

Inclusive education journey: comparative insights from gifted and differently abled learners

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to comparatively examine the educational needs of learners with disabilities (LWDs) and potentially gifted learners (PGLs) within higher education institutions, highlighting their distinct yet overlapping requirements for inclusive learning. Using a qualitative-comparative research design, 20 participants, 10 from each group, were selected through purposive sampling. Semi-structured interviews were conducted and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic framework to identify convergent and divergent themes. Results revealed that both groups face systemic and pedagogical barriers, including rigid curricula, limited institutional support, and insufficient guidance in developing social-emotional skills. While LWDs emphasized accessibility, assistive technologies, and equitable participation, PGLs highlighted the need for enrichment, mentorship, and intellectual challenge. Despite differing emphases, both groups shared the need for inclusive policies, emotional support, and a sense of belonging. The study proposes an integrated model of inclusivity that unites adaptive pedagogy, personalized mentorship, and wellness programs under coherent institutional policies. This framework reframes inclusion from fragmented interventions toward a holistic, equity-driven approach that values diversity as a resource for learning. Findings contribute to the global discourse on inclusive education by demonstrating that authentic inclusivity in higher education emerges when accessibility and excellence are addressed through a unified, transformative educational system.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has become a central theme in the global movement toward equity in higher education. Traditionally, educational systems have focused on mainstream learners, often overlooking the unique needs of those at the margins, such as learners with disabilities (LWDs) and potentially gifted students. While these two groups appear to occupy opposite ends of the learning spectrum, both encounter systemic barriers that hinder their academic growth, social integration, and overall well-being. As universities strive to cultivate environments that celebrate diversity and empower every learner, it is imperative to understand not only the distinct challenges faced by gifted and disabled learners but also their shared needs within inclusive education [1].

Despite increasing advocacy for inclusive practices, the lived realities of these learners highlight a persistent gap between policy intentions and classroom realities. Students with disabilities frequently struggle with inaccessible learning spaces, insufficient assistive technologies, and limited institutional support.

Conversely, gifted learners often encounter rigid curricula, under-stimulation, and inadequate recognition of their talents. These parallel yet divergent challenges underscore a pressing problem: current educational models tend to treat inclusivity in fragmented ways, focusing either on remediation for disabilities or on enrichment for giftedness, rather than recognizing the interwoven principles of equity and support that both groups require. This disconnect limits the transformative potential of higher education to foster inclusive and holistic learning environments.

Existing literature provides valuable insights but remains compartmentalized. Research on LWDs has emphasized the importance of assistive technologies, accessibility, and legal protections [2], [3]. Meanwhile, studies on potentially gifted learners (PGLs) stress the need for differentiated instruction, advanced curricular opportunities, and talent development [4], [5]. However, few comparative studies examine the overlapping and divergent needs of both groups within the same institutional context. There's a knowledge gap that expands the discourse of inclusivity beyond the binary framing of disability versus giftedness. To address this gap, the study aims to capture and contrast the educational needs of both LWDs and PGLs. Using semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis, the study foregrounds students' voices, revealing converging themes such as the need for emotional support, inclusive policies, and social belonging, alongside divergent themes, including the use of assistive technology for LWDs and talent development for PGLs. Based on these insights, the study proposes an integrated action plan that combines adaptive curriculum design, specialized mentorship, personalized education plans, inclusive extracurricular programs, financial and emotional support services, and technology-enhanced learning. The innovativeness of this research lies in its holistic, dual-focus framework for inclusive education. Rather than treating disability and giftedness as isolated categories requiring separate interventions, the study highlights their intersecting needs and proposes unified strategies that benefit all learners. This approach reimagines inclusivity not as a remedial or enrichment agenda but as a comprehensive system of support that values diversity, equity, and empowerment. By doing so, the study offers a novel perspective on higher education research and practical pathways for institutions seeking to create more inclusive, equitable, and future-ready learning environments.

