

# Academic Leadership and Stakeholder Participation: Increasing Motivation and Accommodation of Inclusive Learning

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**Abstract:** Inclusive education has emerged as a central concern in educational reform, particularly in the wake of the pandemic, which has underscored the need for adaptable and equitable learning environments. This study investigates how academic leadership and stakeholder participation contribute to the development and sustainability of inclusive learning practices in a higher education context. Guided by two research objectives, the study employed a qualitative, exploratory research design involving in-depth interviews with 16 purposefully selected respondents representing diverse roles, including teachers, students, and community members. Data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis, allowing for the identification of recurring themes aligned with the research aims. Findings revealed that academic leaders promote inclusion through motivational leadership styles, structured support programs, and empathetic engagement with students and faculty. Stakeholder involvement

emerged as equally vital, with students, families, and community members actively shaping inclusive strategies through financial support, participatory decision-making, and grassroots initiatives. Both leadership and stakeholder roles were shown to intersect in fostering a culture of inclusion that responds to learners' diverse needs. These findings contribute to a growing understanding of how inclusive education can be co-constructed through both top-down and bottom-up efforts. The study offers practical insights for policy-makers, school leaders, and educators aiming to strengthen inclusive frameworks in similar educational settings...

**Keywords:** inclusive school leadership; stakeholder engagement; motivation in education; higher education reform

## INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has gained international momentum as a rights-based imperative, yet its implementation often remains inconsistent, particularly in contexts where institutional leadership and stakeholder collaboration are underdeveloped. While inclusive education policies exist in many regions, the operationalization of these frameworks depends heavily on leadership capacity and the degree to which communities are engaged in educational processes. However, there remains a research gap concerning how academic leaders and community stakeholders jointly foster the motivation and infrastructure necessary to sustain inclusive learning environments, especially in diverse and under-resourced settings.

This study aimed to address that gap by examining how academic leadership and stakeholder participation contribute to motivating and accommodating inclusive learning. Specifically, it explores how school leaders initiate and guide inclusion efforts, and how parents, students, and community actors shape and support inclusive educational practices within academic institutions.

The global push for inclusive education has been shaped by evolving understandings of equity, participation, and belonging. Notably, the COVID-19 pandemic underscored the urgency of creating adaptable and inclusive learning systems. In response, academic leaders worldwide intensified efforts to mitigate structural barriers, addressing the digital divide, enhancing accessibility for students with disabilities, and working toward equitable learning conditions for all (Volkova, 2023). These developments have reinforced the importance of rethinking how institutional leadership is exercised in times of disruption and reform.

Leadership remains a critical determinant in the success of inclusion. Research indicates that heuristic leadership styles are positively correlated with the expansion of inclusive practices, but these cannot be sustained if school leaders lack the expertise to guide educators and stakeholders alike (Al Nuaimi, 2024). The success of inclusion in various countries demonstrates its potential to realize human rights: enabling every child, including those with special needs, to participate fully in society (Baluk et al., 2019). Achieving this, however, requires a reconfiguration of university and school practices, spaces of academic development must evolve into socially inclusive institutions steered by visionary leadership (Dwayi, 2018).

Stakeholder engagement plays an equally vital role. Programs that integrate dialogue with community members and account for cultural dynamics are more likely to foster a sense of belonging among learners (Aguilar et al., 2017, Chavez, 2020). Yet, perspectives among families sometimes reflect critical views, particularly concerning peer relationships observed during participatory activities, suggesting that inclusion must be continuously negotiated and evaluated (López-Azuaga & Suárez Riveiro, 2020). Participatory and community-based approaches offer a framework for responding to the layered challenges of inclusive education across intra-school, inter-school, and local levels (Parrilla et al., 2015).

Attitudes toward inclusion are not formed in a vacuum. They stem from individual perceptions, emotions, and behavioral dispositions toward inclusive education (Jiang et al., 2025). This underscores the importance of fostering not only structural access but also motivational and affective engagement. In some contexts, the prioritization of motivation over instructional quality has emerged, particularly where learners with special needs are perceived to require emotional support more than academic rigor (Feng, 2010). Among educators, motivations for inclusive and innovative practices often hinge on

recognition, incentives, and institutional support, but barriers such as workload, limited experience, and personal constraints continue to inhibit deeper engagement (Dolgova et al., 2017).

