



Inclusive Education in Islamic Philosophy: Foundations, Principles, and Contemporary Relevance

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive education is a rights-based and equity-oriented approach that seeks to ensure meaningful participation and quality learning for all learners, including persons with disabilities and other historically marginalized groups. This conceptual paper examines inclusive education through the lens of Islamic philosophy and places Islamic ethical principles in dialogue with contemporary scholarship, international human-rights frameworks, and Indian educational policy. Drawing on the Qur'an, Sunnah, classical Islamic perspectives, policy documents, and recent peer-reviewed literature, the paper argues that justice ('adl), equality (musāwah), compassion (rahmah), human dignity (karāmah), and social responsibility provide a strong ethical foundation for inclusive education. The discussion is further connected to the social model of disability, Rawlsian justice, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and the human-rights approach to disability. Recent research indexed in major scholarly databases shows that successful inclusion depends not only on formal policy but also on teacher attitudes, self-efficacy, professional learning, accessible environments, family

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collaboration, assistive technology, and institutional capacity. The paper also considers the relationship between inclusive education and religious moderation (wasatiyyah), arguing that learning environments that value difference can contribute to empathy, tolerance, social cohesion, and peaceful coexistence. The paper concludes that Islamic ethical commitments can complement contemporary inclusive-education frameworks, while implementation requires evidence-based

Introduction

Inclusive education has developed from a concern with access to a broader commitment to participation, belonging, achievement, and the removal of systemic barriers. Contemporary scholarship increasingly treats inclusion as a transformation of educational systems rather than the simple placement of learners with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. Ainscow (2020), for example, emphasizes the need to identify and overcome barriers that prevent learners from participating and progressing. This systems perspective is also consistent with the international human-rights framework represented by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), especially Article 24, and with Sustainable Development Goal 4.

Although the terminology of inclusive education is modern, the ethical principles associated with inclusion have much older intellectual roots. Islamic philosophy places substantial emphasis on human dignity, justice, mercy, equality, mutual responsibility, and the pursuit of knowledge. Qur'anic teachings concerning the honor of human beings and the rejection of social discrimination provide a normative foundation for considering education as a shared social good. The Qur'anic account of Abdullah ibn Umm Maktum is also frequently discussed in Islamic scholarship as an important example of the dignity and participation of a person with a disability.

The contemporary literature demonstrates that the success of inclusion is shaped by institutional and relational factors. Systematic review evidence shows that teachers' attitudes toward inclusion can remain neutral or ambivalent and may vary according to the type and perceived severity of disability (Lindner et al., 2023). Research also indicates that teacher attitudes, perceived norms, and perceived behavioural control are associated with intentions to implement inclusive practices (Urton et al., 2023). These findings strengthen the argument that an ethical commitment to inclusion must be accompanied by professional competence, resources, and institutional support.



This paper therefore brings Islamic philosophy into conversation with contemporary inclusive-education research. It does not claim that the modern policy term 'inclusive education' existed in its present form in early Islamic history. Rather, it examines whether the moral principles within Islamic sources can provide an ethical and philosophical basis for contemporary inclusion.

Purpose and Objectives of the Study

- The purpose of this conceptual study is to examine the philosophical foundations of inclusive education in Islamic thought and to relate these foundations to contemporary theories, international frameworks, and educational practice.
- To identify Islamic principles that support educational inclusion and equitable participation.
- To examine the relationship between Islamic values and contemporary theories of inclusive education.
- To connect Islamic perspectives with international frameworks such as the UNCRPD and SDG 4 and with India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.
- To examine contemporary evidence on teacher attitudes, professional capacity, accessibility, technology, and systemic barriers to inclusion.
- To discuss how inclusive education may contribute to religious moderation, social cohesion, and respect for diversity.