2. METHOD

2.1. Research design

This study employed a qualitative-comparative research design to examine and contrast the educational needs of LWDs and those of PGLs in higher education institutions. The qualitative approach was chosen because it provides depth and richness in capturing participants' lived experiences, perceptions, and nuanced needs [6]. While quantitative designs can measure prevalence and correlations, they may overlook the complex social, emotional, and institutional contexts that shape diverse learners' experiences. Thus, a qualitative lens allowed the researchers to explore how these groups perceive inclusivity, support, and barriers within academic environments. The comparative component was central to the design. Through a side-by-side analysis of experiences from LWDs and PGLs, the study sought to uncover distinct needs, common challenges, and overlapping support requirements. Such an approach underscores the principle that inclusive education must simultaneously address diversity and equity, moving beyond the dichotomy between disability and giftedness to foster a holistic, inclusive learning environment.

This study is grounded in a conceptual framework that provides a comparative lens, highlighting the unique and shared needs of LWDs and PGLs, as shown in Figure 1. Each group contributes its distinct set of lived experiences and perspectives, which reflect its specific academic, social, and emotional challenges. For instance, LWDs often emphasize the importance of accessibility, assistive technologies, and accommodations [2], [3], while PGLs highlight the need for advanced curricular opportunities, enrichment programs, and sustained motivation [4], [5]. These group-specific concerns are represented in the model's separate hexagons. At the same time, the framework highlights the intersection of shared needs and insights, which represent the common challenges and opportunities that affect both populations. These include flexible curricula, inclusive policies, emotional and psychological support, financial assistance, and a strong sense of social belonging. The presence of overlapping needs reflects a central insight of inclusive education: despite their differing profiles, both disabled and gifted learners face systemic barriers that limit their opportunities to thrive [7], [8]. By visualizing this convergence, the model demonstrates that inclusivity should not be approached as fragmented interventions targeting separate groups, but rather as integrated strategies that foster equity for all learners. This conceptual framework aligns with the study's qualitative-comparative design, offering a clear structure for analyzing both divergent and convergent themes. It also provides a foundation for developing holistic, institution-wide interventions such as adaptive curricula, mentorship programs, and emotional support services that simultaneously meet the needs of gifted and disabled learners. In this way, the model reflects the innovative contribution of the present study by reconceptualizing inclusivity as a shared and integrative educational agenda rather than a set of isolated supports for specific groups.

Uncovering Shared and Unique Needs in Education

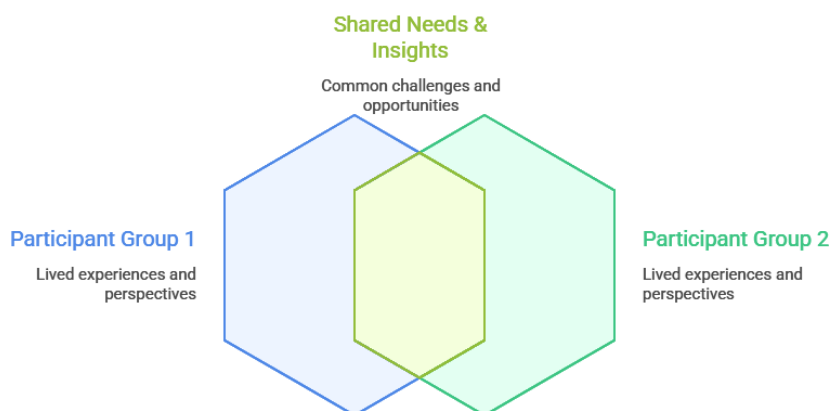


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the study

2.2. Participants and sampling

Participants were recruited through purposive sampling, a method commonly used in qualitative research to select individuals who can provide the most relevant and insightful data for the study [9]. Two distinct participant groups were identified: LWDs, these are learners registered with the university's disability support office or self-identifying with documented physical, sensory, or learning impairments and PGLs, these are learners meeting at least two of the following criteria: i) consistent academic performance in the top 5% of their cohort, as evidenced by transcripts or standardized assessments; ii) formal nomination by faculty based on exceptional analytical, creative, or leadership potential; and iii) documented outstanding achievement in talent domains (e.g., national competitions, published work, prestigious awards).