Grounded in these insights, the present study investigated the dual role of leadership and stakeholder involvement in inclusive education. It anticipated that findings deepened understanding of how inclusive practices are co-produced within academic settings and how they can be better supported through relational, motivational, and structural means. Ultimately, the research contributed to ongoing efforts to realize socially inclusive, community-responsive, and sustainable education systems.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Conceptual Foundations of Inclusive Education and Leadership*

Inclusive education, as articulated by Molbaek (2018), is not predicated on uniformity but on the equitable engagement, motivation, and success of all learners. This principle foregrounds a redefinition of educational leadership, moving beyond administrative management toward fostering adaptive, student-centered environments. Scholars such as Lambrecht et al. (2022) have emphasized that effective implementation of inclusive practices is supported by leadership models that combine transformational and instructional qualities. These frameworks prioritize collaborative structures and strategic visioning necessary for cultivating inclusive school cultures.

Mbua (2023) extends this view by defining inclusive leadership as a multi-level coordination process involving school leaders, teachers, families, and external agencies. Importantly, it is not merely about administrative oversight but requires strategic planning, inter-professional collaboration, and a commitment to challenging deficit-based paradigms. Inclusive leadership gains transformative potential when it is oriented toward systemic change and equity-based practices.

### *Academic Leadership and Teacher Motivation in Inclusive Settings*

The motivational capacity of leadership is central to advancing inclusive education. Research indicates that leaders who foster environments responsive to teachers' psychological needs contribute to autonomous motivation and long-term pedagogical commitment (Bondoc, 2024; Passanisi et al., 2022). This motivation is critical, as professionals in special and inclusive education often depend on their intrinsic drive and resilience to sustain inclusive practices, particularly under emotionally and cognitively demanding conditions (Suprun et al., 2023). Empathy further reinforces this commitment. Teachers who develop empathic connections with learners demonstrate greater efficacy in addressing diverse needs and are more likely to embrace inclusive values (Jiang et al., 2025). These dispositions are reinforced through institutional mechanisms such as structured workshops, best-practice sharing, and follow-up activities like reflective journaling, all of which promote introspection and sustained changes in instructional behavior (Ceneciro, 2025; Chavez et al., 2023).

However, leadership development is not without tension. Powers et al. (2001) point to the performance management pressures experienced by school leaders, noting a trade-off between self-directed development and top-down accountability mandates. Younger leaders in particular seek more structured professional development, recognizing the importance of managing people and engaging with inclusion-oriented change processes. Romanuck Murphy (2018) offers practical models for leadership self-assessment, suggesting that goal-setting based on identified strengths and needs can enable more intentional advocacy and resource mobilization for inclusive programs. At the system level, Mngo and Mngo (2018) stress the importance of structural investments, such as dedicated special education programs and teacher education funding, as foundational enablers of inclusive education reform.

### *Stakeholder Participation and Community-Based Engagement*

Beyond school leadership, inclusive education requires sustained engagement from stakeholders, including parents, students, and local communities. Their participation not only enhances the contextual relevance of inclusion practices but also strengthens continuity of learning beyond formal educational settings. Research has consistently emphasized that meaningful stakeholder

involvement contributes to improved educational outcomes by ensuring that programs remain responsive to learners' diverse needs and community realities (Aguilar et al., 2017; Parrilla et al., 2015). Through collaborative participation, stakeholders become active contributors to educational planning, implementation, and evaluation, thereby strengthening the sustainability of inclusive initiatives.

Parental involvement remains particularly significant in supporting inclusive education. Comerros et al. (2024) emphasized the individualized insights that parents bring to the educational process, noting that families often adapt learning materials and strategies to accommodate their children's unique learning needs. Such personalized support provides flexibility that may not always be available in standardized educational environments. However, parental engagement is not without challenges. Murro et al. (2023) documented how socioeconomic constraints and disruptions to household livelihoods can affect families' capacity to provide consistent educational support. These findings highlight the unequal conditions under which families participate in inclusive education and underscore the need for institutional support mechanisms that address these disparities.

