



Inclusive Leadership in Practice: How Private Primary Schools in Lahore Publicly Represent the Management of Diverse Learning Needs

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Vol. 5, Issue 1, 2026

Article Information

Received:

2026-03-10

Revised:

2026-05-05

Accepted:

2026-06-27

ABSTRACT

Inclusive education is an established international imperative, yet a substantial gap persists between policy commitments and the publicly visible practices through which schools staff, lead and resource inclusion. Private primary schools in Lahore illustrate this gap clearly: operating in a competitive, fee-paying market, they face pressure to present themselves as inclusive. This document and content analysis examined 39 publicly available sources, including institutional websites and policies, search-indexed web content, videos, podcasts and interviews, corporate social media, and NGO, academic and policy documents. Data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis, with a coding framework drawn from distributed leadership, social justice leadership and neurodiversity-inclusive perspectives. First, Lahore's private primary sector lacks a shared inclusion standard and instead spans three tiers: rhetorical or general inclusion, structured fee-based inclusion, and inclusion as institutional identity. Second, depending on tier, inclusion is positioned either as a priced add-on service or as core institutional identity. Third, the sector relies on parallel, standalone provision, with no documented referral or information-sharing networks linking mainstream private schools and specialist centres for learners with special educational needs. Fourth, although school-level inclusive leadership is largely absent from Pakistani discourse compared with international literature, national policy and NGO documents reveal operational challenges similar to those reported elsewhere. The study concludes that this gap does not stem simply from budget constraints and can be addressed. Inclusive education is a responsibility, not a privilege reserved for high-income families. Recommendations are offered for school leaders, policymakers, parents and future primary research in Pakistan.

Keywords: *Inclusive Leadership, Distributed Leadership, Social Justice Leadership, Neurodiversity, Private Schools, Document Analysis, Lahore, Pakistan.*

Citation: APA

Shahid, M., Khan, T, M & Ijaz, H, M, U (2026) *Inclusive leadership in practice: How private primary schools in Lahore publicly represent the management of diverse learning needs*, *Journal of Climate and Community Development*, 5(1), 333-350.



1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The present global consensus on inclusive education dates back to the 1994 Salamanca Statement and Framework for action (UNESCO, 1994), wherein disability and learning difference came to be seen not as pathologies that required remediation in separate environments, but rather as common human variations that necessitate accommodations within mainstream classrooms, formalized through the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and reinforced by the Incheon Declaration (2015) and Sustainable Development Goal 4.

Three decades hence, the space between commitment and realisation widens not narrows; the 2026 UNESCO Global education monitoring report indicated that 273 million children, adolescents and youth were out of school globally in 2024 (approximately one in every six people school aged) a number that had steadily increased year upon year over seven consecutive years after decades of consistent decline with children with disability being amongst the most marginalized with the most persistent systemic barriers. Given this data the study of inclusive leadership as the organizational mechanism used to translate policy into practice in schools is not a purely historical topic but currently possesses an urgent timeliness.

Meanwhile the lexicon on inclusive education has shifted from 'integration' to 'inclusion,' characterized as a whole-institution strategy encompassing the reorganisation of staff allocation, curriculum and resources for diverse learners (Ainscow, 2024). As a second impetus for changing leadership, the rapid acknowledgement and identification of conditions such as AD-HD, dyslexia and ASD in mainstream settings require schools to reframe the problematic locus of deficits from the child toward a social construct located in the system itself (Doyle, 2024). In the Pakistani context, the right to education is enshrined in the Constitution and national policy repeatedly makes mention of SGD4, inclusive education as a policy imperative and there is a well-established network of schools and, in 2003, the Special Education Department was formed in the province of Punjab, overseeing a large provincial network while training of school personnel has reached thousands of teachers through government led programs;

schools continue to be renovated to accommodate people with disabilities. International analyses notwithstanding show that fewer students with disability enroll in school than their non-disabled peers and substantial ambiguity surrounds what inclusion requires at school level.

The sector is partially characterized by the public discourse on inclusion that institutions project to potential fee-paying clients. World Bank indicators suggest that the enrollment numbers for private schooling have comprised roughly a third of overall primary enrollment and a little less than half of overall secondary enrollment in the most recent years, a trend consistent with the Annual status of education report. While this figure is reflective of a characteristic of schooling in Pakistan-not solely or even primarily one of class-it is relatively under-researched within the literature of inclusive-leadership in comparison to the private schooling sector of the global north or Pakistan's public school sector. Public school administrators need simultaneously to publicize their inclusion mandate to parents while ensuring standardized outcomes to maintaining viability within competitive markets; while this dynamic plays out in the complex field of educational contexts in Lahore that span large school networks where the concept of inclusion informs general marketing rhetoric to specialized education facilities, purpose built programs that include inclusion wing classrooms that focus on specific areas of deficit, and smaller, standalone learning support centers within a larger educational market context, it manifests unevenly within the private educational system.

1.2 The Problem

Despite constitutional provisions and global mandates, rhetoric rarely translates to the publicly available details about the provision of inclusive leadership and the resource allocation that underpins it. The current research aims at systematically analysing the discourse surrounding inclusive leadership and management in public institutions and at differentiating how inclusion is projected across distinct private sector models within Lahore as well as contextualising this information against prevailing national and international discourse in academic literature, media broadcasts and NGOs.

The situation presents an information asymmetry against the interests of the very populations that

such policies aim to serve; a parent seeking a place for a neurodivergent child in a private school setting has only their peers, school marketed literature or personal information to frame a comparative understanding of its inclusive policy or its implementation beyond that presented by the marketing arms of an institution that uses inclusive rhetoric to maintain profitability while it may also be concerned about the performance of other students within the system. While schools use an inclusive marketing model, their administrators must meet stakeholder demands about learning outcomes, and therefore their own comparative language tends toward differentiating the "services they offer to supplement regular schooling."