A total of 20 participants were included, comprising 10 learners from each group. This sample size was determined to be sufficient to achieve thematic saturation, a point at which additional data collection yields minimal or no new insights relevant to the research questions [10]. Saturation was actively ensured through an iterative data collection and analysis process: recruitment and data collection for each group proceeded concurrently with preliminary analysis, allowing for the identification of recurring themes and the deliberate targeting of subsequent participants to explore and confirm these patterns. This process continued until the final interviews within each group produced no substantively new themes, confirming that saturation had been achieved. Participants represented diverse academic programs, year levels, and socioeconomic backgrounds, providing a broad perspective on experiences in higher education and further strengthening the depth and credibility of the saturated thematic findings.

2.3. Data collection

Data were gathered through semi-structured individual interviews, which enabled the researchers to strike a balance between consistency and flexibility [11]. The individual interviews lasted approximately 45-60 minutes each and were conducted in person or via a secure videoconferencing platform. The interview guide, primarily based on the literature and institutional policies, contained open-ended questions probing key domains. Sample questions included:

- “Can you describe a time when the curriculum or teaching methods either significantly supported or hindered your learning?” (Academic domain)
- “How do your extracurricular interests intersect with, or feel separate from, your academic identity?” (Talent development)
- “What does an ‘inclusive’ learning environment look and feel like to you?” (Learning environment)

All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and redacted using pseudonyms.

2.4. Data analysis

The study employed thematic analysis following the six-phase framework [12]. This approach provided a systematic yet flexible method of identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within qualitative data. Transcripts were managed and coded using NVivo software (version 12), which facilitated the organization of large datasets and the retrieval of coded excerpts. The process began with familiarization through repeated reading of transcripts. Initial coding was conducted inductively, attaching descriptive labels

(e.g., “frustration with rigid deadlines,” “reliance on peer explanation”) to text segments. These codes were then collated and refined through discussion among researchers to form initial themes. Themes were reviewed and defined by comparing their prevalence and characteristics between the two participant groups (LWDs vs. PGLs). To ensure themes were grounded in participant voices, illustrative quotations were systematically identified and embedded within the analysis. For example, the theme “environmental sensitivity” for PGLs was supported by a participant’s statement, “*I can’t focus if there’s chaotic noise... but absolute silence feels oppressive. I need a space that’s calibrated, not just quiet.*” Similarly, the LWDs theme “access as a prerequisite, not an accommodation” was evidenced by quotes like, “*If the lecture slides aren’t provided beforehand, I’m not getting an accommodation, I’m starting the class already behind.*”

2.5. Trustworthiness of data

To ensure the reliability and validity of the qualitative findings, several established strategies were employed to address the trustworthiness criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability [13]. Credibility was strengthened through member checking, in which participants reviewed summaries of their interviews for accuracy; all confirmed the interpretations, and minor clarifications were incorporated. Dependability was ensured by maintaining a detailed audit trail within NVivo, documenting all coding decisions and analytical progress. To enhance confirmability, the research team engaged in peer debriefing with independent colleagues who critiqued the emerging themes and interpretations. Finally, transferability is supported through the provision of thick description in the reporting of results, detailing the participants’ contexts and experiences to allow readers to judge the potential applicability of the findings to other settings.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. The comparison of needs for LWDs and PGLs

Table 1 compares the needs of LWDs and PGLs and reveals both shared and distinct priorities for inclusive learning. While both groups require foundational supports like inclusive teaching methods, financial assistance, and peer collaboration, their primary emphases diverge significantly. LWDs’ needs are prominently focused on accessibility and specific accommodations, including assistive technology, adapted materials, and physical access. In contrast, PGLs require a more holistic approach to socio-psychological well-being, motivational environments, and the development of leadership and self-advocacy skills. A notable difference is that time management emerged as a specific support need only for PGLs, not for LWDs. The findings highlight that effective inclusion requires a responsive framework that addresses universal principles of access and flexibility while also tailoring specific interventions to each group’s unique challenges and needs. Each support domain is explicitly discussed in the succeeding paragraph.