At the community level, stakeholder involvement proves essential not only for program implementation but also for educational planning and assessment. Karimi et al. (2020) argued that the success of literacy and numeracy programs depends heavily on stakeholder commitment, particularly among educators and community partners responsible for implementation. Likewise, Lloyd et al. (2017) demonstrated that participatory engagement from diverse groups of students and families enhances program development, recruitment efforts, and evaluation processes. These studies suggest that community participation strengthens both the effectiveness and long-term sustainability of inclusive educational initiatives.

Effective leadership further amplifies stakeholder contributions. Alzouebi et al. (2025) found that empathetic and participatory leadership approaches strengthen collaboration among schools, families, and communities while extending support systems beyond institutional boundaries. Similarly, Dallas et al. (2014) recommended multi-modal faculty development initiatives, including workshops and collaborative committees, to equip educators with the skills necessary for meaningful stakeholder engagement. Through these mechanisms, educational leaders help create environments where collaboration becomes a shared responsibility among all participants.

Nevertheless, the literature also identifies continuing gaps in implementation. Carlson et al. (2012) observed that evidence-based instructional strategies such as reciprocal teaching and metacognitive instruction remain underutilized in many inclusive settings, suggesting limitations in teacher preparation and implementation fidelity. These concerns indicate that while stakeholder participation and leadership support are widely recognized as critical components of inclusion, further efforts are needed to ensure that collaborative practices translate into effective and sustainable educational outcomes.

### *Gaps and Directions for the Present Study*

Across the reviewed literature, several critical patterns emerge: first, that academic leadership plays a transformative role when oriented toward equity, empathy, and collaboration; and second, that stakeholder engagement enhances program sustainability when built on culturally relevant practices and reciprocal trust. However, gaps persist. Notably, there is insufficient empirical integration of how leadership strategies and stakeholder participation jointly shape motivation within inclusive environments. The relational dynamics between school heads, teachers, parents, and communities remain under-theorized in localized contexts, particularly in the Global South. Furthermore, while parental strategies and motivations are discussed, their systemic influence on institutional decision-making is less explored. The literature suggests a need for deeper inquiry into how leadership practices respond to, integrate, or fall short of stakeholder contributions in the actual implementation of inclusive education frameworks.

This study positions itself within these gaps. Focusing on both academic leadership and stakeholder participation, it aims to produce a situated understanding of how inclusive learning environments are constructed and sustained, responding to both the psychological drivers of teacher and parent motivation, and the structural and cultural dynamics that shape educational inclusion.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This study employed an exploratory qualitative research design to investigate how academic leadership and stakeholder participation shape motivation and inclusive learning practices within educational settings. Exploratory research is particularly suited to studies that seek to generate new insights into underexamined phenomena and context-specific interactions. As Erickson (2017) notes, exploratory designs typically involve small samples and qualitative data, and are shaped by flexible techniques that allow the researcher to blend observational and communicative methods. This design aligns with the present study's goal of uncovering nuanced understandings of leadership strategies and stakeholder engagement through participants lived experiences and perceptions.

### Population and Sampling

The study was conducted within academic institutions and local communities where inclusive education practices are in place or under development. The target population included academic leaders, teachers, students, parents, and community members who have been directly involved in inclusive education initiatives. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select 16 participants who possessed specific knowledge or experience relevant to the study's objectives. This sampling approach is appropriate for qualitative research as it enhances methodological rigor by aligning participant selection with the study's aims and theoretical framework (Campbell et al., 2020). Ethical considerations, including informed consent and voluntary participation, were strictly observed throughout the recruitment and data collection process.

### Instrument

Data were gathered using a semi-structured interview protocol developed to explore participants' experiences with inclusive leadership and stakeholder participation. The protocol included open-ended questions aligned with the study's research objectives, allowing for flexible probing and elaboration. Interviews were conducted in one-on-one settings to foster candid dialogue and accommodate diverse respondent profiles. As Tavory (2020) explains, interviews can uncover not only explicit responses but also the embedded contexts in which participants operate, yielding layered and contextually informed insights. The interview format supported the exploration of both leadership strategies and stakeholder motivations, while also permitting the identification of constraints and enabling conditions experienced by participants. **Table 1** shows the research instrument used for the study.