Materials and Methods

This paper adopts a conceptual and qualitative narrative literature-review approach. The analysis is based on four interconnected source groups: (a) Qur'anic teachings and selected Islamic educational perspectives; (b) international and national policy frameworks concerning inclusive education and disability rights; (c) contemporary peer-reviewed scholarship on inclusive education, teacher attitudes, accessibility, technology, and implementation barriers; and (d) theoretical literature on social justice, the social model of disability, and Universal Design for Learning. Recent journal literature was identified through web-based scholarly searching, with particular attention to studies published in journals with evidence of Scopus and/or Web of Science coverage. The paper does not claim a systematic review or bibliometric methodology and does not present original empirical data.

The analytical strategy was thematic. Literature was organized around five themes: human dignity and equality; justice and equity; participation and accessibility; teacher and institutional capacity; and inclusion as a pathway to social cohesion and religious moderation. The resulting synthesis is interpretive rather than causal and should be read as a philosophical framework for future empirical research.



Results

Because this is a conceptual and qualitative narrative literature-review paper, the results are presented as thematic findings from the literature synthesis rather than as original quantitative or experimental data.

The thematic analysis identified five interconnected findings: (1) human dignity and equality provide a normative foundation for inclusion; (2) justice and equity require meaningful participation and appropriate support rather than identical treatment; (3) accessibility, assistive technology, flexible curriculum, and reasonable accommodation are essential for translating ethical commitments into practice; (4) teacher attitudes, self-efficacy, professional development, institutional capacity, and family collaboration strongly shape implementation; and (5) inclusive education can create conditions that support respect for diversity, social cohesion, and religious moderation, although such outcomes require deliberate pedagogical and ethical practice.

Theoretical Framework

Islamic Theory of Human Dignity (*Karāmah al-Insān*)

The concept of *karāmah al-insān* provides a central ethical foundation for this paper. Qur'an 17:70 states that the children of Adam have been honored. Read philosophically, this principle supports the recognition of inherent human worth and challenges educational practices that treat learners as less deserving because of disability, social status, language, ethnicity, or other characteristics. The implication for education is that differences among learners should not be used as a justification for denying access, participation, respect, or opportunity.

Theory of Social Justice

Rawls (1971) argues that just institutions should secure fair equality of opportunity and address inequalities in ways that protect the least advantaged. This is relevant to inclusive education because equity does not necessarily mean identical treatment. Learners may require reasonable accommodation, assistive technology, additional time, accessible materials, or individualized support in order to participate meaningfully. In this sense, the Islamic value of *'adl* can be placed in productive dialogue with contemporary theories of distributive and educational justice.



Universal Design for Learning

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) provides a framework for designing flexible learning environments through multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression (CAST, 2018). UDL is particularly relevant to inclusive classrooms because it seeks to reduce barriers before they become individualized problems. Its emphasis on learner variability complements the Islamic ethical principle that individuals possess dignity and value while differing in their circumstances and needs.

Social Model of Disability

The social model of disability shifts attention from impairment alone to environmental, institutional, and attitudinal barriers. This perspective complements the inclusion principle that schools should modify environments and practices rather than expecting learners to overcome inaccessible systems on their own. Contemporary evidence demonstrates that barriers may include inadequate teacher preparation, inaccessible infrastructure, stigma, weak professional development, and limited resources (MacKenzie et al., 2023).

Human-Rights Approach

The UNCRPD frames inclusive education as a human right and requires states to work toward inclusive education systems, reasonable accommodation, and appropriate support. This rights-based approach complements the ethical argument developed in Islamic philosophy: learners should not be excluded from educational opportunities because of disability or other forms of difference.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework developed in this paper proposes the following relationship:

Islamic ethical values: justice (‘adl), equality (musāwah), compassion (rahmah), human dignity (karāmah), and brotherhood/social responsibility (ukhuwwah).

Inclusive educational practices: equal access, barrier-free environments, teacher support, accessible curriculum, assistive technology, differentiated instruction, reasonable accommodation, and participation of all learners.

Educational and social outcomes: educational equity, social justice, respect for diversity, social cohesion, religious moderation (wasatiyyah), and sustainable development.