Table 1. LWDs and PGLs’ support needs for inclusive learning

Support domain	LWDs	PGLs
Academic and curriculum support	Tailored support, flexible teaching, adaptive assessment, learning pace, Equal access, inclusive teaching, marginalized support	Diverse learning styles, inclusive curriculum, strength-based alignment, flexible options, inclusivity, curriculum responsiveness, and flexible pathways
Socio-psychological support	Inclusive activities, belonging, peer collaboration, diversity celebration	Awareness, resilience, counselling, emotional wellness, and mindfulness
Learning environment support	Accessibility, multimodal learning, quiet/collaborative spaces, flexibility	Intellectual/emotional/social/physical well-being, adaptable environment; motivating environment, goal setting, and role models
Financial support	Scholarships, emergency aid, partnerships, work-study	Financial aid, grants, emergency funds, literacy, and work-study
Peer support and empowerment	Peer mentoring, talent development, collaborative learning	Self-advocacy, leadership, mentorship, confidence building; Clubs, sports, leadership, creativity, and collaboration
Special needs support	Assistive tech, accessible materials, physical access, and accommodations	Academic accommodations, holistic support, mentoring, community linkages, artistic expression, mentorship, performances, and tools
Time management and multitasking	(not emerging)	Time management, prioritization, and planning tools

3.1.1. Academic and curriculum support

Within the domain of academic and curriculum support, both groups require tailored approaches as reflected in the table, but their needs differ due to distinct learning profiles. For LWDs, the emphasis is on equity and access. Their support must include tailored interventions that accommodate specific disabilities,

such as modified instruction, assistive technology, and adaptive assessment methods. Flexibility in teaching styles and learning pace is essential to ensure these learners are not left behind. Inclusive teaching strategies help them feel integrated within the classroom, and addressing marginalization is crucial to uphold their educational rights and social-emotional well-being. With a goal to remove barriers and create an environment where they can engage meaningfully with the curriculum.

On the other hand, PGLs require differentiated and enriching educational experiences that align with their advanced abilities and diverse learning styles. These learners thrive in strength-based learning environments where their talents are nurtured rather than constrained by a standardized curriculum. Research supports that gifted learners benefit significantly from curriculum models that incorporate acceleration, enrichment, and differentiation to foster their academic and creative growth [14]. Flexible, responsive curricula, such as those grounded in the Integrated Curriculum Model, have shown to enhance critical thinking and reading skills in verbally gifted students [15]. Studies also indicate that enrichment and acceleration approaches, when implemented systematically, can prevent underachievement and disengagement by challenging gifted students appropriately [16]. Unlike LWDs, who often need support to meet foundational standards, PGLs requires expanded learning opportunities to stay intellectually engaged and to fully realize their potential. Despite these differences, a unifying theme is inclusivity and responsiveness; both LWDs and PGLs benefit from a learning environment that adapts to their unique profiles. The goal is to provide equitable educational experiences that enable all learners to reach their full potential through appropriate curriculum modifications, effective teaching strategies, and supportive mechanisms.

3.1.2. Socio-psychological support

In the domain of socio-psychological support, both LWDs and PGLs require intentional strategies to nurture their emotional well-being, though the focus of support differs according to their distinct socio-emotional experiences. For LWDs, socio-psychological support is centered on inclusion, acceptance, and positive social interactions. Inclusive activities are critical in fostering a sense of belonging and combating feelings of isolation that these learners may experience due to physical, cognitive, or behavioral differences. Peer collaboration plays a crucial role in developing interpersonal skills and fostering mutual understanding. Celebrating diversity within the learning environment helps to normalize differences and create a safe space where LWDs feel valued and respected. Such efforts promote self-esteem and support their integration into the wider school community.

