

When Inclusion Meets Reality: The Implementation of IEP Accommodations in High School Classrooms in South Carolina, USA

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Abstract - This study examined the implementation of Individualized Education Program (IEP) accommodation in high schools within Lancaster County School District in South Carolina, United State of America, focusing on teachers' experiences, instructional practices, and perceived effects on student learning. Guided by Universal Design for Learning (UDL), a qualitative case study design was used, with semi-structured interviews conducted among eight purposively selected general and special education teachers. Thematic analysis shows that while teachers value IEP accommodations for promoting equity and access, they face major implementation challenges, including large class sizes, limited instructional time, inadequate training, and insufficient resources. Some teachers integrate accommodation into lesson planning, while others apply them inconsistently due to workload and competing demands. Findings also indicate that although accommodation improves student engagement and confidence, their impact on academic achievement remains unclear. The study concludes that implementation challenges are driven more by structural and institutional constraints than by teacher willingness or awareness. It recommends strengthening instructional support systems, enhancing professional development, increasing curriculum flexibility, improving resource provision, and embedding inclusive practices within school leadership structures to ensure consistent implementation.

Keywords: Individualized Education Program, Inclusive education, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), Accommodation implementation, Instructional practices; Student engagement; Special educational needs

Introduction

Inclusive education has become a central priority in contemporary educational systems, particularly in the United States where federal legislation such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates equitable access to education for students with disabilities. Within this framework, Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) serve as the primary mechanism through which accommodations are developed and implemented to support students' academic success and participation in general education settings. These accommodations, including extended time, modified instruction, and assistive technologies, are intended to reduce learning barriers and promote equitable educational opportunities. However, the effectiveness of these provisions is not guaranteed by policy alone; it largely depends on how they are interpreted and enacted in classroom practice. Kurth et al. (2022) asserts that teachers occupy a central role in translating policy into practice, yet empirical evidence indicates that inconsistencies in implementation persist across schools and districts. Although accommodations are often well documented in IEPs, their application in classrooms varies considerably due to factors such as

teacher preparedness, workload pressures, availability of resources, and the level of institutional support (Kern et al., 2018; Xu & Filler, 2020).

Teacher perceptions further shape the extent to which accommodations are effectively implemented. DeMatthews and Knight (2019) assert that beliefs about inclusion, perceived competence, and attitudes toward students with disabilities influence instructional decisions and the fidelity with which accommodations are applied. In high school settings, these challenges become more pronounced due to subject specialization, increased academic demands, and larger class sizes, all of which complicate efforts to provide individualized support. Consequently, while the policy framework for inclusive education is well established, the realities of classroom practice often fall short of its intended goals. In Lancaster County School District, there is limited empirical evidence that examines how teachers perceive and implement IEP accommodations within their specific institutional environment.

Despite the intended purpose of IEP accommodation to ensure equitable access to instruction and assessment, their implementation remains inconsistent and, in many cases, ineffective. Research points to a persistent gap between policy expectations and classroom realities, where accommodation exists in documentation but are not always applied as intended (Kurth et al., 2022). Teachers frequently encounter challenges such as inadequate training, insufficient instructional resources, and unclear implementation guidelines, all of which constrain their ability to deliver accommodation effectively (Hoppey & Yendol-Hoppey, 2013). In addition, variations in teacher attitudes toward accommodation contribute to disparities in practice. While some educators' view accommodation as essential tools for supporting diverse learners, others perceive them as burdensome or difficult to integrate into standard teaching routines (DeMatthews & Knight, 2019). These differences influence the consistency and quality of implementation, ultimately affecting students' academic engagement and learning outcomes.

