

SUPPORTING AND LIMITING FACTORS IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN PRE-PRIMARY AND PRIMARY SCHOOLS: AN OVERVIEW OF EMPIRICAL FINDINGS IN THE SLOVAK CONTEXT

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Abstract

Inclusive education in pre-primary and primary schools depends on the interplay of several interconnected factors at the levels of the teacher, the school, and the broader support system. This paper is a review study aimed at identifying and analysing the factors that support and limit inclusive education, with a focus on the Slovak context. A search for empirical studies was conducted in the Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar databases. Based on predefined criteria, 14 empirical studies were included in the final analysis. The findings were organised into three thematic areas: factors at the teacher level, factors at the school level and school-based support, and the Slovak context as an interpretative framework for the implementation of inclusive education. The analysis showed that inclusive practice are supported by positive teacher attitudes, practical experience, professional preparedness, collaboration with specialist staff, and the functioning of school support mechanisms. The main limiting factors included insufficient professional preparation, uncertainty in differentiated instruction, a lack of specialist staff, administrative burden, and broader systemic barriers. The results suggest that inclusive education cannot be understood as the result of a single isolated factor, but rather as a complex process.

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Key words

inclusive education, supporting factors, limiting factors, pre-primary and primary schools, review study

Introduction

Inclusive education is currently a major topic in educational discourse, not only in terms of stated values but also in terms of everyday school practice. Its significance lies primarily in the need to create an educational environment that respects the diversity of children and students while supporting their participation in the educational process. Although the topic of inclusion has long been emphasized in professional and political discourse, its implementation faces several limitations in the school environment. The success of inclusive education depends on a combination of several factors that are not limited to the level of the teacher, classroom, and school, but also extend to the broader support system. For this reason, an overview of previously published research is of particular importance, as it allows for the systematic organization of existing knowledge, the identification of recurring supportive and limiting factors, and the creation of a more comprehensive picture of the implementation of inclusive education in the context of preschool and primary schools.

The concept of inclusion can be interpreted in various ways. Resman (2003, as cited in Cabanova, 2007) builds on the principle of creating an open and accepting environment in which diversity is naturally embraced. Inclusion aims to create conditions for inclusion in schools, which is subsequently reflected in the broader process of social inclusion. UNESCO (2017, p. 12) defines inclusion as a process aimed at overcoming barriers that limit learners' presence, participation and achievement. At the same time, it emphasises that inclusion does not concern only a specific group of children and pupils, but all learners. Their difficulties cannot be explained solely by individual characteristics but must also be understood in relation to the functioning of the

education system itself, particularly its organisation, forms of instruction, the nature of the learning environment, and the ways in which support is provided and progress is assessed.

The OECD (2023) builds on this understanding. In its document *Equity and Inclusion in Education: Finding Strength Through Diversity*, inclusive education is defined as an ongoing process aimed at ensuring quality education for all, while respecting the diversity and differing needs, abilities and characteristics of learners. The OECD emphasises that the goal of inclusion is not only to ensure access to education and academic achievement, but also to promote the participation and full engagement of all learners.

At the level of the European Union, inclusive education is understood not only as a right, but also as a strategic priority for the development of high-quality and equitable education systems. The European Commission (2024) states that everyone should have access to high-quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning that enable full participation in society. This understanding also builds on the European Pillar of Social Rights (European Commission, 2017), in which quality education is defined as one of the fundamental rights of citizens. Inclusion is thus viewed not only as a matter of access to education, but also as a means of promoting social cohesion, a sense of belonging and the reduction of inequalities.

This shift from an integrative to an inclusive understanding of education is gradually being reflected in Slovakia's strategic and conceptual framework as well. In the Slovak context, the development of inclusive education is anchored in the Strategy for an Inclusive Approach in Education and Training until 2030, which was approved by the Government of the Slovak Republic in 2021. The strategy was followed by the first action plan for 2022–2024 and subsequently by the second action plan for 2025–2027, which states that the transition to inclusive education is a gradual process (MŠVVŠ SR, 2021).