In contrast, PGLs often require socio-psychological support that addresses internal pressures, social disconnect, and emotional intensity. These learners may experience heightened sensitivity, perfectionism, or asynchronous development, which can lead to anxiety, isolation, or social-emotional difficulties [17]. Support strategies such as mindfulness, counselling, and the promotion of emotional well-being help them navigate these challenges. For example, mindfulness interventions have been shown to reduce self-oriented perfectionism among gifted youth [18]. Additionally, specialized counselling programs that address both psychosocial and academic planning needs are crucial to help gifted students develop coping mechanisms and maintain emotional well-being. Building resilience and self-awareness is equally important to help these students manage expectations, cope with failure, and avoid underachievement linked to emotional stress [19].

While both groups benefit from environments that promote emotional security and social inclusion, LWDs needs structures that reduce external barriers to participation, while PGLs needs support to help them manage internal emotional and psychological complexities. A holistic and differentiated socio-psychological support system is therefore essential to nurture the mental health, interpersonal skills, and emotional resilience of both groups in a balanced and responsive educational setting.

3.1.3. Learning environment support

In the area of learning environment support, both LWDs and PGLs require thoughtful, adaptive environments that cater to their specific needs, but the focus for each group varies in emphasis and implementation. For LWDs, the priority is to remove barriers to access and participation. This includes physical accessibility features such as ramps, suitable seating, and assistive devices, as well as multimodal learning approaches that cater to diverse sensory and cognitive needs. Providing a balance between quiet spaces for focused learning and collaborative spaces for social interaction is essential, as some learners may require minimal distractions while others benefit from social engagement. Flexibility in the learning environment is crucial, enabling modifications that respond to fluctuating needs related to fatigue, sensory processing, or individual learning styles. The overarching aim is to create an inclusive space where LWDs can learn comfortably and effectively.

For PGLs, the learning environment should promote intellectual stimulation and holistic development. These learners thrive in spaces that support not only cognitive growth but also emotional, social, and physical well-being. Research emphasizes that learning environments for gifted students must be creative, adaptable, and enriched to stimulate curiosity and high-level thinking. Flexible and personalized environments such as

those supported by the Universal Design for Learning and Schoolwide Enrichment Models allow learners to engage in independent inquiry, group collaboration, or artistic expression, depending on their preferences and strengths [20]. Exposure to meaningful challenges, goal-setting, and inspiring role models also contributes to sustained motivation and creativity among gifted students [21]. Ultimately, well-structured but flexible educational settings are key to nurturing the intellectual and personal growth of gifted learners. While the specific strategies differ, both groups benefit from adaptable, inclusive, and supportive learning environments. The key is to design spaces that not only accommodate differences but also actively foster growth, confidence, and success in every learner.

3.1.4. Financial support

In the domain of financial support, both LWDs and PGLs require targeted assistance to overcome economic barriers that may hinder their educational progress. These support mechanisms are often similar in form. However, they serve different underlying purposes based on each group's context and challenges. For LWDs, financial support is crucial in ensuring equal access to educational opportunities. This includes scholarships specifically designated for students with disabilities, which help reduce the financial burden of tuition, assistive technology, transportation, and specialized support services. Emergency aid is particularly important to address unforeseen circumstances that may disproportionately affect these learners, such as health-related issues or the need for personal support aides. Partnerships with government agencies, NGOs, and disability advocacy groups can enhance funding opportunities and provide comprehensive assistance. Work-study programs offer both financial relief and skills development, though these must be tailored to accommodate their unique needs and capacities.