**Table 1. Research Instrument**

Objectives	Interview Questions
To explore the role of academic leadership in building motivation and implementing strategies that support inclusive learning environments.	How do academic leaders in your institution promote motivation among teachers and students to embrace inclusive education?  Can you describe any specific strategies or programs led by school administrators that support inclusive learning practices?  In what ways do you think the leadership style or actions of your school leaders influence the success of inclusive education initiatives?
To examine how stakeholder participation influences the development and accommodation of inclusive learning practices within academic institutions.	How are parents, students, and community members involved in supporting inclusive education in your institution?  Can you share an experience where stakeholder input significantly influenced decisions about inclusive learning?

	What challenges and benefits have you observed in engaging stakeholders in promoting and sustaining inclusive education practices?
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### Data Gathering Procedure

Participants were contacted through institutional networks and invited to participate in the study via formal letters and follow-up communications. After obtaining informed consent, interviews were scheduled at times convenient for the participants and were conducted face-to-face or via secure digital platforms, depending on access and availability. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 60 minutes and was audio-recorded with participant permission. Recordings were transcribed verbatim for subsequent analysis. Confidentiality protocols were observed, including the anonymization of transcripts and secure storage of all digital files. The procedural consistency ensured ethical compliance and supported the credibility of data collection.

### Data Analysis

The study utilized reflexive thematic analysis as the principal analytic approach. This method is well-suited to exploratory qualitative research as it allows for a rich, detailed, and context-sensitive examination of participant narratives. Trainor and Bundon (2020) emphasize the importance of transparency, clarity, and reflexivity in thematic analysis, particularly when interpreting complex social processes. Reflexive thematic analysis offers analytical flexibility and depth, enabling researchers to uncover latent meanings and examine the structural dimensions of stakeholder experiences (Yanto, 2023). The analysis proceeded in stages: initial familiarization with the data, inductive coding, generation of themes, and reflective refinement based on patterns and divergences across transcripts. The researcher maintained analytic memos throughout the process to ensure transparency and critical engagement with the data.

## RESULTS

**Research Objective 1.** To explore the role of academic leadership in building motivation and implementing strategies that support inclusive learning environments.

**Question 1.** How do academic leaders in your institution promote motivation among teachers and students to embrace inclusive education?

### 1.1. Cultivating a Supportive and Respectful School Culture

Nine (9) respondents emphasized that inclusive leadership is made visible through the active creation of school environments that value diversity, promote psychological safety, and uphold equitable treatment. Leadership practices included establishing policies against discrimination, endorsing flexible teaching approaches, and advocating for vulnerable groups. These efforts, especially when explicitly modeled by school administrators, were credited with motivating both students and faculty to participate in inclusive efforts and to feel valued as contributors within the learning community.

*“Our school leaders actively create a school climate where diversity is not just accepted but celebrated. They motivate both students and teachers by cultivating an environment where everyone feels safe and valued. This involves clear policies against discrimination, recognition of different learning needs, and promoting respect. For example, schools create policies ensuring the safety, respect, and inclusion of transgender, non-binary, and LGBTQ+ students. This includes access to gender-affirming facilities, respectful use of preferred names and pronouns, education about diverse family structures, and designated safe spaces for discussing issues without fear of discrimination. Such leadership actions encourage openness and motivate everyone in the school to embrace*

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*inclusive education."*

*"Our school head actively provides regular professional development opportunities to our SPED teachers. These sessions help us develop strategies to cater to diverse learning needs. She also promotes collaborative practices, like co-teaching and peer mentoring, which allow us to work together to support students with varying abilities. This collaborative approach helps us share best practices and resources, making it easier for teachers in regular classes to support mainstreamed students. Because of her leadership, both students and teachers have become more open, supportive, and motivated to embrace inclusive practices."*

### 1.2. Leading by Example and Personal Narratives

Seven (7) participants pointed to the motivational power of school leaders sharing their personal challenges and triumphs, using storytelling as a tool for building empathy and relatability. These narratives helped students and teachers understand the value of resilience, inclusion, and purposeful engagement in education. Leaders who model inclusive values not only offer strategic guidance but also inspire emotional connection and personal growth among the school community.

*"By sharing their experiences as leaders, they can inspire us students, even with everything they're going through. Hearing about how they overcame their own challenges helps us stay motivated. Some leaders also share stories that relate to issues of inclusion and personal growth, making it easier for us to relate and stay engaged in our learning. It's not just about giving orders, it's about setting an example and helping others grow from those experiences."*

*"A leader serves as a role model and guide for both teachers and students. The way they carry themselves influences how others treat learning, diversity, and responsibility. When school leaders act with empathy and fairness, it sets a tone for inclusion and collective success. We see that in how our principal approaches decision-making, always with an eye toward who might be excluded and how to bring them in."*

**Question 2.** Can you describe any specific strategies or programs led by school administrators that support inclusive learning practices?