Existing research on IEP implementation has largely focused on compliance and quantitative indicators, offering limited insight into the lived experiences of teachers and the contextual factors that shape their practices. There is a notable lack of qualitative studies that explores how teachers interpret, adapt, and negotiate accommodation requirements in real classroom settings. Furthermore, localized research within specific districts such as Lancaster County School District in South Carolina, United State of America, remains scarce, limiting the development of context-sensitive strategies for improvement. The absence of such evidence risks the formulation of policies that do not adequately address the practical challenges faced by teachers, thereby weakening the overall effectiveness of inclusive education initiatives. This study responds to these gaps by providing an in-depth exploration of teachers' perspectives and experiences regarding the implementation of IEP accommodation in high schools within Lancaster County School District, with the aim of informing more effective and contextually relevant educational practices.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) theory, which provides a comprehensive lens for understanding the implementation and effectiveness of IEP accommodations in inclusive classroom settings. UDL, advanced by Meyer, Rose, and Gordon (2014), is premised on the idea that instructional environments should be intentionally designed to accommodate learner variability from the outset rather than relying on reactive adjustments. The framework emphasizes three core principles: multiple means of engagement, multiple means of representation, and multiple means of action and expression. These principles guide educators in creating flexible learning environments that support diverse learners, including students with disabilities, by reducing barriers to access, participation, and achievement.

Within the context of this study, IEP accommodations are conceptualized as practical manifestations of UDL principles. Accommodations such as extended time, differentiated instructional strategies, and assistive technologies align with UDL's emphasis on flexibility and responsiveness to individual learner needs. Rather than viewing accommodations as isolated or supplementary interventions, UDL positions them as integral components of effective instructional design. This perspective shifts attention from compliance-driven implementation toward a more pedagogically grounded approach that prioritizes meaningful access and participation. Empirical research supports this alignment, indicating that classrooms structured around UDL principles tend to demonstrate improved student engagement and more consistent implementation of inclusive practices (CAST, 2018).

The relevance of UDL to this study lies in its focus on teacher practice and instructional decision-making. Teachers serve as the primary agents responsible for translating IEP provisions into classroom realities, and their ability to implement accommodation effectively depends on their understanding of inclusive pedagogies. UDL highlights the need for teachers to adopt flexible teaching strategies that anticipate learner diversity, thereby reducing the need for extensive individual modifications. In high school contexts, where subject specialization and academic demands often constrain instructional flexibility, UDL provides a structured yet adaptable framework for integrating accommodation into everyday teaching practices. This theoretical orientation enables the study to examine how teachers in Lancaster County School District interpret and apply IEP accommodations within their instructional environments. It also provides a basis for analyzing the extent to which current practices reflect the principles of inclusive design and equitable access. The use of UDL as a guiding framework ensures that the study moves beyond procedural compliance to critically explore how accommodation contributes to authentic participation, engagement, and learning outcomes for students with disabilities.

4. Individualized Education Program (IEP) accommodations, perceptions, and challenges.

Empirical scholarship consistently affirms that Individualized Education Program (IEP) accommodations play a pivotal role in advancing inclusive education by enabling students with disabilities to access, participate in, and benefit from general education curricula. Quantitative and

quasi-experimental studies have demonstrated that well-designed accommodations such as extended time, preferential seating, scaffolded instruction, and assistive technologies can significantly enhance academic performance, classroom engagement, and students' self-efficacy (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2017; Sireci, Scarpatti, & Li, 2005). For instance, Fuchs and Fuchs (2017) found that students receiving appropriately matched accommodations demonstrated improved reading and mathematics outcomes compared to peers without such supports. Similarly, Sireci et al. (2005), through a meta-analysis, reported that accommodations are most effective when they reduce construct-irrelevant barriers without altering the intended learning outcomes. However, other empirical studies caution that the mere presence of accommodations in IEP documents does not guarantee their effectiveness; rather, outcomes depend heavily on fidelity of implementation and alignment with individual learner needs (Kurth et al., 2022). In a large-scale review, Kurth et al. (2022) revealed inconsistencies between documented accommodations and classroom practices, highlighting a persistent gap between policy design and enactment.