Concurrently, PGLs also benefit significantly from financial support systems such as scholarships and grants, which are often merit-based and geared toward talent development. These resources enable access to enrichment programs, competitions, and advanced coursework that might otherwise be out of reach due to economic constraints. Studies show that providing targeted financial aid, such as the Student Talent Enrichment Program and the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation's support for low-income, high-achieving students, significantly improves academic outcomes and access to specialized learning experiences [22]. Emergency funds are also important in supporting gifted students' participation in academic events or specialized training opportunities. Financial literacy education is an emerging area of value for PGLs, equipping them with tools to manage personal resources and prepare for future academic or career aspirations. Work-study programs, when aligned with interests and goals, can offer both financial relief and meaningful developmental experiences [23]. While financial support tools like scholarships, emergency aid, and work-study may seem similar across learner groups, their design and purpose must differ for LWDs; they promote access and equity, whereas for PGLs, they enable growth and excellence. Tailoring these programs ensures no gifted learner is left behind due to financial barriers.

3.1.5. Peer support and empowerment

In the areas of peer support and empowerment, both LWDs and PGLs greatly benefit from environments that foster positive peer interactions, mutual growth, and self-confidence. These environments play a crucial role in their overall development. However, the strategies and focal points differ according to learners' specific needs and developmental trajectories. For LWDs, peer support is essential in promoting social inclusion, academic engagement, and personal empowerment. Peer mentoring programs help these learners navigate school life, build friendships, and feel a sense of belonging. Collaborative learning encourages interaction with classmates in a supportive and respectful manner, allowing LWDs to contribute their strengths while also benefiting from peer assistance. These strategies not only support learning but also enhance self-esteem by reducing feelings of isolation and dependency. Talent development initiatives within peer groups also help LWDs identify and build on their capabilities, challenging the often-limited expectations placed upon them.

In contrast, PGLs require peer engagement that emphasizes leadership development, creativity, and self-expression. These learners often thrive when given opportunities to take initiative and contribute meaningfully to group activities. Research indicates that peer leadership roles can enhance academic performance, self-confidence, and communication skills, key traits for gifted learners navigating complex social and intellectual environments [24]. Encouraging self-advocacy and confidence-building empowers gifted students to articulate their needs and aspirations; peer mentoring has proven effective in restoring and boosting self-confidence in educational settings [25]. Participation in clubs, sports, and academic or creative pursuits enables these students to explore interests with like-minded peers and foster a sense of identity and belonging. Leadership roles and mentorship opportunities help build responsibility, self-efficacy, and purpose, contributing to both academic growth and personal development [26]. Furthermore, while both LWDs and PGLs benefit from positive peer dynamics and empowerment structures, LWDs primarily need peer support

systems that promote inclusion, encouragement, and mutual respect, whereas PGLs benefits from those that cultivate leadership, independence, and collaborative innovation. A responsive educational environment should, therefore, provide diverse and adaptable peer support models to meet the unique needs and potential of every learner.

3.1.6. Special needs support

In the area of special needs support, both LWDs and PGLs require specialized strategies and resources to enable them to thrive. These supports are essential for addressing their individual requirements. However, the focus and execution of these supports differ according to the learners' unique challenges and strengths. For LWDs, special needs support is focused on eliminating barriers and ensuring equitable access to education. This includes the use of assistive technologies such as screen readers, speech-to-text tools, or hearing aids, which are essential in addressing specific disabilities. Accessible materials, whether in print, digital, or tactile formats, ensure that learning content is available to all. Physical access to facilities, including classrooms, laboratories, and extracurricular spaces, must also be guaranteed. Accommodations such as extended test times, alternative assessments, and personalized instruction are critical in supporting the diverse learning needs of LWD. These supports are not merely supplementary; they are fundamental to ensuring that LWDs can fully participate in educational activities on equal footing with their peers.

For PGLs, special needs support focuses on nurturing advanced abilities and offering platforms for growth and expression. Academic accommodations such as acceleration, differentiated instruction, and access to advanced content are key strategies for challenging and stimulating gifted learners [27], [28]. Holistic support acknowledges that gifted students may also face social or emotional challenges; mentorship is highly effective in guiding both personal and academic development [29]. Community linkages, such as partnerships with universities, professionals, or cultural institutions, expand opportunities for exploration and talent development. Furthermore, avenues for creative expression through arts programming and performance opportunities help gifted students refine and display their talents in meaningful ways [14]. In essence, while LWDs require support that promotes accessibility and functional participation, PGLs need support that fosters enrichment, self-expression, and expanded learning opportunities. Both groups benefit from individualized and responsive approaches that recognize their specific needs and potential. These approaches ensure that education is truly inclusive and empowering for all learners.