1.3 Purpose, Questions and Objectives

The purpose of this study was therefore to qualitatively compare how the international discourse on inclusive leadership and inclusive practices were translated, represented, and enacted across distinct types of publicly described models of private elementary schools in Lahore to provide a baseline understanding of public discourse surrounding exclusive leadership and the management of diverse learning needs of regular students, placing it against the broader national and international understanding. I asked the following research questions:

RQ1. How do private primary schools in Lahore publicly represent and communicate their approach to inclusive leadership and the management of the diverse learning needs of regular students through institutional websites and public materials?

RQ2. What distinct institutional models of inclusive leadership and management are evident across Lahore's private primary education sector?

RQ3. What themes emerge from the wider national and international public discourse on inclusive educational leadership, and how does the Pakistani discourse compare with the international discourse? These are framed as qualitative descriptive questions rather than hypothesized causal relationships and were informed by the following two sensitizing propositions: Schools focusing on distributed, whole staff ownership of inclusion report deeper integrated practices than schools with inclusion as an additional element at the mission-statement level; and there exists a disparity in Pakistani professional discourse not as an artifact of data search method, but as a function of

development within that discourse.

1.4 Significance

The study is significant at three levels. For school administrators, it offers a comparative map of how peer institutions publicly position their inclusive provision, useful for benchmarking both communication and practice. For parents, it synthesises otherwise scattered public information about the range of models available. For policymakers and researchers, it identifies a concrete discourse gap that constrains the development of locally grounded practice knowledge, and proposes an agenda for closing it.

The study also makes a modest theoretical contribution. Most applications of Distributed Leadership Theory and Social Justice Leadership to inclusive education draw their evidence from within a single school or a small number of schools. By applying the same lenses to a corpus representing an entire city's private-school sector as it presents itself publicly, this study offers a sector-level, discourse-based application that complements school-level, interview-based evidence, and offers a method transferable to other cities, sectors, or countries.

1.5 Key Terms

Inclusive leadership is defined here as a leadership approach ensuring that all students, regardless of learning profile, have equal access to quality education through intentional, deliberately redesigned management practices. *Neurodivergence* refers to individuals whose neurological and cognitive functioning differs from what is considered typical. A *discourse gap* is a scarcity of public professional discussion on a topic within a national context relative to the volume of comparable discussion elsewhere, and an *implementation gap* is the disconnect between stated policy commitments and the operational detail an institution makes publicly available about daily practice.

2. Literature Review

2.1 From Global Policy to School-Level Practice

The dominant discourses of the field can be identified historically across three largely concurrent phases - segregation, integration and inclusion - and a central argument from Ainscow (2024) is that a learner's disability is no longer the

biggest obstacle for inclusion but rather that management processes and structures within schools is that hurdle. It is upon the latter premise that the scope of this research is grounded in exploring representation and use of leadership and management, as opposed to students and student characteristics.

A growing evidence base underlies this statement, evidenced by systematic reviews including DeMatthews et al. (2026) who consolidated findings from 38 empirical studies concerning principal leadership for inclusive schools between 1995 and January 2024 across 13 countries, into three categories - creating and maintaining commitment to inclusion; established and enhancing inclusive organisation structures; and developing instructional and leadership capacity. These three categories cover fifteen target practices, from family engagement structures to provision scheduling which are present across varied contexts. That the highest proportion of schools within the study are in countries such as the UK, US and Australia, directly addresses issues of context imbalance in relation to research which is used to outline best practice globally. Private sector, South Asian schools feature sparsely in the research base which informs inclusive practices.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

Distributed Leadership Theory. A move away from a notion of singular leadership from traditionally appointed leaders, distribution sees leadership 'spread across people, tools, and situations', (Spillane, 2006) influencing how a school functions more fluidly through distribution to leadership figures within other levels or roles, such as heads of department, coordinators and even through teachers, thus circumventing leadership bottlenecks within the school (Harris, 2014, 2023). There is supporting evidence suggesting that giving others a higher degree of responsibility in decisions-making particularly in a SENCo or among teachers will be far more reflective and supportive of inclusive practices than with single leadership where centralised decision-making could be the biggest stumbling block (Tian et al. 2023; However, a PRISMA systematic review of thirty five schools identified distributed leadership should not be assumed to address family and student barriers on its own Bagwell (2019). Furthermore, it was discovered through the examination of one school's

practices that there was greater buy in to whole-school practices from both faculty and leadership when instructional decisions were placed with grade-level and Specialist teachers. Distributed leadership is therefore not a leadership technique but rather an environmental requirement that enables other inclusionary practices to exist, rather than an entity itself.

Social justice leadership. This theory discusses leadership actions or processes keeping Race, gender, language, socio-economic status, disability and other aspects of marginalisation on the explicit surface of a principal's vision and decisions, arguing that these individuals' leadership activities inherently constitute political actions rather than administrative ones (Theoharis 2007) and later five particular kinds of practice that social justice leaders undertake, including; distributing resources toward underserve communities, auditing for equity, and redistributing of power to marginalized others (Radd et al. 2021). The approach argues for the importance of focusing on equity, while also empowering individuals to act with critical consciousness. A transformative leadership perspective emphasizes not only equity in terms of the end outcome but also develop critical consciousness and voice across the school community (Shields, 2013). Furman (2022) discusses the process of the practice as one that must consist of continuous praxis of reflection and action (rather than established policy/strategy) and when considered in relation to the private school context, it frames inquiry around the possibility of a genuine equity-oriented approach, versus a desire to meet market demand and provide parental satisfaction and competitive services.

Neurodiversity-affirming leadership. Doyle (2024) argues that leaders must move from a deficit model toward a social model, redirecting management priorities toward Universal Design for Learning. Hamilton and Petty (2023) apply double empathy theory to argue that mismatches between neurodivergent students and neurotypical institutions are relational and bidirectional rather than located within the student, making the school's leadership the appropriate unit of intervention. Harrison et al. (2024) document how leaders operationalise these principles through flexible means of engagement, representation, and expression rather than through the assistive-technology purchases institutions often foreground

publicly.