- Islamic ethical values: justice (‘adl), equality (musāwah), compassion (rahmah), human dignity (karāmah), and brotherhood/social responsibility (ukhuwwah).
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Review of Related Literature

International scholarship increasingly conceptualizes inclusion as a process of educational transformation. Ainscow (2020) argues that inclusion and equity require education systems to identify and address barriers that prevent learners from accessing and benefiting from education. UNESCO (2020) similarly emphasizes that exclusion is often produced by structures, policies, attitudes, and practices rather than by learners' characteristics alone.

The Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) established a major international policy commitment to educating children in ordinary schools wherever possible and to developing child-centred pedagogies responsive to learner diversity. The UNCPRD (United Nations, 2006), particularly Article 24, further strengthened the rights-based basis of inclusive education by recognizing the right of persons with disabilities to education without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity.

In India, the National Education Policy 2020 places equity and inclusion among the central principles of educational reform and calls for barrier-free access, teacher preparation, flexible approaches, and support for learners with disabilities (Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2020). These directions are compatible with the Islamic ethical principles of justice, compassion, human dignity, and responsibility toward vulnerable members of society.

Recent empirical and review evidence reinforces the importance of teacher-related factors. Lindner et al. (2023), in a systematic review of 36 studies, found that primary teachers' attitudes toward inclusion tended to be neutral or ambivalent and were influenced by the type of disability. Urton et al. (2023), using data from 585 primary school teachers in Germany, found significant relationships between teachers' attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, and their intentions to implement inclusive practices. Woodcock et al. (2023) likewise examined teacher beliefs and self-efficacy and highlighted the importance of teachers' perceived capacity to implement inclusive teaching.



Studies also demonstrate that inclusion depends on broader institutional conditions. Moehlen et al. (2024), in a qualitative study of stakeholders in Austria, showed how teachers navigate tensions between inclusive-education requirements and special educational needs assessment practices. Mavrou et al. (2024) examined experiences of teachers and parents in Cyprus and highlighted the importance of technology and collaboration in supporting inclusion. Sabates et al. (2024) reported on disability and learning in Ethiopia and drew attention to the continuing effects of educational disruption on learners with disabilities.

MacKenzie et al. (2023) found that teachers and mothers in the West Bank experienced barriers associated with scarce resources, inadequate qualifications and professional development, and disability-related stigma. Such evidence supports the social-model argument that exclusion is often generated by environmental and institutional conditions. The lesson for Islamic educational philosophy is significant: moral commitments to dignity and justice must be translated into concrete institutional practices that remove barriers.

Research on inclusive education also indicates that inclusion should not be restricted to disability alone. Schwab et al. (2024) argue that inclusive schooling encompasses a broader population of learners and that teacher attitudes toward diversity are relevant to inclusion as a whole. This broader understanding is consistent with Islamic teachings that reject unjust discrimination and encourage respect for human diversity.

Islamic scholarship has begun to connect inclusive education explicitly with religious moderation. Akrim and Sulasmi (2021) argue that inclusive education is consistent with Islamic principles concerning human beings and balance. Wazdy and Yahya (2024) specifically connect Islamic inclusive education with compassion, tolerance, respect for differences, and religious moderation. These works provide a bridge between inclusion as an educational principle and inclusion as a broader ethical project for social harmony.

Islamic Philosophical Foundations of Inclusive Education

Justice (‘Adl)

Justice is a foundational Islamic value and has direct implications for education. Educational justice requires that learners are not denied opportunities because of disability, poverty, gender, language, ethnicity, or other socially constructed differences. In an inclusive setting, justice is better understood as equitable participation and appropriate support rather than uniform treatment.



Equality (Musāwah) and Human Dignity (Karāmah)

Qur'an 49:13 emphasizes human diversity while rejecting superiority based on lineage or social identity. Qur'an 17:70 affirms human dignity. Together, these principles can be interpreted as supporting educational environments in which diversity is recognized without allowing difference to become a basis for exclusion. Contemporary inclusive education similarly seeks to move from deficit-oriented categorization toward participation and belonging.

Compassion (Raḥmah)

Compassion provides an ethical basis for responding to learners' needs. In education, compassion should not be reduced to charity; it should inform professional responsibility, respectful communication, individualized support, and the creation of safe learning environments. Inclusive pedagogy therefore requires both competence and an ethic of care.