3.1.7. Time management and multitasking

In the domain of time management and multitasking, the table reveals that this support area is not emerging as a prominent need for LWDs. Their primary challenges tend to fall in other areas, making time management a less emphasized concern. However, it is recognized as a relevant area of development for PGLs, which often juggles multiple tasks and advanced learning opportunities. For LWD, the absence of this support area may indicate that their learning environments typically highlight task simplification, focused instruction, and paced learning rather than multitasking or self-directed time management. Many LWDs benefit from structured routines, individualized support, and guided timeframes, which help them manage tasks without the additional cognitive load of planning and juggling multiple responsibilities. As a result, formal training in time management may not be prioritized in their support systems, although some LWDs, depending on their specific condition, might still benefit from basic organizational skills.

In contrast, PGLs often face increased academic and extracurricular demands due to their advanced capabilities and involvement in multiple enrichment opportunities. To manage these responsibilities effectively, skills such as time management, prioritization, and the use of planning tools become essential. Research indicates that gifted learners frequently engage in advanced coursework, independent projects, and leadership roles, all of which require high levels of self-regulation and organizational competence [30]. Without appropriate guidance, these students may struggle with overcommitment and perfectionism, which are linked to increased stress and reduced well-being [31], [32]. Structured interventions, such as time management training, planning tools, and mentoring, can help establish healthy routines and prevent burnout [33]. In general, while time management and multitasking may not currently emerge as pressing concerns for most LWDs in typical educational settings, these skills are vital for PGLs, who must learn to balance their talents and responsibilities effectively. Educators and support staff should remain flexible and responsive to the individual needs of learners in both groups. They must also recognize that some LWDs may benefit from support in these areas, depending on their personal learning challenges.

Based on the findings, the researchers propose an integrated model for inclusive education. As illustrated in Figure 2, the model presents a unified framework for addressing the needs of LWDs and PGLs in higher education. It asserts that authentic inclusion requires the synergistic integration of accessibility and enrichment, moving beyond fragmented interventions. The model is built upon a foundation of coherent institutional policies that frame diversity as a resource. Three primary pillars operationalize this vision: i) adaptive pedagogy, utilizing UDL and differentiated instruction; ii) personalized mentorship for

self-advocacy and enrichment; and iii) wellness and socio-emotional support to foster belonging. The intersection of these pillars forms a convergence zone that addresses shared needs, such as emotional support and inclusive access. While the model identifies distinct focuses for LWDs (targeted accessibility) and PGLs (intellectual challenge), it integrates them through a shared support structure. This reframing demonstrates that a holistic, equity-driven approach can simultaneously achieve accessibility and excellence, transforming systemic practice in higher education.