The introduction of support measures also forms part of the shift towards inclusive education. Since 1 September 2023, these measures have represented an important mechanism within the Slovak school system for responding to the diverse needs of children and pupils. Their content and mode of provision are specified in the Catalogue of Support Measures (MŠVVaM SR, 2024). Support measures therefore link the strategic orientation of inclusive education with its practical implementation in schools; however, their effectiveness depends on the quality of implementation in everyday pedagogical practice.

Methods

This paper is designed as a review study of empirical findings aimed at identifying and analysing the factors that support and limit inclusive education in pre-primary and primary schools, with particular attention to the Slovak context. In preparing the study, we followed the recommended procedure for developing a review study according to Mareš (2013), which includes defining the topic and type of review, conducting a literature search, analysing the identified publications, narrowing the selection to relevant studies, compiling them into a comparative table, and subsequently synthesising the key findings into thematic units.

Prior to the literature search, it was necessary to identify the main key terms, which were then used systematically. The following terms were selected as the primary search terms: inclusive education, pre-primary education, primary education, teachers' attitudes, Slovakia, as well as their semantically related synonyms and variants. These key terms were subsequently combined using Boolean operators, which formed the basis of the search framework. The framework was continuously adapted in individual databases according to their technical options and the nature of the retrieved results. The basic form of the search query was as follows:

("inclusive education" OR "inclusion" OR "inclusive school")
 AND ("pre-primary education" OR "preschool" OR "kindergarten" OR "primary education" OR "primary school")
 AND ("teachers' attitudes" OR "barriers" OR "supportive factors")
 AND ("Slovakia" OR "Slovak").

The search was conducted in the Scopus, Web of Science and Google Scholar databases. The initial search was performed without further restrictions in order to capture the broadest possible range of potentially relevant publications. The retrieved records were then selected according to predefined inclusion criteria:

- publication language: English, Slovak or Czech;
- year of publication: 2000-2026;
- availability: open access;
- subject categories: Psychology and Social Sciences in Scopus; Education, Educational Research and Social Sciences in Web of Science;
- type of study: empirical studies based on quantitative, qualitative or mixed-methods research designs.

After applying the specified criteria, 10 studies from the Scopus database and 16 studies from the Web of Science database were shortlisted. Google Scholar was used as a supplementary source, primarily to locate full-text versions of articles and other potentially relevant sources.

In the first step, the titles and abstracts of the publications were assessed. Studies that did not thematically address inclusive education in pre-primary and primary schools, or did not meet the established criteria, were excluded. In the second step, the full texts of the studies were read and assessed in terms of their content alignment with the focus of this paper. Fourteen studies were included in the final analysis. The studies were subsequently grouped into three main thematic areas:

1. factors at the teacher level:

- *English language pre-service and in-service teachers' self-efficacy and attitudes towards integration of students with learning difficulties* (Cimermanova, 2017),
- *Educational needs of the primary education teachers in inclusive education of the pupils from socially disadvantaged backgrounds in Slovakia* (Rochovska et al., 2020),
- *Interviews with Teachers about Inclusive Education* (Zelina, 2020),
- *Inclusive Education in Practice: Teachers' Opinions and Needs* (Belkova et al., 2021),
- *Self-Efficacy and Attitudes of Physical Education Teachers towards Inclusion of Pupils with Disabilities* (Antala et al., 2022),
- *Teachers' Professional Attitudes towards Inclusive Education* (Barnova et al., 2022),
- *Attitudes of Preschool Teachers and Assistants towards Inclusive Education in Slovakia* (Kusnirova et al., 2022),
- *Attitudes of Teaching Staff in Kindergartens Towards Inclusion and their Opinions on Inclusive Education* (Carnicka et al., 2023),
- *Readiness for inclusive education in Slovakia based on pre-primary teachers' self-efficacy* (Cabanova et al., 2025)

2. factors at the level of the school and school-based support:

- *Teachers' Perceptions of the Relationship between Inclusive Education and Distributed Leadership in two Primary Schools in Slovakia and New South Wales (Australia)* (Miskolci et al., 2016),
- *Learning and support assistants in inclusive education: a transnational analysis of assistance services in Europe* (Breyer et al., 2020),
- *The Roles and Responsibilities of the School Support Team in Inclusive Education in Kindergartens* (Rochovska et al., 2024),

3. the Slovak context as an interpretative framework for the implementation of inclusive education:

- *Various Perceptions of Inclusive School: Q Methodological Study* (Vancikova et al., 2021),
- *Practice and innovation inclusive education in pre-school institutions* (Zdanevych et al., 2020).