An integrated lens. Read together, these lenses bridge the administrative and ethical dimensions of inclusive leadership: Distributed Leadership Theory explains how inclusive responsibility is

structurally distributed, Social Justice Leadership explains the values driving that distribution, and neurodiversity-affirming leadership specifies the framing of learner difference. Table 1 summarises the textual indicators each lens directed the researcher to code for.

Table 1: *Theoretical Framework and Coding Indicators*

Lens	Key sources	Textual indicators coded for
Distributed Leadership Theory	Spillane (2006); Harris (2014, 2023); DeMatthews et al. (2026); Bagwell (2019)	Named roles beyond the principal (SENCOs, coordinators); shared decision-making language; staff training structures
Social Justice Leadership	Theoharis (2007, 2021); Radd et al. (2021); Shields (2013)	Equity and rights language; resource redistribution; family and community voice; explicit naming of marginalised groups
Neurodiversity-affirming leadership	Doyle (2024); Hamilton & Petty (2023); Harrison et al. (2024)	Deficit versus social-model framing; UDL and flexible-provision language; assistive technology and individualised planning

2.3 International Comparators

Western and Gulf contexts. Verheijen-Tiemstra, Ros, Vermeulen, and Poell (2024) studied a structured professional-development programme for school and childcare leaders in the Netherlands, finding that participants' inclusive leadership behaviour grew measurably but that leaders initially over-emphasised fostering belongingness while under-emphasising valuing uniqueness, both of which the authors argue are necessary for a genuinely inclusive climate. This belonging-uniqueness distinction proved a useful diagnostic in the present analysis. In the United States, the National Association of Elementary School Principals has used its Principal Podcast to platform practising principals discussing inclusive leadership as the dismantling of systemic barriers. Massouti et al. In their 2023 and 2024 study interview school leaders at private schools across the Gulf on their practice with Dubai Inclusive Education Policy Framework, in which persistent concerns in lack of adequate finance, large student-teacher ratio and lack of specialist training arise despite strong leader commitment. Almalky and Alwahbi (2023) report a structurally similar policy-practice gap among Saudi teachers, and Lindner, Alnahdi, Wahl, and Schwab (2023) find that German teachers' occupational stress was associated with less positive attitudes toward inclusion independent of training background, suggesting that working conditions, not only

training investment, moderate whether positive attitudes translate into sustained practice.

Asia-Pacific. Adams and Tan (2020) and Adams and colleagues (2023) argue that Malaysian principals face a cultural dynamic in which hierarchical structures complicate the power-sharing model Western distributed-leadership scholarship assumes as normative, prompting the development of a Malaysia-specific instrument for assessing principals' inclusive leadership practices. Indonesian case studies examine principals building inclusive cultures in resource-constrained rural and Islamic-school settings.

Sub-Saharan Africa and developing contexts. Opoku (2023) found that formal training modules for inclusive school leadership remain scarce in Ghana, and proposed a context-specific heuristic model for low-income settings, explicitly rejecting direct transplantation of Global North frameworks; his earlier work (Opoku, 2021) found that positive leader intent frequently outpaced implementation capacity, a distinction directly relevant to the present study's separation of public representation from verified practice. A study commissioned for UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report examined leadership competences across Ghana, Kenya, and Zambia and introduced the concept of Ubuntu school leadership, emphasising community engagement, collaborative empowerment, and holistic wellbeing as culturally rooted alternatives to Global North models (UNESCO IICBA, 2024).

Similarly, Cooper, Wolfenden, Dawadi, & Majid (2025) have found that school leaders in South Asia are hardly studied as actors for change:

2.4 The South Asian and Pakistani Context

The formal structure for inclusion in Pakistan is Article 25-A, along with the Punjab Special Education Department, which by 2023 was providing facilities for 288 institutions. Various programmes, such as the TALEEM initiative report thousands of teachers were trained on inclusive education, and the Brunel University/Dow University Occupational Therapy in Inclusive Education project demonstrated improvements at classroom level through mainstreaming of allied-health professionals with general teaching staff. Recent literature suggests that policy is currently being adapted according to ethno-federal politics, the patronage of kinship structures, and geopolitics that make simple policy transfer difficult. While the Consortium for Development Policy Research indicates that children with disability in Pakistan remain one tenth as likely to be attending school compared to their peers, with notably higher drop-out rates once enrolled in mainstream schools.

Recent studies suggest change is occurring at the level of school rather than as policy structure. According to Wolfenden and Naeem (2025), within Global Partnership for Education work in Pakistan, school leaders encouraged to monitor and use data on enrolment, attendance, and pupil wellbeing to identify barriers to inclusive practices rapidly increased in confidence. Specifically, leaders became bolder in challenging individualised pupil needs as well as working, disabled and refugee children more often as result of using data for advocacy in terms of student portfolios, rather than simple command-and-control compliance. The region is responding with increasing momentum too; to address inclusion through such means as, extension of school transport networks and outreach provision of services, along with the province's Autism School and Resource Centre in Lahore (Punjab Special Education Department, 2024). Nevertheless, Waqar et al. (2024) found that the majority of interventions in Pakistan focused on physical and curriculum based access to schooling and largely failed to adequately address needs for psychological support.

Regional research in terms of head teachers' capacity supports the argument: Mullick et al.

(2012) found head teachers within Bangladeshi primary schools frequently lacked both training and authority delegated from the top to restructure services or staff provision needed to put inclusive education practice into effect. This research was particularly interesting given this thesis is looking for this deficit in leadership capacity that underpins, a distributed-leadership failure. Following this, Ahmed et al. (2014) discovered institutional support was a greater determinant than personal attitudes for teachers engaging with inclusive education and Khan (2012) reported the only barrier cited by Bangladeshi secondary teachers was lack of specialised training (not actual disapproval of inclusion). Conversely, Hoque et al. (2013) indicated that while Bangladesh and Malaysia had fairly comparable rates of school enrolment they had divergent allocated budget streams and therefore differentiated implementation resulting from different levels of national control (Malaysia is more centralised). Read all together with Alur and Bach's work (2012) of legal and policy commitment continually outweighing the capacity of classroom level practice across the subcontinent, it seems to be the structurally embedded issue of resources.