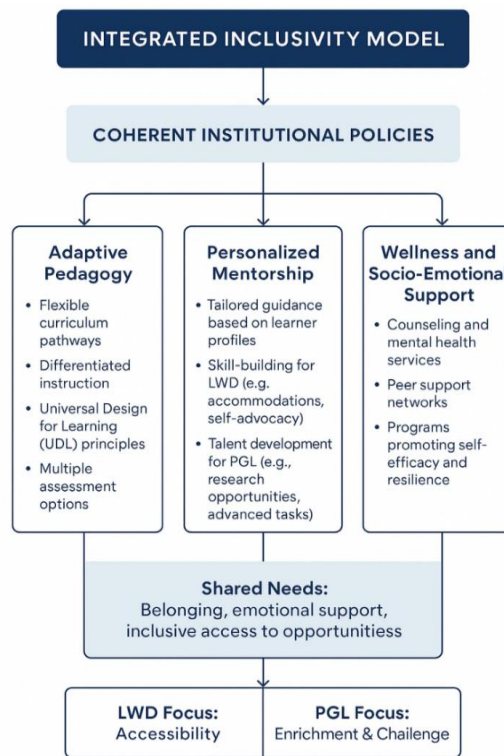


Figure 2. Proposed integrated inclusivity model

4. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study affirm that LWDs and PGLs, though representing distinct educational profiles, share overlapping needs within an inclusive higher education framework. Both groups face systemic and pedagogical barriers, such as rigid curricula, inadequate support services, and limited socio-emotional scaffolding, that hinder their full academic participation. For LWDs, inclusion demands adaptive curriculum design, accessible environments, assistive technologies, and responsive teaching strategies that promote equity and participation. Conversely, PGLs require differentiated instruction, enrichment programs, and mentorship opportunities that nurture creativity, critical thinking, and leadership potential. Despite their contrasting needs, both groups benefit from a supportive institutional culture that offers psychological support, peer collaboration, and financial assistance. These findings confirm the study's central premise that inclusivity in higher education should be a unifying, equity-driven model that integrates accessibility, excellence, and emotional well-being as interdependent elements of student success.

Building on these findings, the study recommends a holistic, sustainable framework for inclusive higher education. Institutions should implement adaptive pedagogical approaches, personalized mentorship, and wellness initiatives within coherent policy mechanisms that support diverse learners. This integrated model redefines inclusion not as a remedial intervention but as a transformative, systemic approach to equity and excellence. Future research should examine the long-term effects of integrated inclusion models using longitudinal and mixed-method designs, and explore cross-cultural and institutional variations in inclusive practice. Particular attention should also be given to twice-exceptional learners who are both gifted and have disabilities to deepen the understanding of intersectionality in inclusive education. This study shows that authentic inclusivity in higher education systems requires an accessible, differentiated, and empowering design that enables every learner to realize their full academic and personal potential.

While the qualitative-comparative design provided depth and richness, its reliance on a relatively small sample size limits the universality of the findings. Moreover, self-reported data may be influenced by social desirability bias or participants' willingness to disclose sensitive experiences. Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into the nuanced and intersecting needs of gifted and disabled learners, offering practical implications for inclusive educational practices.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

This journal uses the Contributor Roles Taxonomy (CRediT) to recognize individual author contributions, reduce authorship disputes, and facilitate collaboration.

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C : **C**onceptualization

M : **M**ethodology

So : **S**oftware

Va : **V**alidation

Fo : **F**ormal analysis

I : **I**nvestigation

R : **R**esources

D : **D**ata Curation

O : **O**riting - **O**riginal Draft

E : **E**riting - **R**eview & **E**ditng

Vi : **V**isualization

Su : **S**upervision

P : **P**roject administration

Fu : **F**unding acquisition

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflicts of interest related to this research, whether personal, financial, ideological, political, cultural, or academic, that could influence the results or publication of this article.

INFORMED CONSENT

The authors obtained informed consent from all individuals included in this study.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

During the conduct of the study, the University does not have an institutional ethics board; however, it has a Research, Innovation, and Extension Office that serves as an equivalent committee for research approval. Research related to human use has been conducted in accordance with all relevant national regulations, including the data privacy law of the Philippines, as well as institutional policies, as outlined in the tenets of the Declaration of Helsinki. The research has been approved by the Office of Research, Innovation, and Extension (ORIE). The scholarly work for this research has undergone a rigorous review and evaluation by experts from ORIE and has been approved by the University President, following the recommendation of the Vice President for Research, Innovation, and Extension. The mechanism for approval ultimately aligns with journal guidelines for ethical oversight.




DATA AVAILABILITY

The data supporting this study's findings are available on request from the corresponding author, [RBA]. The data, which contains information that could compromise the privacy of research participants, is not publicly available due to certain restrictions from the data privacy law of the Philippines.




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