Teacher perceptions have emerged as a critical determinant of how IEP accommodations are interpreted and implemented in practice. Empirical studies using survey and mixed-method designs indicate that teachers who hold positive beliefs about inclusion are more likely to adapt instruction and consistently implement accommodations (DeMatthews & Knight, 2019; Sharma, Forlin, & Loreman, 2018). DeMatthews and Knight (2019), in a study of U.S. public schools, found that teachers' commitment to inclusive education was strongly associated with their willingness to modify instructional strategies and collaborate with special education professionals. Conversely, negative perceptions often linked to perceived lack of competence or increased workload were found to reduce the likelihood of consistent accommodation use. Qualitative studies further deepen this understanding by revealing that teachers often experience tensions between policy expectations and classroom realities. For example, a study by McCray and McHatton (2011) showed that teachers expressed uncertainty about how to effectively implement accommodations while maintaining curriculum rigor, particularly in high-stakes testing environments. These findings suggest that teacher cognition, including beliefs, attitudes, and self-efficacy, plays a mediating role between policy and practice.

Empirical evidence also highlights a range of structural and contextual challenges that hinder effective implementation of IEP accommodations. A recurring theme across studies is the inadequacy of professional development. Hoppey and Yendol-Hoppey (2013) found that teachers who participated in sustained, coaching-based professional development demonstrated improved implementation practices compared to those who received one-time training sessions. However, many teachers report limited access to such ongoing support, resulting in superficial understanding of accommodation strategies. Time constraints and workload pressures also feature prominently in literature. In a study by Xu and Filler (2020), teachers indicated that large class sizes and competing instructional demands made it difficult to provide individualized support to students with disabilities. High school settings present additional complexities due to subject specialization, which often limits teachers' familiarity with diverse learning needs and accommodation strategies.

Furthermore, resource limitations, including inadequate access to assistive technologies and support personnel, have been identified as significant barriers (Morningstar et al., 2017). These challenges contribute to inconsistent implementation and reduced effectiveness of IEP accommodations.

Another important strand of empirical research focuses on institutional and organizational factors influencing IEP implementation. Studies have shown that school leadership, collaborative culture, and policy clarity significantly affect how accommodations are enacted. For example, research by Billingsley et al. (2014) indicates that supportive leadership and structured collaboration between general and special educators enhance the quality of IEP implementation. Schools that promote co-teaching and shared responsibility tend to demonstrate higher levels of inclusion and accommodation fidelity. In contrast, fragmented communication and unclear role expectations often lead to gaps in service delivery. Additionally, accountability pressures associated with standardized testing have been found to influence teachers' decisions regarding accommodation use, sometimes leading to selective or inconsistent implementation (Kettler et al., 2009). These findings underscore the importance of systemic support in translating policy into effective classroom practice.

Despite the growing body of empirical literature, several critical gaps remain. A significant proportion of studies rely on quantitative methods, focusing on compliance rates, accommodation frequency, or standardized test outcomes, while offering limited insight into the lived experiences of teachers. This methodological orientation constrains understanding of the complex, context-dependent processes involved in implementation. Qualitative studies that capture teachers' voices, decision-making processes, and contextual challenges remain relatively scarce (McCray & McHatton, 2011). Moreover, much of the existing research is conducted at national or state levels, with limited attention to district-specific contexts such as Lancaster County School District. This lack of localized evidence restricts the development of context-sensitive interventions and policies. Additionally, there is insufficient exploration of how different categories of accommodations vary in effectiveness across subjects and student profiles, indicating a need for more nuanced, practice-oriented research.

