched by funding for teacher training and instructional materials.
- Support the equitable distribution of specialist personnel across urban and rural areas to reduce disparities in access to expert consultation.
- Establish sustained, funded professional development pathways rather than relying on one-time training initiatives, with mechanisms for follow-up coaching and evaluation of outcomes.

9.4 For Future Research

- Further comparative research across national and resource contexts would help clarify which preparedness strategies generalize across settings and which require local adaptation.
- Longitudinal studies tracking teacher self-efficacy and instructional practice over multiple years following training would strengthen understanding of the durability of professional development outcomes.
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10. Conclusion

This paper has examined teacher preparedness for the inclusive education of learners with visual impairment across five interrelated domains: pre-service preparation, in-service professional development, access to specialized resources and technology, teacher attitudes and self-efficacy, and institutional and collaborative support. The literature reviewed consistently indicates that many general education teachers enter and remain in the profession with limited disability-specific training related to visual impairment, and that this gap is compounded by uneven access to specialist personnel, instructional resources, and assistive technology. At the same time, the evidence points to identifiable strategies with demonstrated potential to strengthen preparedness, including the integration of disability-specific content into teacher education curricula, sustained and specialist-led professional development, structured mentorship and co-teaching arrangements, and stronger institutional collaboration structures.

A central conclusion of this review is that teacher preparedness should not be treated as a fixed attribute determined solely by initial qualification, but as a developmental continuum shaped by ongoing training, experience, and the resource and support environment of the school. This reframing has practical implications: it suggests that investment in inclusive education for learners with visual impairment cannot be limited to policy statements mandating inclusion, but must extend to sustained, adequately resourced investment in the people, materials, and institutional structures that make effective inclusive practice possible. Only through such coordinated investment can the promise of inclusive education be realized in practice for learners with visual impairment, ensuring that their placement in mainstream classrooms translates into genuine access to learning rather than a nominal inclusion unsupported by the conditions needed for it to succeed.

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