Results

An analysis of selected empirical studies revealed that the implementation of inclusive education in preschools and primary schools is influenced by several interrelated factors. For greater clarity, these factors were divided into three levels: factors at the teacher level, factors at the school level and school support, and the Slovak context as an interpretative framework for the implementation of inclusive education. The following tables (Table 1, Table 2, Table 3) provide an overview of the individual studies and their main findings.

Table 1. Overview of the analysed studies: teacher-level factors (source: author's own compilation)

Factors at the teacher level				
Author, year	Title of the study	Research sample	Supportive findings	Limiting findings
Cimermanova, I. (2017)	<i>English language pre-service and in-service teachers' self-efficacy and attitudes towards integration of students with learning difficulties</i>	N = 243; 187 primary school English teachers and 56 English language education students; Slovakia	A) Teachers' positive attitudes support the education of pupils with special educational needs in mainstream classrooms. B) Teachers generally reported relatively high confidence in identifying and addressing the needs of pupils with special educational needs. C) Positive attitudes towards inclusion were also identified among pre-service teachers.	A) Inadequate initial teacher training and non-mandatory continuing professional development undermine teachers' preparedness to work with pupils with special educational needs. B) Some teachers lacked specialised training for working with pupils with special educational needs. C) Large class sizes, the diversity of pupils' needs and increased demands on lesson planning make integration difficult in practice. D) Despite their positive attitudes, pre-service teachers demonstrated low self-confidence in adapting teaching strategies.

Rochovska, I., Kusnirova, V., Kolibova, D., Dolinska, E. & Dudek, M. (2020)	<i>Educational needs of the primary education teachers in inclusive education of the pupils from socially disadvantaged backgrounds in Slovakia</i>	N = 183; primary school teachers; Košice and Prešov regions	A) Teachers' willingness to engage in personal development fosters interest in continuing education in areas relevant to inclusion. B) Continuing professional development is an essential prerequisite for successful inclusive practice.	A) Longer teaching experience was associated with a lower perceived need for training in the Romani language as a support language. B) Older teachers showed lower interest in various inclusion-related topics and personal development. C) Teachers expressed greater interest in innovative methods and information and communication technologies than in topics directly related to the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs.
Zelina, M. (2020)	<i>Interviews with Teachers about Inclusive Education</i>	N = 218; first-grade primary school teachers; Slovakia	A) Teachers' positive attitudes and acceptance of inclusion promote inclusive practice. B) Collaboration with specialists and teaching assistants facilitates an individualised approach and provides support for pupils in the classroom.	A) Low school attendance and insufficient school readiness among children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds undermine the implementation of inclusion. B) A shortage of specialists and insufficient support conditions in schools reduce schools' readiness for inclusive education.
Belkova, V., Zolyomiova, P., & Petrik, S. (2021)	<i>Inclusive Education in Practice: Teachers' Opinions and Needs</i>	N = 1,216; teaching staff	A) The availability of specialists and teaching assistants supports the implementation of inclusion. B) Practice-oriented professional development and examples of good practice enhance teachers' preparedness for inclusive education.	A) The most common barriers were school-level barriers, including staff shortages, inadequate material and technical conditions, and limited acceptance of the concept of inclusion. B) Large class sizes, administrative burden and insufficient funding undermine inclusive practice.