Methodology

This study is grounded in an interpretivist qualitative paradigm, which is appropriate for examining how teachers construct meaning around the implementation of IEP accommodations within their natural school contexts. Interpretivism assumes that reality is socially constructed and best understood through the perspectives and experiences of individuals; therefore, it provides a suitable lens for exploring how teachers perceive, interpret, and enact accommodation practices in classrooms (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A case study design was employed to enable an in-depth and contextually rich exploration of instructional practices within high schools in Lancaster County School District. Case study research is particularly effective when the aim is to investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life setting, especially when the boundaries between the

phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2018). This design allowed for a detailed examination of how institutional conditions, teacher beliefs, and classroom realities interact to shape the implementation of IEP accommodations.

A qualitative research approach was adopted to capture the nuanced, subjective experiences of teachers and to provide a deeper understanding of their interpretations and practices. Qualitative inquiry is well suited for studies that seek to explore processes, meanings, and lived experiences rather than quantifiable outcomes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In the context of this study, the approach facilitated the exploration of how teachers make sense of accommodation requirements, how they adapt these accommodations in practice, and the challenges they encounter. Such depth of understanding is often unattainable through quantitative methods, which tend to prioritize measurement over meaning.

The study was conducted in selected high schools within Lancaster County School District in South Carolina, United State of America, involving eight participants comprising both general education and special education teachers. The sample included both general education and special education teachers, ensuring a range of perspectives on inclusive practices and instructional responsibilities. Participants varied in terms of teaching experience, with some having several years of classroom practice while others were relatively early in their careers, allowing for insights across different levels of professional maturity. They also represented diverse subject areas, particularly at the high school level where subject specialization influences instructional approaches and the application of accommodations. All participants had prior exposure to IEP processes through their professional roles, including planning, implementation, and monitoring of accommodations for students with disabilities. This diversity in roles, experience, and subject expertise provided a rich and comprehensive understanding of how IEP accommodations are perceived and enacted within real classroom contexts. These participants were purposively selected based on their direct involvement in implementing IEP accommodations, ensuring that the data generated were information-rich and relevant to the research objectives. Purposive sampling is widely recommended in qualitative research where the goal is to obtain detailed insights from individuals with specific knowledge or experience related to the phenomenon under investigation (Patton, 2015).

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which provided a balance between structure and flexibility. This method allowed the researcher to guide the conversation using predetermined questions while also creating space for participants to elaborate on their experiences and introduce new insights. Semi-structured interviews are particularly valuable in qualitative studies because they facilitate in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives while maintaining alignment with the research focus (Kallio et al., 2016). With participants' consent, interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accurate capture of responses, and supplementary field notes were taken to document non-verbal cues and contextual observations. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), a systematic method for identifying, organizing, and interpreting patterns of meaning within qualitative data. The process involved

repeated reading of transcripts to achieve familiarity, generating initial codes, grouping codes into themes, and refining these themes to reflect the core issues emerging from the data. This analytical approach was appropriate because it allows for both inductive and interpretive engagement with the data, making it possible to uncover patterns related to teacher perceptions, implementation practices, and contextual challenges.

Measures were taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the study in line with the criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), namely credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. Credibility was enhanced through member checking, where participants were given the opportunity to review and validate the accuracy of their responses. Dependability was addressed through maintaining a clear audit trail that documented the research process, including data collection and analysis procedures. Transferability was supported through the provision of rich, thick descriptions that allow readers to determine the applicability of the findings to other contexts. Confirmability was ensured by maintaining objectivity and minimizing researcher bias through reflexive practices and systematic documentation. Ethical considerations were strictly adhered to throughout the study. Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the research and their rights, including the right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. Informed consent was obtained prior to data collection, and confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing participants' identities. All data were securely stored to prevent unauthorized access, ensuring that the research process upheld the highest ethical standards.

5. Analysis and Discussion

The analysis of the data reveals a deeply layered account of how teachers interpret, negotiate, and enact IEP accommodation within high school classrooms. The findings are not merely descriptive but expose tensions between policy intentions, theoretical expectations under Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and the lived realities of classroom practice. The themes are presented as interconnected narratives, supported with direct quotations and critically interpreted in relation to existing empirical literature and the guiding theoretical framework.