Brotherhood, Cooperation, and Social Responsibility

Islamic teachings emphasize mutual support and social responsibility. Applied to schools, these values support peer learning, collaborative problem-solving, family-school partnerships, and community participation. Such practices are consistent with contemporary evidence that successful inclusion depends on collaboration among teachers, families, support professionals, school leaders, and communities.

Disability and the Example of Abdullah ibn Umm Maktum

The account of Abdullah ibn Umm Maktum is frequently invoked in Islamic educational discussions concerning disability. The significance of the account lies not simply in the presence of a person with visual impairment in the community, but in the recognition of his capacity, dignity, participation, and responsibility. The example challenges assumptions that disability necessarily limits intellectual or social contribution.

Inclusive Education and Religious Moderation (Wasatiyyah)

Inclusive education can contribute to religious moderation when it creates structured opportunities for learners with different identities, abilities, and experiences to interact respectfully. Wazdy and Yahya (2024) argue that Islamic values such as compassion, tolerance, and respect for difference can support religious moderation. The connection is particularly important in multicultural societies, where educational institutions can either reproduce social divisions or create spaces for meaningful encounter.



From this perspective, inclusion is not only about physical placement. It involves curriculum content, classroom interaction, language, school culture, participation in activities, and equal recognition. Learners who experience respectful diversity may develop empathy and cooperation, while teachers and school leaders can model non-discriminatory practice. This does not mean that inclusion automatically produces moderation; rather, inclusive education creates conditions that can support these outcomes when accompanied by deliberate pedagogical and ethical practices.

Contemporary Evidence on Implementation Challenges

The literature shows a consistent gap between inclusive policy commitments and implementation. Teacher attitudes and self-efficacy remain important factors (Lindner et al., 2023; Woodcock et al., 2023). Professional development is therefore essential, particularly when teachers are expected to adapt instruction, assessment, classroom management, and learning materials to diverse needs.

Accessibility is another major issue. Inclusive schools require barrier-free physical environments, accessible digital and print materials, appropriate assistive technologies, and assessment accommodations. Mavrou et al. (2024) illustrate how technology and collaboration can support participation, while Sabates et al. (2024) show that learners with disabilities can remain vulnerable when educational systems are disrupted.

Stigma and negative attitudes can be as restrictive as physical barriers. MacKenzie et al. (2023) demonstrate how stigma and structural inequality can limit meaningful inclusion even where teachers and families actively seek better opportunities for learners with disabilities. This evidence reinforces the social-model perspective and indicates that policy implementation must address culture and institutional practice alongside infrastructure.

Finally, assessment practices require attention. Moehlen et al. (2024) show that assessment and categorization can create dilemmas for teachers when systems simultaneously pursue inclusive education and maintain segregated or deficit-oriented structures. Inclusive assessment should therefore identify support needs without reducing learners to diagnostic labels.

Discussion

The synthesis indicates substantial philosophical convergence between Islamic ethical principles and contemporary inclusive-education frameworks. The key point is not that Islam anticipated every contemporary policy mechanism, but that its emphasis on dignity, justice, compassion, and social



responsibility can support a moral rationale for removing educational barriers. Contemporary scholarship adds the institutional and pedagogical mechanisms through which these values can be operationalized.

The evidence also cautions against treating inclusion as a matter of good intentions alone. Teacher attitudes, professional knowledge, perceived self-efficacy, institutional norms, accessible resources, technology, family collaboration, and policy structures all influence whether inclusion is experienced meaningfully (Lindner et al., 2023; Mavrou et al., 2024; Urton et al., 2023; Woodcock et al., 2023). Therefore, an Islamic philosophy of inclusion should be translated into professional standards and school-level practices.

The relationship with religious moderation is similarly best understood as a potential social outcome rather than an automatic consequence. Inclusive schools can provide opportunities for learners to encounter difference in constructive ways, and Islamic ethical values can frame such encounters through compassion, respect, and mutual responsibility. Wazdy and Yahya (2024) provide a useful conceptual basis for this link. However, empirical research is needed to examine whether and under what conditions inclusive education actually produces measurable changes in tolerance, empathy, and social cohesion.