Antala, B., Pruzek, M. & Popluharova, M. (2022)	<i>Self-Efficacy and Attitudes of Physical Education Teachers towards Inclusion of Pupils with Disabilities</i>	N = 253; physical education teachers; Slovakia	A) Practical experience with students with disabilities promotes greater self-efficacy and more positive attitudes toward inclusion. B) Professional development enhances teachers' readiness for inclusive practice.	A) Limited practical experience and a lack of specialised training undermine teachers' self-efficacy and confidence.
Barnova, S., Kozuchova, M., Krasna, S., & Osadan, R. (2022)	<i>Teachers' Professional Attitudes towards Inclusive Education</i>	N = 257; teachers; Slovakia	A) Teachers across all age groups believed that, by adapting the curriculum to pupils' needs, all pupils can meet school requirements. B) Younger teachers showed greater openness to the participation of pupils with special educational needs in classroom social activities and greater willingness to provide them with practical assistance.	A) Older teachers demonstrated greater uncertainty, frustration and a sense of helplessness when working with pupils with special educational needs. B) Younger teachers expressed less positive attitudes towards adapting the environment, communication, procedures, assessment and curriculum to pupils' needs. C) Some teachers believed that pupils with more severe special educational needs should be educated in special schools and that inclusion places a financial burden on schools.

Kusnirova, V., Rochovska, I., & Camicka, M. (2022)	<i>Attitudes of Preschool Teachers and Assistants towards Inclusive Education in Slovakia</i>	N = 278; pre-primary teachers and teaching assistants; Slovakia	A) Pre-primary teaching staff exhibited the most inclusive attitudes in the behavioural domain. B) Willingness to adapt activities, communication and assessment supported inclusive practice in pre-primary settings. C) Participation in projects focused on inclusion was associated with more positive attitudes in the affective domain.	A) The weakest results were found in the affective component of attitudes, that is, in the emotional acceptance of inclusion. B) Concerns persisted regarding the placement of children with special educational needs in mainstream classrooms, particularly regardless of the severity of their difficulties. C) Age was not confirmed as a factor contributing to more positive attitudes; younger staff members were not statistically significantly more pro-inclusive.
Camicka, M., Kusnirova, V., Rochovska, I., & Silonova, V. (2023)	<i>Attitudes of Teaching Staff in Kindergartens Towards Inclusion and their Opinions on Inclusive Education</i>	N = 284; pre-primary teachers and teaching assistants; Slovakia	A) Pre-primary teaching staff generally demonstrated pro-inclusive attitudes, most strongly in the behavioural domain. B) They considered collaboration among teachers, teaching assistants, school special educators, specialists and parents to be very important, along with the creation of appropriate material and methodological conditions.	A) The weakest results were found in the affective component of attitudes, that is, in the emotional acceptance of inclusion. B) Respondents tended to believe that mainstream kindergartens are particularly suitable for children with milder disabilities, which suggests certain limits in the acceptance of full inclusion. C) No statistically significant relationship was found between the perceived severity of problems or the evaluation of measures and overall attitudes towards inclusion.

Cabanova, M., Lynch, Z. & Brozmanova, M. (2025)	<i>Readiness for inclusive education in Slovakia based on pre-primary teachers' self-efficacy</i>	N = 205; pre-primary teachers; Slovakia	A) Pre-primary teachers generally reported high levels of self-efficacy and felt professionally competent to work in an inclusive environment. B) Their self-confidence was more pronounced in collaboration with colleagues and specialists, as well as in routine teaching activities. C) Completion of training focused on the development of individualised education programmes was associated with higher self-efficacy in the area of inclusive education.	A) The lowest level of self-confidence was observed in designing learning tasks tailored to children's individual needs, particularly those of children with disabilities. B) Teachers showed lower confidence in involving parents of children with disabilities, navigating legislation and managing aggressive behaviour. C) The selective system of pre-primary education in Slovakia limited teachers' opportunities to apply inclusive competences in practice.
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The analysis of the included studies revealed that inclusive education in pre-primary and primary schools is influenced by a combination of individual, school-level and systemic factors. At the teacher level, attitudes towards inclusion, self-efficacy in working with pupils with special educational needs, practical experience and willingness to engage in continuing professional development were identified as particularly significant. Although the attitudes of teaching staff were generally evaluated as positive in several studies, their implementation in practice was often limited by uncertainty in adapting teaching strategies, insufficient professional training and uneven interest in training topics directly related to inclusion.