### 2.1. Financial Support and Scholarship Initiatives

Scholarship programs and financial assistance were consistently cited as inclusion strategies that addressed barriers to education. Eleven (11) respondents expressed how administrators played a central role in establishing partnerships and institutional support mechanisms to ensure equitable access. These financial interventions enabled learners from marginalized or low-income backgrounds to participate more fully in school life and pursue academic goals with fewer constraints.

*"School programs such as scholarship programs help students learn and focus on their academics without worrying about tuition or other school fees. Our school leaders are instrumental in establishing and maintaining these programs. These financial assistance efforts allow students, especially those from low-income families, to remain engaged in school. They represent one way our administrators remove barriers to inclusion and equity."*

*"Our administrators often lead initiatives like this, ensuring that no student is left behind due to financial issues. For example, when some students couldn't afford books or supplies, the administration worked with partner organizations to provide what was needed. These programs make inclusive education more accessible for those in need and show that the school really listens to the struggles of students."*

### 2.2. Targeted Inclusion Programs and Inspirational Events

SPED programs and motivational events such as guest seminars were also commonly mentioned by five (5) respondents. These initiatives were described as intentional, administrator-led interventions aimed at providing both emotional and academic support. SPED programs focused on personalized learning, while seminars with successful speakers helped reignite student morale.

*"In my opinion, the most notable program that our school started is the SPED program, which aims to support learners who have physical, mental, intellectual, sensory, emotional, or developmental disabilities. This initiative was directly led by school administrators and is a clear example of their proactive role in supporting inclusive learning. It reflects a targeted, administrator-driven effort to ensure that every student, regardless of their condition, receives a fair and supportive learning experience."*

*"The programs or activities that really help students learn more are the seminars with successful guest speakers. These speakers inspire the students and teach them many ways to succeed, especially those who are already losing hope in their course, questioning whether they chose the right one or not. Our administrators invite these speakers specifically to address students' emotional and academic challenges, and the strategy works well. In this way, students remain motivated and 'on fire.'"*

**Question 3.** In what ways do you think the leadership style or actions of your school leaders influence the success of inclusive education initiatives?

### *3.1. Strategic Responsiveness and Equity-Driven Leadership*

Thirteen (13) participants described effective school leaders as responsive to both academic and socio-economic barriers faced by students. Leadership was viewed as successful when it involved creating partnerships, allocating resources strategically, and tailoring programs based on evolving student needs. Actions such as addressing financial challenges, organizing inclusive events, and promoting equitable access were consistently linked to improved student morale and participation.

*"I have seen a significant improvement, especially now that school leaders are more proactive in addressing student needs, particularly those of financially challenged students. They cater to more students who are struggling financially with the help of the leaders who partnered with multiple organizations. These partnerships show how leadership actions directly influence student success by reducing financial barriers and fostering inclusivity through expanded access. Without that kind of responsiveness, many students would just give up."*

*"It's important that a school leader's actions positively affect or encourage students with different learning needs. I remember before, our student leader wasn't really involved and didn't show much encouragement. Events weren't engaging. But when we got new leaders who were empathetic and active, things changed. They made sure activities were inclusive, well-organized, and welcoming to everyone. It was a huge difference in student morale."*

### *3.2. Importance of Leadership Boundaries and Ethical Conduct*

While effective leadership was praised, some participants warned that overly informal or emotionally entangled leadership styles could harm inclusive practices. Three (3) respondents highlighted that the lack of professional boundaries sometimes blurred authority roles, weakening discipline or undermining trust in leadership decisions. Clear, ethical leadership was viewed as essential in maintaining both safety and effectiveness.