2.5 Teachers, Parents, and Principals

Teacher attitudes are widely established as decisive in whether inclusive policy becomes inclusive practice. Kazmi, Kamran, and Siddiqui (2023) surveyed 230 teachers across ten traditional and ten inclusive schools in Karachi, finding that attitudes toward children with behavioural and learning differences varied systematically with school type and prior inclusive training. Boyle, Allen, and Grembecki (2023) found in Australia that specific pre-service training in inclusive pedagogy, rather than general teaching experience, was the strongest predictor of positive attitudes, and cautioned that attitude and self-efficacy do not always move together: a teacher may hold a positive philosophical stance while reporting low confidence in curricular modification or behaviour support. McGarrigle, Beamish, and Hay (2021) found that sustained professional development measurably increased self-efficacy where one-off sessions did not.

On parental engagement, Barnard (2004) established that sustained involvement across the elementary years predicts stronger attainment, and

Hornby and Lafaele (2011) propose a multi-level model distinguishing parent and family, child, parent-teacher, and societal barriers to involvement. The content of parental involvement, not the amount, predicted performance, whereby curriculum-tied, structured parental assistance was superior to parental prompting and support (Cabus and Aries, 2016). Antony-Newman (2024) argues that teacher preparation has historically treated parent engagement as peripheral rather than a core competency.

On principal preparation, Webster (2023) interviewed twelve United States principals and found a consistent gap between the general instructional-leadership training they received and the competencies they identified as necessary for leading inclusive schools, with participants reporting that their most useful learning came through informal, on-the-job problem-solving and peer networks rather than formal coursework. Darling-Hammond and colleagues (2023) identify policy levers, including leadership standards, programme approval requirements, licensure design, and investment in induction and pipeline programmes, through which systems can improve leaders' capacity for equity-focused practice.

At classroom level, Lindner and Schwab (2020) found that although differentiated instruction is near-universally endorsed in policy, many teachers differentiate through pace or quantity of work rather than the structural redesign of content, process, and product the model's theorists intended. Alsudairy (2024) found that structured co-teaching training improved collaborative planning, but that many teachers enter such training with little prior exposure to co-teaching as a concept, owing to teacher-education programmes that continue to prepare general and special educators on largely separate tracks.

2.6 Document Analysis as Method, and the Research Gap

Document and content analysis is a well-established qualitative method in which existing artefacts, rather than researcher-generated data, constitute the primary source. Bowen (2009) describes it as a systematic procedure of skimming, close reading, and interpretation, valuable particularly for triangulating findings across independent source types and for contexts where direct access to participants is constrained.

Three interlocking gaps emerge from the literature reviewed above. The three weaknesses are that (1) most previous inclusive-leadership studies are survey-based, or based on relatively small samples that might not be readily duplicated without directly accessing interview participants; (2) almost all of the scholarship in inclusive leadership is focused on Western public school systems, or on a handful of more affluent private markets in Gulf and Southeast Asian regions; and (3) for public educational discourses and practice related to inclusive schooling, particularly in Pakistan, there is an obvious discourse-gap-no systematic history, policy development and enduring discussion seems apparent in either the tertiary (academic) and even the secondary public record of educational practice and policy discourses in Pakistan. For the first time this paper will attempt to make some map of that secondary discourse and practice development within the context of private, primary education in Lahore.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Design and Philosophical Position

Instead of the interview-based phenomenological design initially suggested the researcher opt for a qualitative document and content analysis design (Bowen, 2009). There are three reasons for this change. Firstly, feasibility: there was not sufficient time in a revised eight months' work period to recruit principals, obtain informed consent, conduct and transcribe in-depth interviews that would consume a large portion of work time compared to the remaining tasks of data analysis and write up. Secondly, access: leaders in private sector schools in Lahore are an institutionally cautious group within a competitive market and the chosen area addressing inclusion through resourcing was one where guardedness on the part of participants could realistically lead to refusal or guarded replies. Thirdly, and most importantly, a document design asked a new, and relatively less investigated question than an interview-based one. The investigation asks not what privately understood or intended intentions private school leaders have with regard to inclusive leadership but what the sector more broadly or collectively publicly says in its documentation with regard to leading inclusion and, what in the public discourse is hidden and what is revealed. Response to obstacles occurring during research is part of good qualitative work as it can

and should be accounted for (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016).

The research aligns to an interpretivist paradigm assuming that the inclusion of an institution as published is socially constructed to audiences; market and institutional culture and not a pure reflection of what exists on the ground level within the institution. Following Krippendorff (2018) the corpus was regarded as communications produced to be observed by specific audiences hence, meaning not divisible from production and reception environments. Therefore, the researcher considered the context of her professional experience in the primary education sector as one that lent a particular lens and perspective to analysis and this was openly stated.

3.2 The Institutional Landscape

The composition of the sector determining the corpus first identified the variation in types of institutional models through which private sector schooling in Lahore interfaces with inclusion. These could be divided into four types. The large mainstream network institutions: Beaconhouse School System, The City School, Lahore Grammar School, whose large networks comprise dozens of primary campuses.

Such institutions characterize their schools with diffuse use of general inclusive phrasing interspersed in general marketing brochures.

The mainstream institutions which have established an explicit separate fee-based inclusion/SEN wing of the school are embodied by, for example, The International School Lahore: Institutions operating specialized departments with individually written and jointly parent-formulated IEPs. They charge an additional monthly fee for these specialized services. Schools built primarily around special and inclusive education include Cornerstone School, the Lahore Garrison Institution for Special Education, and Rehab Care's Special Children School, which integrates speech, occupational, and behavioural therapy into the academic day. Finally,

a wider network of standalone, localised learning-support facilities is distributed across residential neighbourhoods including Wapda Town, Iqbal Town, Mughalpura, Johar Town, Gulberg III, Garden Town, and Cantt, alongside government facilities under the Punjab Special Education Department.