5.1 IEP Accommodations as Necessary for Inclusion but Operationally Burdensome

Teachers consistently positioned IEP accommodations as indispensable for equitable participation, indicating a strong normative commitment to inclusion. This reflects alignment with Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which conceptualizes learner variability as the default condition of classrooms and advocates for proactively designed flexibility rather than retrofitted support (Meyer et al., 2014). In principle, teachers endorsed this philosophy by recognizing accommodations as mechanisms that enable access to learning for students who would otherwise be excluded.

This is clearly expressed in the statement: *“the accommodations help level the playing field. Without them, some students would be completely lost in the lesson.”* This reflects a deficit-sensitive awareness of structural inequity rather than student inability. Importantly, the teacher

does not locate difficulty within learners but within the absence of instructional adaptation. This is consistent with UDL's shift away from individual deficit models toward systemic barrier removal.

However, the lived reality of implementation reveals a contradiction between ideological acceptance and operational feasibility. Teachers repeatedly framed accommodations as administratively burdensome and cognitively taxing. One participant explained, *"it's not that I don't believe in them, but managing different accommodations for several students in one class can be overwhelming."* This statement is analytically important because it shows that resistance is not philosophical but procedural.

The key issue here is not rejection of inclusion but the accumulation of micro-level demands tracking multiple accommodation plans, adjusting instruction in real time, and monitoring diverse learner needs simultaneously. This produces what can be interpreted as "implementation overload," where the cognitive demands of differentiation exceed available instructional bandwidth.

This tension exposes a structural contradiction in UDL implementation: while UDL assumes that inclusive design reduces long-term instructional strain through upfront planning, teachers experience the opposite continuous workload escalation due to fragmented systems of support. Instead of becoming embedded practice, accommodation remains externally imposed tasks layered onto conventional teaching routines. DeMatthews and Knight (2019) similarly note that inclusive practices often become additive responsibilities when institutional support systems are weak. The implication is that inclusion is currently dependent on individual teacher endurance rather than systemic redesign, making equity contingent rather than guaranteed.

5.2 Inconsistent Implementation and the Problem of Instructional Fidelity

A central finding is the inconsistency in how IEP accommodations are implemented, which raises serious concerns about instructional fidelity and equity of access. Teachers demonstrated two distinct implementation patterns: anticipatory integration and reactive application.

In the anticipatory model, accommodations are embedded into lesson planning. One teacher stated, *"I plan my lessons with accommodations in mind from the start, so it becomes part of the teaching rather than something extra."* This reflects high-level alignment with UDL's core principle of proactive instructional design, where variability is anticipated and built into lesson structure rather than addressed after difficulty arises.

In contrast, the reactive model is characterized by delayed or inconsistent application. As one teacher admitted, *"sometimes you only remember to apply certain accommodations when a student is struggling during the lesson."* This is particularly significant because it reveals that implementation is contingent on situational awareness and cognitive availability during instruction.

This inconsistency introduces a systemic equity problem. If accommodations are applied selectively or inconsistently, then students with identical documented needs experience unequal learning conditions depending on teacher responsiveness, attention, and instructional workload. This undermines the principle of procedural fairness embedded in IEP frameworks. The deeper issue is that implementation is not governed by stable instructional protocols but by real-time cognitive decision-making. Teachers must simultaneously manage instruction, behavior, assessment, and differentiation, which increases the likelihood of omission or partial implementation. Kurth et al. (2022) similarly identify gaps between IEP documentation and classroom practice, but the present findings extend this by showing the mechanisms behind this gap: cognitive overload, competing instructional priorities, and the absence of structured implementation systems. From a UDL perspective, this challenges the assumption that teacher agency alone is sufficient for consistent inclusive practice. Without external scaffolding such as co-teaching models, instructional aides, or structured planning systems, implementation becomes variable and unreliable.