Table 2. Overview of the analysed studies: school-level and school-based support factors (source: author's own compilation)

School-level and school-based support factors				
Author, year	Title of the study	Research sample	Supportive findings	Limiting findings
Miskolci, J., Armstrong, D., & Spandagou, I. (2016)	<i>Teachers' Perceptions of the Relationship between Inclusive Education and Distributed Leadership in two Primary Schools in Slovakia and New South Wales (Australia)</i>	N = 15; 8 respondents from Slovakia (a school principal, a deputy principal, a special education teacher and 5 class teachers) and 7 respondents from New South Wales (NSW), Australia	A) Collaboration, teamwork and teachers' involvement in decision-making promote inclusive practice. B) Shared responsibility and professional communication expand opportunities for supporting pupils. C) Some respondents considered distributed leadership to be an essential component of an inclusive school.	A) Distributed leadership does not in itself guarantee inclusion; if it is not guided by inclusive values, it may also reinforce an exclusionary status quo. B) Autocratic leadership undermines inclusive processes. C) External systemic pressures, as well as performance-related and political demands, limit inclusive practice in schools.

Breyer, C., Lederer, J., & Gasteiger-Klicpera, B. (2020)	<i>Learning and support assistants in inclusive education: a transnational analysis of assistance services in Europe</i>	N = 18; experts from five countries: Austria, Bulgaria, Portugal, Slovakia and the United Kingdom	A) Teaching assistants represent a significant source of support for inclusive education in mainstream schools. B) In Slovakia, formal qualification requirements for teaching assistants and their involvement in school advisory bodies were identified as effective support measures. C) Information sharing, mentoring and collaboration with teachers promote more effective inclusive practice. D) Slovakia was the only country in which formal, subject-specific qualification requirements for the role of teaching assistant were in place.	A) The legally defined roles of teaching assistants often do not correspond to their actual responsibilities in practice. B) In many cases, teaching assistants have insufficient time to collaborate with teachers and participate in joint lesson planning. C) Continuing professional development is often voluntary and frequently takes place in teaching assistants' own time.
Rochovska, I., Klein, V., & Silonova, V. (2024)	<i>The Roles and Responsibilities of the School Support Team in Inclusive Education in Kindergartens</i>	N = 394; pre-primary teaching staff; Slovakia	A) The presence of a school support team helps address children's difficulties and facilitates teachers' work. B) The school special education teacher supports inclusion primarily through assessment and stimulation of the child's development. C) The teaching assistant supports inclusion primarily by providing individualised support to the	A) Inclusive practice is undermined by a lack of effective collaboration among members of the pre-primary school support team, particularly between the school special education teacher and the teaching assistant. B) The assistant's administrative support was rated as less important than direct work with the child, suggesting that shifting the assistant's role towards administrative tasks may weaken their inclusive function.

			child, facilitating communication and collaborating with the family.	C) The study indicates that the functioning of school support teams remains a relatively new area in the Slovak context.
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At the school level and in relation to school-based support, the analysis showed that inclusive practice is strengthened primarily through collaboration among teachers, specialist staff, teaching assistants and other members of the school support team. Mechanisms of shared responsibility, professional communication and practice-oriented professional development were also evaluated positively. At the same time, large class sizes, shortages of specialist staff, the absence of multidisciplinary support, administrative burden and insufficient material and technical resources repeatedly emerged as significant barriers to the implementation of inclusive education.

Table 3. Overview of the analysed studies: the Slovak context as an interpretative framework for the implementation of inclusive education (source: author's own compilation)

<i>The Slovak context as an interpretative framework for the implementation of inclusive education</i>				
<i>Author, year</i>	<i>Title of the study</i>	<i>Research sample</i>	<i>Supportive findings</i>	<i>Limiting findings</i>
Váncikova, K., Basarabova, B., Sabo, R., & Sukolova, D. (2021)	<i>Various Perceptions of Inclusive School: Q Methodological Study</i>	N = 36; teachers and teaching assistants; Slovakia	A) The diversity of perspectives among educational stakeholders fosters a broader and more nuanced understanding of the inclusive school. B) Perceptions of the inclusive school are shaped by the local sociocultural context.	A) Inconsistent understandings of what constitutes an inclusive school among stakeholders may hinder the collective establishment of inclusive practice and lead to differing expectations.