Implications of the Study

Educational Policy

Policymakers should recognize that Islamic ethical teachings can provide a culturally meaningful rationale for inclusive education while maintaining alignment with international human-rights standards. Policies should translate principles into measurable commitments concerning accessibility, teacher preparation, accommodations, assistive technology, and participation.

Teacher Education

Teacher education programmes should integrate inclusive pedagogy, disability awareness, differentiated instruction, UDL, assistive technology, accessible assessment, and collaborative practice. In Muslim educational contexts, Islamic perspectives on justice, dignity, compassion, and social responsibility can be incorporated as ethical foundations rather than as substitutes for evidence-based professional knowledge.



Curriculum Development

Curricula should represent diversity positively and address discrimination, empathy, human rights, and social responsibility. Where appropriate, Qur'anic and Prophetic examples can be used to encourage respectful attitudes toward persons with disabilities and marginalized communities.

School Leadership and Community Partnership

School leaders should develop inclusive cultures, allocate resources for accessibility, support teacher collaboration, and involve families in decision-making. Religious leaders and community organizations can contribute to awareness-building and help challenge stigma, provided that disability inclusion is approached through rights, dignity, and participation rather than charity alone.

Limitations of the Study

This study is conceptual and qualitative in orientation and does not present primary data from teachers, learners, parents, or policymakers. It therefore cannot establish causal effects of Islamic values on inclusive educational outcomes. The paper also does not provide a country-by-country comparison of Muslim-majority education systems. The selection of recent international literature was designed to strengthen the conceptual argument, not to constitute a systematic review or meta-analysis. Future empirical and comparative studies are required to test the framework in specific educational contexts.

Future Directions for Research

- Investigating teachers' attitudes and self-efficacy toward inclusive education in Islamic schools and mainstream institutions.
- Examining the educational experiences of students with disabilities in Muslim-majority and multicultural contexts.
- Evaluating implementation of inclusive education under NEP 2020 in Indian schools serving diverse communities.
- Exploring the role of Islamic scholars and religious institutions in disability-awareness and inclusion initiatives.
- Comparing Islamic educational philosophy with other religious and philosophical traditions concerning disability, equity, and inclusion.
- Assessing the effectiveness of assistive technologies and UDL in inclusive classrooms.



- Investigating family perceptions of inclusive education and their influence on participation and retention.
- Testing empirically the proposed relationship among Islamic ethical values, inclusive practices, social cohesion, and religious moderation.

Conclusion

Education occupies a central place in Islamic intellectual and moral life because it contributes to knowledge, character, responsibility, and social participation. This paper demonstrates that the ethical foundations of inclusive education—justice, equality, compassion, dignity, and responsibility—can be meaningfully connected with Islamic philosophy. Qur'anic principles concerning human dignity and diversity, together with Prophetic examples concerning participation and responsibility, provide a strong normative basis for rejecting discriminatory educational practices.

At the same time, contemporary inclusive education contributes practical frameworks that Islamic educational philosophy alone does not specify in operational detail. The UNCRPD, SDG 4, NEP 2020, the social model of disability, UDL, and recent empirical research provide tools for translating ethical commitments into accessible environments, flexible pedagogy, reasonable accommodation, assistive technology, and professional support. Recent research from Scopus- and Web of Science-evidenced journals further demonstrates that teacher capacity, institutional conditions, technology, collaboration, and systemic barriers are central to successful inclusion.

Accordingly, inclusive education should be understood as both an ethical commitment and a professional practice. In Muslim and multicultural educational contexts, Islamic values can strengthen the moral legitimacy of inclusion while contemporary educational science supplies evidence-based mechanisms for implementation. When dignity and justice are combined with accessible infrastructure, trained teachers, inclusive assessment, family partnership, and appropriate technology, education can move beyond mere placement toward genuine participation and belonging. Such an approach has the potential to advance educational equity while also contributing to respect for diversity, social cohesion, and religious moderation.

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