5.3 Structural Constraints Undermining Inclusive Practice

Teachers overwhelmingly attributed implementation challenges to structural rather than individual factors, indicating that barriers are systemic. The most dominant constraint is time pressure, particularly in content-heavy curricula that prioritize syllabus completion over differentiated instruction.

One teacher captured this tension clearly: *“there is so much content to cover, and sometimes you have to choose between finishing the lesson and giving individual support.”* This reflects a direct structural conflict between standardized curriculum pacing and individualized learning support. It positions inclusion not as an instructional preference but as a competing demand against institutional expectations of coverage.

Large class sizes further exacerbate this issue. As one teacher noted, *“with over thirty students in a class, it’s hard to give each student the level of support their IEP requires.”* This statement highlights a proportional mismatch: as class size increases, the feasibility of individualized attention decreases exponentially rather than linearly. This creates a structural ceiling on differentiation capacity.

Resource limitations add another layer of constraint. Teachers reported insufficient access to assistive technologies and support staff. One participant stated, *“we don’t always have the tools or support staff needed to implement accommodations properly.”* This is critical because it shows that teachers are being expected to implement specialized interventions without the necessary material infrastructure.

These constraints indicate that UDL implementation is being attempted in environments that are structurally incompatible with its assumptions. UDL presupposes flexible design supported by adequate time, resources, and manageable instructional loads. In contrast, teachers operate in

environments defined by scarcity and high demand. Hoppey and Yendol-Hoppey (2013) argue that inclusive reform fails when systemic conditions remain unchanged. The present findings strongly reinforce this position, suggesting that inclusion is currently being framed as a pedagogical expectation rather than a systemic transformation.

5.4 Teacher Training as a Determinant of Implementation Quality

Teacher training emerged as a key determinant of how effectively accommodations are implemented, influencing both confidence and instructional precision. Teachers who received targeted training demonstrated clearer procedural understanding and greater ease in integrating accommodation into instruction.

One teacher explained, *“the training I received helped me understand how to adjust my teaching without compromising the lesson.”* This is analytically important because it reflects a shift from viewing accommodations as disruptive modifications to seeing them as integrated instructional strategies. Training, in this case, functions as a cognitive restructuring tool that reshapes how teachers conceptualize lesson delivery.

However, the dominant narrative is one of inadequate preparation. Teachers consistently reported that training was too general and insufficiently practical. As one participant stated, *“we get general information about IEPs, but not enough guidance on how to actually implement them in a busy classroom.”* This reveals a disconnect between policy-level knowledge dissemination and classroom-level execution demands.

The key issue here is not absence of training but misalignment of training content with real instructional complexity. Teachers are exposed to conceptual frameworks but not supported in translating those frameworks into situated classroom practice. Hoppey and Yendol-Hoppey (2013) emphasize that sustained, context-specific professional development is essential for inclusive education effectiveness. The current findings extend this by showing that one-off or theory-heavy training produces awareness without competence. From a UDL perspective, this is significant because UDL requires dynamic instructional decision-making, not static knowledge. Without continuous professional learning, teachers cannot develop the adaptive expertise required to consistently implement accommodations across varied classroom conditions.

5.5 Ambiguous Impact on Student Learning Outcomes

Teachers provided nuanced and sometimes uncertain assessments of the impact of accommodation on student learning outcomes. A consistent observation was improved engagement and participation, suggesting that accommodation is effective in reducing affective and access-related barriers.

One teacher noted, *“when accommodations are used properly, you can see students participating more and feeling more confident in their abilities.”* This indicates clear gains in student motivation

and classroom inclusion, particularly in affective domains such as confidence and willingness to engage.

However, teachers also expressed uncertainty about whether these gains translate into academic achievement. As one participant stated, *“sometimes it’s hard to tell if the accommodation is helping the student learn or just helping them complete the task.”* This distinction is analytically critical because it separates procedural success (task completion) from cognitive success (conceptual understanding).