3.3 Corpus and Sampling

Purposive sampling was applied, selecting material because it was relevant to inclusive leadership in private primary education in Lahore or provided a directly comparable national or international benchmark. Sources were drawn from six categories: institutional websites and public materials; search-indexed web content, including directory listings and education-sector news; video content; podcasts and published interviews, including international practitioner platforms and interview-based Pakistani policy scholarship; school and organisational social media; and NGO, development-partner, and academic or policy documents from bodies including UNESCO, UNICEF Pakistan, the Global Partnership for Education, and the Consortium for Development Policy Research.

Three inclusion criteria applied. A source had to be publicly accessible without login or privileged access; had to concern inclusive education, inclusive leadership, or the management of diverse and neurodivergent learners, either in Pakistan or in a comparator context; and had to be current, with foundational documents such as the Salamanca Statement retained only where they remain the field's standard reference.

The final corpus contained around 39 sources and is represented by the breakdown in Table 2 below. The weighting towards institutional Web sites is a result of the main interest being how schools individually choose to portray inclusive leadership and the wide distribution across the rest ensures triangulation supports the credibility measure detailed below.

Table 2: *Data corpus by source category (N = 39)*

Source category	n	% of corpus
Institutional web and public materials	9	23.1
Search-indexed web content	7	17.9
Video content	4	10.3
Podcasts and published interviews	8	20.5
School and organizational social media	5	12.8
NGO-, academic- and policy documents	6	15.4
Total	39	100

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

Sources were found by iterative systematic web searches: the terms inclusive leadership, inclusive education, special needs and SEN were combined in turn with Lahore, Pakistan and with and without comparator states. The inclusion criteria were used to screen each found source, the full citation was entered to a logging document and it was read/viewed/listened in full, via transcripts/description/episode summary where necessary for video and audio. Extracts and observations were recorded to a structured extraction log stating the source category, institutional model and themes covered.

The data were analyzed using Braun & Clarke's (2022) six-phase thematic analysis adapted to a document corpus: becoming familiar with the dataset through repeated close reading; generating initial codes; searching for themes via combinations of related codes (and guided by the theoretical framework); refining candidate themes via a systematic check of these themes against the entirety of the documents, along with the four institution categories; naming and defining the themes; and finally producing the report. First coding cycle included descriptive and in Vivo codes following Saldaa (2021): the application of codes to extracts such as fee-based SEN service, disclosure initiated by parent and stand-alone facility, second cycle coding led to the grouping of codes of a similar nature into the pattern level categories, which developed into the five theme titles reported in this study. Each coded extract carries its reference and is linked to its constituent codes, such that any theme can be traced back to original instances. This document-corpus was composed of documents at varying registers from policy papers to website marketing copy to blog posts and

podcasts so in the first pass codes were applied considering the context and origin of the statement: the weight of a statement made in a government white paper is not equivalent of a similar statement in commercial webpage copy so the codes assigned reflect the origin to allow the reader to differentiate based on source category; an illustrative example of this difference can be found under theme one.

3.5 Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four criteria were applied and adapted for a document-based design. Credibility was supported by triangulating findings across independent source categories, so that a theme was treated as credible only where it recurred across more than one source type. Transferability was supported by thick description of each source's institutional context using the four-category typology. Dependability was supported by a documented audit trail from raw source through initial code to named theme. Confirmability was supported by a reflective log of search terms and source-selection decisions, used to surface and bracket the researcher's assumptions. Tracy's (2010) big-tent criteria were applied as a complementary framework, with worthy topic, rich rigor, sincerity, and ethics particularly salient to a design of this kind.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

All analysed material was already in the public domain and accessible without login or privileged access, so no institutional consent was required and no private or identifiable individual data were collected. Institutions are discussed on the basis of their own public self-representation, and all source material is paraphrased and attributed rather than quoted at length. The study makes no evaluative claim about the internal quality of any named

school's provision, only about what that school has chosen to make publicly visible.

4. Findings

Five themes were developed from the corpus. Each is presented with supporting evidence drawn from at least two independent source categories, in line with the triangulation-based credibility standard described above. All source material is paraphrased and attributed to its origin.

4.1 Theme One: A Spectrum of Institutional Models, Not a Single Standard

What is most clear is that there is no single, collective notion of inclusive practice presents in Lahore's private primary sector. One encounters a spectrum, but reading the specific communications of these schools sharpens rather than blurs this conclusion.

One end of the spectrum large mainstream networks reference inclusive practice primarily in general mission language, indicating environments are "safe," "inclusive," or "nurturing" without publicly detailing institutional commitments regarding a specific inclusion department, staffing structure, or resourcing plan at the primary level. The public-facing director's message of Lahore Grammar School foregrounds examination results, specific subject- specialist instruction, and Cambridge distinctions and does not, at the primary level and through its public website, include one word regarding inclusion, special needs, or diverse learners; similarly, the public "Policies" section of the City School website addresses scholarships, attendance, conduct, uniform and health, among others, but does not dedicate a specific policy for special education or inclusion (suggesting if one exists it isn't a priority). The Beaconhouse network is a partial exception; its website mentions that an additional layer of SEN support services is becoming available within the network but notes those services are only yet available at certain campuses, while parents must "request" help and demonstrate proof of the need according to its published Parents Charter. This models an ad-on logic with disclosure.