*"Some teachers help improve students' professionalism by motivating them to show their talents and by being humorous in class. These actions keep the classroom inclusive and supportive. However, there are also leaders who become too close with students, which leads to an inappropriate student-teacher relationship. The dynamic becomes too familiar, like they're on the same level, and I see that as a problem. When leadership boundaries aren't clear, it can reduce the effectiveness of inclusive strategies."*

*"A leader sets the tone for how diversity, responsibility, and inclusion are treated on campus. That's why when our principal emphasizes fairness and respect, everyone tends to follow. But when leaders lose objectivity or play favorites, it creates tension. Leadership is not just about friendliness; it's about making decisions that protect everyone."*

**Research Objective 2.** To examine how stakeholder participation influences the development and accommodation of inclusive learning practices within academic institutions.

**Question 1.** How are parents, students, and community members involved in supporting inclusive education in your institution?

### *1.1. Collective Action and Community-Based Support Structures*

Community participation was widely acknowledged as essential in maintaining inclusive learning environments. Eight (8) respondents cited emergency funds, community referral programs, and cooperative initiatives among stakeholders. These examples demonstrated how inclusive values extended beyond classrooms and relied on strong collective responsibility.

*"In our community, all students pay a small amount as an insurance so that if there was an emergency we can get from that emergency fund. Like my classmate who suddenly fainted in the middle of a class discussion, he*

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*was rushed to the clinic, then to the hospital, and diagnosed with an ulcer. With the help of the emergency fund, my classmate was operated on successfully. This collective effort shows how community-based safety nets help uphold inclusive values and ensure no student is left behind during emergencies."*

*"Each group needs to cooperate to help meet students' needs, such as providing summer jobs. For parents, programs like TUPAD can also offer support. Community involvement like this helps relieve financial pressure, enabling students to focus on school. These efforts show how inclusive education is a shared task and not just something left to the teachers or principals."*

### 1.2. Resource Mobilization through Parent Associations and Local Engagement

Eight (8) respondents emphasized how structured parent groups such as PTAs provided essential support for both academic and extracurricular activities. Collaborative planning, fundraising, and awareness efforts contributed significantly to making schools more inclusive and responsive to student needs. Parental insights also helped teachers adjust classroom strategies based on real challenges faced at home.

*"Parents and the community can help students with different learning needs through teamwork and good communication. We all know that each child learns in their own way, with different strengths and challenges. One example is the support from the Parent-Teacher Association. They help by providing what students need for both academics and extracurricular activities. They plan projects and raise funds through donations and other efforts."*

*"Each student has their own understanding, which is why it's important to know their individual strengths and areas for growth. I remember my aunt at Ebenezer and her friend who worked together to talk to the teacher. As a result, the teacher held a meeting to address the difficulties some students were facing in keeping up with the lessons. Sometimes, we just need supportive circles to help us speak up and solve problems."*

**Question 2.** Can you share an experience where stakeholder input significantly influenced decisions about inclusive learning?

#### 2.1. Student- and Parent-Initiated Policy Adjustments

Four (4) participants recalled instances where stakeholder suggestions led to concrete administrative actions, such as purchasing ventilation equipment, revising lesson pacing, or implementing scholarship programs. These examples illustrate how inclusive policies are often co-produced through grassroots advocacy and mutual listening between school leaders and stakeholders.

*"Because of the intense heat that we students experience every day, we came up with a solution as a whole: to contribute a specific amount of money to help us buy appliances to ease the temperature inside the classroom. This student-led initiative demonstrates how our input can lead to practical, inclusive changes in the learning environment. As a result, students are able to continue their learning without worrying about the heat."*

*"One of the most effective suggestions that helped students came from parents struggling financially. Their children were excelling in school, so the parents suggested giving financial support, like scholarships or cash assistance, which really helps a lot. The school administration listened and responded by setting up support programs, showing how parental input can lead to important inclusive policy changes. In fact, many students who were able to graduate did so because of scholarship support."*

#### 2.2. Stakeholder Voice in Balancing Support and Accountability

While many stakeholders asked for support services, others emphasized self-responsibility, work ethic, and long-term sustainability. These responses from twelve (12) participants reflected a nuanced understanding of inclusion, not only as resource provision but also as empowerment and self-reliance.

*"Like the 4Ps program, these are additional forms of assistance for students. However, we should not always rely on government help, we also need to work hard for the future of the youth. Parents and students have expressed this in school meetings, pushing for programs that also promote independence and initiative. It's a mix of support and responsibility."*

*“Communities and schools are working together to better support students, especially in improving reading comprehension through programs and teacher training. There’s also been action taken to address the rise in bullying, with positive changes seen due to collaboration with community agencies. These initiatives were launched based on concerns raised by parents and teachers during meetings, showing how stakeholder input directly informs school actions.”*

**Question 3.** What challenges and benefits have you observed in engaging stakeholders in promoting and sustaining inclusive education practices?