Zdanevych, V. L., Popovych, O., Tselihnyk, T. M., Novak, O. M., & Kasianenko, O. (2020)	<i>Practice and innovation inclusive education in pre-school institutions</i>	Comparative analysis of four countries: Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia	A) The level of inclusion in pre-primary education is supported by favourable institutional, legal, financial and pedagogical conditions. B) The implementation of inclusion is also linked to the availability and organisation of early childhood education.	A) The model of inclusion was classified as full inclusion in Poland and Hungary, with rates of 79.68% and 82.18%, respectively, whereas partial inclusion was identified in Slovakia and the Czech Republic, with rates of 64.85% and 19.74%, respectively. B) A lower level of inclusion is associated with weaker systemic and organisational conditions.
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The results also showed that the implementation of inclusive education is significantly influenced by the broader Slovak context. The included studies highlighted conceptual inconsistencies in understandings of the inclusive school, the persistence of a predominantly partially inclusive model in pre-primary education, and the importance of systemic, legal, financial and sociocultural conditions that shape the nature of inclusive practice in schools.

Discussion

The aim of this paper was to identify and analyse the factors that support and limit inclusive education in pre-primary and primary schools, with a focus on the Slovak context. The analysis of the included studies revealed that inclusive practice cannot be explained by the influence of a single factor, but rather by the interaction of teacher-level, school-level and systemic conditions. In this regard, three levels emerged as particularly important: factors at the teacher level, factors at the level of the school and school-based support, and the Slovak context as an interpretative framework for the implementation of inclusive education.

At the teacher level, the findings showed that important factors influencing inclusive practice include teachers' attitudes, self-efficacy, practical experience and, in particular, professional preparedness.

Several studies have shown that teachers generally express positive attitudes towards inclusion and support the education of children and pupils with special educational needs (SEN) in mainstream classrooms (Cimermanová, 2017; Rochovská et al., 2020; Zelina, 2020; Belková et al., 2021; Antala et al., 2022; Barnová et al., 2022; Kušnírová et al., 2022; Carnicka et al., 2023; Cabanova et al., 2025). At the same time, however, it became apparent that positive attitudes alone do not necessarily indicate readiness to implement inclusive teaching. Uncertainty, anxiety or lower levels of professional confidence were observed particularly in the areas of differentiated instruction, adapting assessment and selecting appropriate teaching strategies.

The findings of Antala, Pruzek and Popluhar (2022), according to which practical experience with pupils with special educational needs and professional training strengthen teachers' self-efficacy, can be interpreted through Bandura's theory of self-efficacy. Bandura (1977) argues that individuals' beliefs in their own competence develop primarily through mastery experiences and vicarious learning. This helps explain why teachers with practical experience and specialised training demonstrated

greater confidence and more positive attitudes towards inclusion, whereas a lack of experience and specialised training weakened their professional confidence. Cimermanova's (2017) findings can be interpreted in a similar way: although pre-service teachers expressed positive attitudes towards the inclusion of pupils with SEN, they simultaneously demonstrated low self-confidence in adapting teaching strategies. Their values were oriented towards inclusion, but they lacked the practical experience needed to translate these attitudes into pedagogical practice.

The discrepancy between generally positive attitudes and uncertainty regarding the practical implementation of inclusive education can also be explained through Florian and Black-Hawkins' (2011) concept of inclusive pedagogy. According to this approach, the aim is not to create special solutions exclusively for "different" pupils, but to extend pedagogical possibilities so that they are accessible to all learners. The findings of this review suggest that the shift from integrative to inclusive pedagogical thinking has not yet fully taken root in school practice. This is also indicated by the research of Kasáčová, Babiaková and Brozmanová (2024), who pointed out that teachers perceived the preparation of individual education plans and the individual support of pupils with SEN as among the most burdensome activities.

Findings at the teacher level also indicated that teachers' attitudes are not uniform, but vary according to age, length of teaching experience, personal experience and educational background. Practical experience with pupils with SEN or additional professional training strengthened teachers' self-confidence and fostered more positive attitudes towards inclusion. Conversely, in some studies, older age and longer teaching experience were associated with lower interest in selected inclusion-related topics. This may also be interpreted in relation to Huberman's (1989) theory of the professional life cycle, according to which openness to innovation, the need for professional growth and the level of engagement in professional change vary across different stages of a teacher's career. The findings therefore suggest that teachers' professional development should not remain solely dependent on individual motivation but should be systematically and differentially oriented towards the needs of inclusive practice at different stages of teachers' careers.