At the other end, there is a cluster of institutions such as Cornerstone School or the Lahore Garrison Institution for Special Education which build its entire publicly expressed identity around specialized and inclusive practice, publicizing in explicit detail individualised program structures,

therapeutic integration, and home school partnerships; still in between are schools that explicitly offer inclusion on a defined and fee-based structure in order to expand beyond their mainstream mission (The International School Lahore, for instance, uses a stated inclusion department model with IN-CASE individualized plans layered onto a traditional academic curriculum. This Tier 1/2/3 structure that could describe general/inclusive rhetorical presentation, fee-based inclusive service, or an inclusive/specialized identity is a more helpful taxonomy than a simplistic binary of inclusive-or-no which characterizes older literature and addresses RQ2. Categorizing by tier is a useful analytical tactic in this study because it allows for schools to occupy differing tiers across different dimensions: for instance, in the case of one school one can find evidence of its fee-based, structured inclusion tier in its admissions policy for students who require SEN support, while one encounters only the tier 1 general public relations branding and mission statement on its public-facing website. Not one single school we surveyed exhibited one specific tier consistently across every communicative component; this, again, indicates that communication about inclusive practice is an aspect that has not necessarily become cohesive at the institutional level through centralized management, but instead has been assembled in pieces, across different public communicative avenues within each individual institution.

It can be argued that the 3-tier structure parallels an existing practical model. Villa and Thousand's (2016) Schoolhouse Model places administrative leadership and support as the very base upon which co-teaching, differentiated instruction and collaborative planning can, in successive and necessary layers, be built until the top of the house is reached. Tier 1 public schools as described by my research reveal only the roof-line-general mission statements-without documenting the structures below at all: a tiered system that suggests there is no underlying administrative, budget, or staffing infrastructure on which anything higher can be built. Tier 3 documents it quite openly. The convergence between an independent, established framework of inclusion as a developed practice and the categories of Tier 1/2/3 uncovered by analyzing these particular schools suggests that my analysis is describing a robust pattern rather than unique

institutional quirkiness in my sample.

4.2 Theme Two: Fee-based service or core identity?

We observe one dominant pattern within the fee-based SEN programs: inclusion is discussed as an added on extra service, available for an additional fee on top of an already established academic program and defined as complementary to, not integral to, an institution's core academic value proposition. Beaconhouse, for example, offers an evidence-based add-on with parent-initiated disclosure; support is described as an accommodation available on request, not as part of an institution's permanent set of defining beliefs. Institutions dedicated entirely to a model of specialized and inclusive education such as LGISE Cornerstone, or Rehab Care frame comprehensive individual support as a value at their very core while publicizing aspects of individually developed confidence-building, multidisciplinary teams, and family education practices. When viewed in light of Social Justice Leadership, a conflict arises between this emphasis on individual service provision, and the marketization of disability (Ainscow, 2024; Theoharis, 2021). The fee-based inclusion programs are driven by a service orientation which seems most closely related to market values of inclusion, whereas the inclusive/specialized institutions are defined by the goal of equity; my research clearly differentiates among types of inclusion programs, but this thematic analysis begins to unpack differences that speak directly to RQ1. Newspaper reports of the broader context supplement what this textual analysis cannot speak to alone; for example, one prominent recent (2025) article in Dawn about issues related to learning disabilities clearly states that most institutions are not accepting children with special needs, while provincial budgets for SEN education are a tiny fraction of the funds appropriated by mainstream education. These reports highlight another potential layer to Tier 1 in my analysis, where no visible commitments may correspond to a stated, albeit private, avoidance of enrolling students with special needs and a lack of resources for such, a hypothesis document-based methods may raise but cannot confirm in this case. Perhaps there is a Structural explanation for this pattern. Dudley-Marling (2012) found that proponents of school choice, who are typically associated with free market ideologies, argue that individual private school operators will

need little incentive from market pressures alone to expand opportunities for students who need special education accommodations, since public programs have struggled and a lack of options would drive people into privately funded programs that may develop specialized support services at a price; in our case, this model would simply reproduce my findings about what seems to characterize a tier 1/ Tier 2 private model.

4.3 Theme Three: Dense but fragmentary independent SE system

The search revealed a geographically scattered yet robust institutional field of independently run special education schools all around Lahore, from Wapda town in the south of the city through to Cantt further to the northwest. These institutions stand apart from the 288 institutions which fall under the Punjab Special Education Department's rubric provincially. The Department's own public directory, which includes government-run facilities such as the Special Education Centre on Fort Road in Ravi Town, confirms that this network extends well beyond the city's more visible private special-education brands into older, lower-profile residential neighbourhoods. This density indicates that demand for specialised and inclusive provision is distributed across the city's residential communities rather than confined to a handful of elite private schools.

These facilities, however, operate largely independently of the mainstream schools mapped in Theme One. The corpus contains no evidence of formal partnership, referral pathway, or shared professional-development structure linking the two. This fragmentation, a mainstream sector and a specialist sector operating in parallel rather than in integration, echoes at institutional level the same organisational rigidity Ainscow (2024) identifies as the central obstacle to inclusion globally.

4.4 Theme Four: A Marked International-to-National Discourse Gap

The search confirms a pronounced asymmetry between international and Pakistani public discourse on inclusive school leadership specifically. Internationally, sustained podcast and interview platforms, including the NAESP Principal Podcast, The Inclusion Podcast, the Inclusion Think Tank, and Ireland's Inclusion Dialogue, feature recurring, leadership-focused conversations with practising principals.

UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report has produced a video series including content on voices from Pakistan, and UNICEF Pakistan publishes narrative case studies on inclusive education, but these are framed around broader access and system-level policy rather than the principal-level practices this study investigates. Published interview-based Pakistani research exists at policy-elite level, including a 2025 study drawing on interviews with senior economists, diplomats, and officials to trace how global inclusive education policy is recontextualised within Pakistan's ethno-federal and patronage-based political structures, but this operates at national policy level rather than school-leadership level. No comparable Pakistani podcast, interview series, or structured media platform focused specifically on private-school principals' inclusive leadership practice was located.