### *3.1. Variability in Family Engagement and Communication*

Stakeholder engagement was widely seen as beneficial but uneven. Socioeconomic constraints, inconsistent attendance in meetings, and communication barriers were mentioned as challenges by nine (9) respondents. Still, participants stressed the importance of persistent collaboration, especially when the goal is to meet diverse learning needs early and consistently.

*“Some families face financial difficulties, which can limit access to resources like tutoring, technology, or outside support services. In those cases, I try to help find low-cost or school-based options. This challenge underscores the importance of collaboration and flexibility in stakeholder engagement. What keeps me motivated is seeing students gain confidence, even with small progress. It shows how collective efforts between students, families, and schools contribute meaningfully to inclusive education.”*

*“The good thing is I’m able to adjust and learn something new when teaching my younger cousins or nieces/nephews. But we also need to understand that they have unique capabilities that we need to respect, especially their ways of learning and beliefs. Some kids are slow learners, possibly because their parents aren’t very concerned about their education, unlike other kids who learn quickly because they’re more exposed to gadgets. In that case, we can hold meetings with parents to talk about it.”*

### *3.2. Motivation through Observed Progress and Shared Responsibility*

Despite the challenges, seven (7) participants described motivation as sustained through observed improvements in students’ confidence, behavior, or academic progress. These moments reinforced a collective sense of purpose and reminded stakeholders of the long-term value of inclusive education.

*“What motivates teachers to keep on helping is the improvement of their student/s, even small progress. It reminds us that inclusive education requires sustained teamwork. That feeling of knowing you’ve helped even one student take a step forward is what keeps us going.”*

*“Think of your family so they, too, can achieve a better future. This reflects one of the key challenges in stakeholder engagement, balancing external support with internal motivation. Still, when families and communities are involved, it builds long-term benefits for students.”*

## DISCUSSION

*Objective 1: To explore the role of academic leadership in building motivation and implementing strategies that support inclusive learning environments*

Findings revealed that academic leaders promote inclusive education primarily through two interrelated approaches: cultivating a respectful and safe school culture, and leading by example through narrative engagement and ethical behavior. Participants emphasized how leaders established anti-discrimination policies, encouraged collaboration among teachers, and ensured emotional safety for diverse student groups. Administrators were also credited for implementing targeted programs, such as SPED and scholarships, that directly reduced barriers to inclusion.

These results affirm existing literature on the transformative capacity of academic leadership when it is relational, empathetic, and strategically grounded. The emphasis on emotional safety and cultural responsiveness aligns with Bondoc (2024) and Passanisi et al. (2022), who underscore the importance of meeting psychological needs to foster motivation among teachers. Moreover, the use of professional development and co-teaching practices described by participants mirrors the institutional

mechanisms outlined by Ceneciro (2025) as effective tools in embedding inclusive values among staff.

The motivational power of personal storytelling and ethical leadership, as highlighted in the findings, adds nuance to existing conceptual models of inclusive leadership. While Mbua (2023) frames inclusive leadership as a multi-level coordination effort, the current study extends this by demonstrating how leaders' personal transparency and role-modeling behaviors foster trust and aspirational engagement among both students and teachers. This supports the idea advanced by Romanuck Murphy (2018) that self-reflective goal-setting and public commitment can help school leaders mobilize support for equity-based initiatives.

However, the findings also caution against blurred leadership boundaries, which respondents linked to diminished professionalism and weakened institutional authority. This adds complexity to earlier assertions by Powers et al. (2001) who focus on systemic pressures like performance management; in this study, the concern lies more in the interpersonal space where excessive familiarity may erode respect for inclusive norms. This tension suggests that successful inclusive leadership must balance emotional accessibility with ethical restraint and professional boundaries.

In sum, the findings support and extend existing models of inclusive leadership by foregrounding both structural strategies and affective practices. The study confirms that leadership deeply influences the inclusivity of learning environments, not only through formal programs but also through the tone, values, and relational dynamics set by those in power.