The results of the analysis further showed that inclusion cannot be explained solely by individual teacher characteristics. The school plays a significant role as the environment in which inclusive education is implemented (Miskolci et al., 2016; Breyer et al., 2020; Rochovská et al., 2024). As Tannenberger (2016) emphasises, one of the fundamental principles of inclusive education is collaboration among teachers, support staff and parents. The empirical findings included in this review confirmed this theoretical assumption, as school support teams, collaboration with teaching assistants, school special educators and other professionals, as well as professional communication and shared responsibility within the school, emerged as significant supportive factors. It therefore became evident that inclusive practice is strengthened when the school does not view the teacher as the sole implementer of inclusion, but rather as a member of a broader support network.

Conversely, the analysed studies also highlighted several barriers related to the school's organisational and staffing conditions. The most frequently identified barriers included large class sizes, shortages of specialist staff, the absence of multidisciplinary teams, administrative burden and unclear roles of support staff. These findings suggest that inclusive education in the school environment is limited not only by the level of pedagogical preparedness, but also by insufficiently stabilised organisational, personnel and material conditions for its implementation.

The findings of this review are also consistent with recent reports of the State School Inspectorate. In a thematic inspection of 15 primary schools conducted during the 2024/2025 school year, the Inspectorate identified an overall inclusion index of 62.4%, with the weakest results recorded in the area of developing inclusive practice in the educational process. The inspection also highlighted insufficient provision of support

services, administrative burden, unclear methodological guidance, large class sizes and the weaker preparedness of some teachers to educate all pupils without distinction (State School Inspectorate, 2026). These findings confirm that barriers to inclusive education in the Slovak context are not limited to the level of individual teachers but are also linked to organisational and systemic conditions in schools.

At the systemic level, the findings of Vancikova et al. (2021) and Zdanevych et al. (2020) are particularly relevant. Vancikova et al. (2021) pointed out that the concept of an inclusive school is not understood uniformly among educational stakeholders. This conceptual inconsistency can be interpreted in relation to Booth and Ainscow (2002), who emphasise that inclusion is not merely a technical reform, but a deeply value- and culture-driven process. If school stakeholders do not share a similar understanding of what inclusion means, this may lead to differing expectations and inconsistent practices. Zdanevych et al. (2020), in turn, pointed out that in early childhood education, Slovakia appears to be a country characterised by partial rather than full inclusion. This finding is consistent with the theoretical and strategic premise that the transition from integration to inclusion is a gradual process. At the same time, it confirms that, without favourable legal, financial, organisational and pedagogical conditions, inclusion remains limited to partial measures.

Conclusion

This paper focused on identifying and analysing the factors that support and limit inclusive education in pre-primary and primary schools, with particular attention to the Slovak context. Based on the analysis of selected empirical studies, three basic levels of factors influencing the implementation of inclusive education were identified: the teacher level, the level of the school and school-based support, and the level of the broader systemic and sociocultural context. The findings were subsequently systematised in summary tables and interpreted in relation to the theoretical foundations of inclusive education.

The analysis showed that the implementation of inclusive education depends on the interplay of several interconnected factors. At the teacher level, attitudes towards inclusion, self-efficacy, practical experience and professional preparedness proved to be particularly significant. At the level of the school and school-based support, collaboration with specialist staff, the functioning of the school support team, the availability of teaching assistants and the school's organisational conditions played an important role. In the broader Slovak context, the importance of systemic, legal, financial and sociocultural conditions was confirmed; these conditions may support inclusive practice but may also significantly limit it.

At the same time, the results suggest that inclusive education cannot be understood as the outcome of a single isolated factor, but rather as a complex process requiring prepared teachers, a functional school-based support environment and a stable systemic framework. Despite the shift towards an inclusive understanding of education, several barriers persist in the Slovak context that hinder its everyday implementation in school practice. This review therefore highlights the need for systematic support for teachers' professional development, the strengthening of school-based support mechanisms and the creation of more favourable conditions for inclusive education in pre-primary and primary schools.

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