The scale of the asymmetry is clearest when measured against the most established international platform in the corpus. Think Inclusive, hosted for the Maryland Coalition for Inclusive Education, has released over 200 episodes since 2012 and ranks in the top two per cent of podcasts globally, with recent episodes addressing how individual schools move from aspirational commitment to inclusive scheduling and staffing without waiting for an ideal blueprint first. A single long-running platform of this kind has produced a volume of recorded, searchable, principal- and teacher-facing discourse with no equivalent in scale, longevity, or school-leadership focus anywhere in the Pakistani sources located. This is not a variation in production values but a variance in practice-level of the knowledge base to which a school leader in Pakistan might look for peers that is depth and discoverability. This gap is substantial, and in itself directly responsive to RQ3. Two associated dimensions were not immediately distinguishable: there were no consistently documented, principal-level, leadership-preparation pipeline for inclusive education that were found at the private sector level within Pakistan, unlike the teacher/infrastructure and program of the Punjab Special Education Department; there was no explicitly designated concept of co-teaching within institutional websites at the classroom level-that is not too surprising, and in agreement with Alsudairy (2024) and her description of the term relatively unseen even among the targeted-teacher cohort she studied.

4.5 Theme Five: Barriers Universal, Pakistan Confirmed

In practice, though, the substantive barriers, as contained within documents within Pakistan, are strongly paralleled by what is present within the literature across the globe. The Consortium for Development Policy Research finds that disabled children still lag far behind their peers in enrollment rates, and when disabled children enroll, their dropout rates are higher than their peers, "owing in part to the lack of awareness...among teachers and administrators about identifying, and supporting special needs," particularly the early stages. The Harvard Mittal South Asia Institute ran a pilot study which independently arrived at the policy-practice disconnect nationally, reporting that Pakistan has a formal National Policy for Persons with Disabilities which aims toward inclusion, yet a National plan of action for the policy was drafted and largely never initiated, making disabled institutions operate without coordinated implementation efforts as defined by policy. This finding validates, through an elite interview-based study (as contrasted to the document analysis conducted within this paper) mainstream and specialist disintegration by showing the policy-level roots of the problem. Working within several schools in Pakistan including a private one, the Brunel and Dow University Occupational Therapy in Inclusive Education project documented actual results of including an allied-health professional on each classroom team-they reported this improves not only students with disabilities, but the whole-class learning environment; these findings lend empirical support to the deficit-to-social-model movement Doyle (2024) articulated. These examples confirm that although the public discourse regarding Pakistani inclusive leadership is minimal, the actual operationalizing challenge of including disabled students is being witnessed universally.

4.6 Triangulation with Independent Interview-Based Evidence

A directly relevant Pakistani interview-based study provided opportunities for a relatively limited but important triangulation verification. Kamran, Bano, and Siddiqui (2024) conducted 16 semi-structured interviews with classroom teachers, alongside classroom and field observations at a single Pakistani private elementary school inclusive setting, utilizing a SWOT-thematic design to map teacher perspectives toward the school's

institutional values and practices concerning disabled children. Although based in Karachi and interview-based rather than document-based, it offers a closely matched comparison: the same national regulatory and cultural context, the same private primary level, and a school that appears to occupy a position comparable to this study's Tier 3 category.

The comparison yields both convergence and a useful divergence. In convergence, their teachers described institutional values and pedagogical commitments in terms closely echoing the public-facing language found among Tier 3 institutions here: individualised attention, staff commitment, and a defining rather than supplementary identity. This lends independent support to the claim that Tier 3's public self-description is not merely

marketing rhetoric disconnected from internal practice. In divergence, their teachers also surfaced operational weaknesses, including bullying dynamics among peers and inconsistent teacher preparedness, that could not have been visible in any of the public materials analysed here. Read together, the two studies suggest that Lahore's own Tier 3 institutions would repay the same interview-based scrutiny, both to test whether public identity-level commitment translates into internal practice and to surface implementation challenges likely present even in schools most strongly built around inclusion.

4.7 Summary of Themes

Table 3 consolidates the five themes against the research question each primarily answers and the source type most strongly supporting it.

Table 3: *Summary of themes, research questions, and primary evidence types*

Sr	Theme	Research question	Primary evidence type
1	A spectrum of institutional models, not a single standard	RQ2	Institutional websites, published policies
2	Inclusion as add-on service versus institutional identity	RQ1	Institutional websites, parent charters
3	A dense but fragmented standalone SEN ecosystem	RQ2	Government directories, social media
4	A discourse gap between international and Pakistani leadership-focused discussion	RQ3	Podcasts, search-indexed web content
5	Consistent global barriers, locally confirmed	RQ3	NGO, academic, and policy documents

4.8 The Limits of Public Representation as Data

Throughout all five themes an identical methodological comment recurs. Available information publicly shows definitively what an institution will claim about its provision, and to a fairly accurate degree, what provisions it claims to have in terms of structured services, but cannot show a principal's thinking on his/her way through day to day problems of inclusive leadership – e.g. How to balance with performance measures, the private politics of resource assignment. Again this could not be perceived as a weakness of the paper, more an inherent limitation of documenting that relies on material as evidence.

5. Discussion

Examining against the Distributed and Social Justice Leadership models, it would appear that

Lahore's private schools occupy all positions upon both theories at the same time: institutes falling under the Identity-Defining label tend combine equity discourses to distinguish themselves (a symbol of Social Justice Leadership) and multi-specialism and distributed staffing models (a symbol of Distributed Leadership). Theory. Institutions in the general or rhetorical category show comparatively little public evidence of either. This supports Ainscow's (2024) claim that the primary barrier to inclusion is organisational and cultural rather than located in the learner. Lahore's mainstream private schools appear to possess the market resources to build inclusive infrastructure, as the fee-based and identity-defining categories demonstrate is possible within this sector, but the majority have not yet made that infrastructure publicly visible or, plausibly, operationally central.

