

Bridging the Gap in Inclusive Education: General Education Teacher Preparedness for Students with Individualized Education Plans

Joy Gibson

Pepperdine University, USA

Email: joy.gibson@pepperdine.edu

Abstract:

Inclusive education has become a central goal of K–12 education in the United States and internationally, resulting in an increasing number of students with learning disabilities being educated in general education classrooms. As a result, general education teachers are expected to differentiate instruction, implement accommodations, and collaborate with special education professionals and related service providers. However, research suggests that many teachers enter the profession without adequate preparation to effectively support students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), thereby creating barriers to meaningful inclusion and student success. Grounded in Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Distributed Leadership theory, this study explores how inclusive practices and shared responsibility among educators shape students' classroom experiences. UDL emphasizes designing learning environments that are accessible to all learners, while Distributed Leadership highlights the importance of collaboration among educators and support staff in promoting student success. This proposed qualitative study will examine the lived experiences of 10–15 students with IEPs in grades 3–12 in public schools in California. Data will be collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic coding to identify patterns related to students' perceptions of support, inclusion, and engagement in general education classrooms. The purpose of this study is to understand how students with disabilities experience inclusive education and the extent to which they feel supported by both general and special education teachers. Findings from this research aim to inform teacher preparation programs, instructional practices, and school-level collaboration in order to improve educational equity and strengthen inclusive education systems.

Keywords: inclusive education, teacher preparation programs, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), distributed leadership