This uncertainty suggests that accommodation may improve visibility of participation without necessarily guaranteeing depth of learning. It also indicates that teachers lack clear evaluative frameworks for distinguishing between access outcomes and achievement outcomes. Sireci et al. (2005) emphasize that accommodation must preserve construct validity to ensure that assessments still measure intended competencies. The present findings extend this concern into classroom instruction, suggesting that validity concerns are not only assessment-related but also instructional. The implication is that inclusion policies may be successfully improving access but remain insufficiently precise in ensuring learning depth. Without alignment between accommodation design, instructional intent, and assessment criteria, learning outcomes remain difficult to interpret with confidence.

Conclusion

The study establishes that teachers recognize IEP accommodations as essential mechanisms for promoting inclusive education and supporting equitable participation for students with disabilities. Their views reflect a general alignment with inclusive principles and the assumptions of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), particularly the need for flexible instructional approaches that address learner variability. However, this conceptual understanding does not consistently translate into effective classroom practice. Implementation remains uneven, indicating that the presence of policy frameworks alone is insufficient to guarantee meaningful inclusion.

The findings further demonstrate that variability in implementation is a critical issue. Differences in how teachers interpret and apply accommodations result in inconsistent support for students, thereby undermining equity. This inconsistency is shaped by individual teacher factors such as experience, confidence, and beliefs, as well as contextual influences within the school environment. As a result, students’ access to accommodation is often dependent on the specific teacher rather than a standardized and reliable system of support. Structural constraints significantly limit the effectiveness of IEP accommodation practices. Time pressures, large class sizes, limited instructional resources, and insufficient institutional support create conditions that make individualized instruction difficult to sustain. These challenges reveal a fundamental gap between inclusive education ideals and the realities of high school teaching contexts. The findings indicate that without addressing these systemic issues, efforts to implement inclusive practices will remain constrained and fragmented. Teacher preparation and professional development emerge as central to improving implementation. Limited training and lack of practical guidance hinder

teachers' ability to apply accommodation effectively, leading to uncertainty and reliance on inconsistent practices. Continuous, context-specific professional development is necessary to equip teachers with the skills required to integrate accommodation into everyday instruction in a meaningful and sustainable manner. The study concludes that while IEP accommodations contribute to improved student participation and confidence, their impact on deeper learning outcomes remains uncertain. The distinction between facilitating access and promoting genuine academic achievement is not always clear in practice. Effective implementation therefore requires not only the provision of accommodation but also careful alignment with instructional goals to ensure that they support both engagement and meaningful learning.

Recommendations

The findings from Lancaster County School District high schools indicate that the implementation of IEP accommodations is constrained by large class sizes, limited instructional time, inconsistent training, and inadequate support systems. To address these challenges, schools should strengthen instructional support structures by expanding co-teaching in core subjects and, where staffing is limited, introducing structured intervention periods within the timetable to ensure learners with IEPs receive consistent and targeted support. Curriculum implementation should also be made more flexible to allow teachers to adjust pacing according to learner needs, while encouraging the use of structured grouping and station-based instruction to manage learner diversity within lessons. Professional development should shift toward practical, classroom-based support through instructional coaching, peer observation, and demonstration lessons, with professional learning communities established to promote collaboration and shared problem-solving. To improve consistency in implementation, schools should adopt simple tools such as accommodation checklists or brief lesson reflection templates integrated into routine planning and departmental reviews, focused on instructional support rather than compliance monitoring. Resource provision should be strengthened through improved access to assistive technologies and adaptable teaching materials, alongside the sharing of low-cost resources across departments. Finally, school leadership should actively embed inclusion into school operations by allocating time for collaborative planning, adjusting timetables to support intervention needs, and recognizing effective inclusive practices, thereby shifting responsibility for inclusion from individual teachers to a coordinated school-wide system.

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