The belonging-uniqueness distinction developed by Verheijen-Tiemstra et al. (2024) offers a sharper diagnostic. The general or rhetorical tier's language speaks almost entirely to belongingness, a broadly comfortable and low-specificity institutional value. It says comparatively little about valuing uniqueness, which would require the individualised structural detail, staffing ratios, named support roles, individualised planning documents, that the other two tiers do publish. The typology is therefore not simply a matter of resourcing but of which half of inclusive leadership a school chooses to foreground publicly. This reading is reinforced by the teacher-attitude literature: because attitude and self-efficacy do not always move together (Boyle et al., 2023), institutional language describing staff as caring and welcoming, absent any documented training pathway, may be documenting attitude without documenting preparedness.

The comparative absence of a Pakistani professional leadership discourse carries a further implication when read against the developing-context literature. Opoku's (2023) Ghanaian findings and the UNESCO IICBA (2024) Ubuntu school leadership study both suggest that, outside the Global North, inclusive school leadership tends to be documented through international academic and development-partner channels rather than the practitioner-facing media that dominate Western and Gulf contexts. Pakistan's substantive operational evidence is academic and policy-channel evidence, while its practitioner-voice channel remains comparatively undeveloped. This reframes the discourse gap as one instance of a wider Global South pattern rather than a uniquely Pakistani deficiency, without diminishing the practical case for closing it locally.

A final point concerns the relationship between the findings taken together. Theme Three's fragmentation and Theme Four's discourse gap are not independent. A sector in which mainstream and specialist provision operate in parallel, with no documented referral or shared professional-development structure, is also a sector with no natural professional forum through which practice knowledge could circulate between them. Conversely, the absence of a practitioner discourse platform removes the most likely low-cost mechanism by which such linkages might form informally. The structural and discursive gaps are plausibly mutually reinforcing, which suggests that

interventions targeting either may have effects on the other.

6. Implications and Recommendations

For school administrators. Schools relying on general mission-statement language stand to gain most from publicly documenting specific inclusive staffing, training, and resourcing structures, both to build parent trust and to benchmark practice against peers, since the analysis suggests that documented specificity rather than stated intent is what distinguishes Tier 2 and Tier 3 institutions in the eyes of parents and regulators. Administrators might also explore formal partnership or referral pathways with the standalone SEN ecosystem rather than each institution independently building specialist capacity; the geographic density documented in Theme Three suggests most mainstream schools already have at least one such centre within practical referral distance. The belonging-uniqueness distinction offers a concrete self-audit tool: an administrator reviewing their school's own public materials can ask whether published language addresses only belonging or also uniqueness.

For policymakers. Three actions follow. The first is to support the development of a Pakistani professional discourse platform, whether a podcast, interview series, or structured case-study repository, focused specifically on school-level inclusive leadership. The second is to consider incentivising formal linkages between mainstream private schools and the existing standalone SEN ecosystem, potentially modelled on the embedded allied-health approach piloted by the Brunel and Dow University project. The third is to revisit the implementation structure for the National Plan of Action documented by the Harvard Mittal South Asia Institute study, as a policy-level precondition for closing the fragmentation this study documents at school level.

For parents and the wider public. The three-tier typology can serve as a practical reference point for understanding what level and type of inclusive provision a given private school is likely to offer, based on how it is publicly positioned. Parents evaluating a Tier 1 institution may wish to request directly the kind of evidence-based disclosure that Beaconhouse's own Parents' Charter describes, given that such provision is not always volunteered proactively in public materials.

7. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The study's most significant limitation is that a document-based design cannot capture principals' private, lived reasoning about the ethical and administrative dilemmas of inclusive leadership. This report is about representation and practice, not verified reality; institutional presentations may be misleading regarding actual provision, and it is an example of the public information the review process was working within-material readily available in the public domain in the process of data collection and cannot claim to embrace every private primary school in Lahore. A second limitation concerns single-coder analysis. Because the study was conducted by a single researcher without a second coder, it cannot report a formal inter-rater reliability statistic of the kind Krippendorff (2018) treats as a marker of rigour in content analysis. This was partially offset by the documented audit trail and the triangulation-based credibility criterion, but a follow-up study incorporating a second coder would strengthen confidence in the boundaries drawn between codes and themes.

Third, the corpus is subject to survivorship bias. Institutions maintaining an active, well-resourced public web presence are, almost by definition, more likely to be larger and more commercially established, which may under-represent the actual practice of smaller or newer institutions. The typology should therefore be read as a map of the sector's public discourse rather than a claim about the true distribution of inclusive practice across every private primary school in Lahore.

Five research directions follow: an interview-based phenomenological study with principals, testing whether the public representation patterns identified here correspond to their lived experience; a parent-perception study examining how fee-paying parents interpret and respond to the three-

tier typology; a discourse-development initiative documenting Pakistani private-school principals' inclusive leadership practice; a comparative document analysis extending the method to Karachi and Islamabad to test whether the typology holds nationally; and a longitudinal repeat in three to five years, to assess whether public representation becomes more detailed and structurally specific over time.

8. Conclusion

This document content, analysis, as described with the systematic nature and rigorous theoretical/practically relevant manner to explain, 'is to what extent inclusive leadership is constructed and discussed in relation to the private sector primary education in Lahore', despite the fact that no primary interview data has been conducted. It has mapped a three-tier institutional typology, identified a fragmented standalone SEN ecosystem operating largely apart from mainstream schools, and documented a substantive discourse gap between international and Pakistani professional discussion of school-level inclusive leadership, while showing that the underlying operational barriers Pakistan faces are well documented and consistent with global patterns.

The practical implication is more specific than a general call for more resources. Pakistan's operational barriers are well understood and expensive to address; its discourse gap is neither. Building a searchable, practitioner-facing record of how Pakistani school leaders actually manage diverse learning needs is comparatively low-cost, and it is a precondition for the locally grounded practice knowledge that any resourcing intervention would ultimately depend on. The study closes by recommending that this public-record analysis be extended, resources permitting, into direct engagement with the principals whose voices remain the central gap in the record it has mapped.

Conflict of Interest

The authors showed no conflict of interest.

Funding

The authors did not mention any funding for this research.

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