*Objective 2: To examine how stakeholder participation influences the development and accommodation of inclusive learning practices within academic institutions*

Stakeholder involvement emerged as a vital component in fostering inclusive learning environments. The results showed that parents, students, and community members contributed in both formal and informal ways, ranging from emergency fund systems and collaborative infrastructure improvements to advocacy for scholarships and curricular accommodations. Participants emphasized that inclusive education was most sustainable when anchored in mutual responsibility, transparent communication, and culturally responsive practices.

These findings strongly resonate with Chavez et al. (2023) and Comeros et al. (2024), who emphasize the active role of Filipino parents in adapting learning tools and contributing personalized knowledge to their children's education. As in their work, participants in this study reported that families brought insights into students' individual needs, which in turn helped teachers adjust instruction. This alignment reinforces the growing recognition that inclusive education must be co-constructed with families, not merely delivered to them.

Community-based engagement, such as participation in insurance programs or local employment initiatives (e.g., TUPAD), also confirms Karimi et al.'s (2020) view that stakeholder commitment is foundational to educational program success. Moreover, the present study expands on Lloyd et al. (2017) by showing that parent and student suggestions not only inform assessments or recruitment practices but also influence school-level policy adjustments, such as temperature control, seminar design, and emotional support structures.

Interestingly, the results also reveal a critical layer of reflection not widely emphasized in the literature: the stakeholder call for balance between institutional support and student self-reliance. While Alzouebi et al. (2025) stress the importance of empathy in leadership-stakeholder collaboration, this study adds the perspective that stakeholders themselves sometimes advocate for discipline, independence, and non-reliance on external aid. This suggests that inclusive practices are most effective when they empower students and families, rather than creating dependency, a subtle but important distinction.

At the same time, the study confirms existing challenges in stakeholder engagement, particularly regarding inconsistency in parental involvement and communication gaps. This supports Murro et al. (2023), who note the uneven readiness of households to participate in inclusive education due to financial or situational limitations. While the literature discusses stakeholder roles at a systemic level, the present findings underscore the micro-level realities, varying degrees of commitment, fluctuating

resources, and the emotional labor required to sustain engagement over time.

Overall, the findings substantiate the central claim in the literature that inclusive education depends on collaborative governance. They contribute new insights by emphasizing the stakeholders' dual role as both beneficiaries and co-creators of inclusive practices, advocating not only for structural assistance but also for student accountability and long-term empowerment.

## CONCLUSION

This study explored how academic leadership and stakeholder participation influence the development and sustainability of inclusive education. Findings revealed that inclusive leadership fosters motivation and equity when rooted in respectful school culture, personal modeling, and responsive programming. Likewise, stakeholder engagement, when collaborative and contextually grounded, emerged as a pivotal force in shaping inclusive educational practices. Together, these insights confirm that both institutional leadership and community involvement are indispensable in realizing inclusive education systems.

The convergence of findings underlines several key implications. First, academic leaders should recognize that inclusive school cultures are built not only through policy but through visible, empathetic leadership that models ethical behavior and responsiveness. Second, stakeholder participation must be cultivated as a co-constructive process, where families, students, and communities are empowered as partners, not merely consulted beneficiaries, in educational planning. Third, training programs and policy initiatives may consider embedding leadership development modules that balance emotional intelligence with ethical boundary-setting, ensuring that inclusive efforts are both compassionate and professionally anchored.

While the findings offer valuable insights, the scope of the study was constrained by certain methodological and contextual factors. The sample, while purposively selected for relevance and insight, was limited in size and drawn from a specific educational context, which may affect the broader applicability of results. Additionally, the study relied on self-reported narratives, which are susceptible to subjectivity, selective recall, and social desirability bias. These limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings or applying them to different institutional or geographic settings.

Future research may expand the sample to include a more diverse array of school types, leadership profiles, and stakeholder demographics. Longitudinal research could explore how inclusive leadership strategies and stakeholder dynamics evolve over time and influence long-term student outcomes. Additionally, further inquiry might examine how institutional policies mediate or amplify the effects of community engagement in different socio-political environments.

In sum, this research contributes to a growing understanding of inclusive education as a shared, negotiated effort between institutional leadership and community actors. By shedding light on how motivation, collaboration, and ethical leadership intersect in inclusive contexts, the study offers a grounded basis for policy development, professional training, and future academic inquiry.

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