

INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL REPRESENTATION OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN THE EDUCATIONAL CURRICULUM: A LITERATURE REVIEW FROM A DISABILITY SOCIOLOGY PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Education has a central role in shaping a social perspective on diversity, including people with disabilities. However, many educational curricula still present a biased and unempowering representation of people with disabilities. This study aims to examine the inclusive language and social representation of people with disabilities in curriculum documents using a sociology approach to disability. This study was carried out through a qualitative method with a systematic literature review approach. Data sources include scientific articles, academic books, research reports, and policy documents collected from databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, and DOAJ. The data collection technique was carried out by literature selection based on the keywords of inclusive language. The analysis was carried out thematically and narratively, using the framework of the disability social model, the concept of ableism, and a critical theory approach. The results show that the educational curriculum is still dominated by medical approaches and non-inclusive narratives that place people with disabilities as objects of mercy or burden. The language used tends to stigmatize, reinforce stereotypes, and create symbolic exclusion in the classroom. In addition, the involvement of people with disabilities in curriculum formulation is still very minimal. The conclusions of this study emphasize that equitable and inclusive education can only be achieved through paradigm shifts, the use of empowering language, and equal representation in all aspects of the educational curriculum.

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INTRODUCTIONS

Education plays a crucial role in shaping individual perspectives on diversity, including people with disabilities. The existence of inclusive education in national and global policies demonstrates the effort to create an equitable

environment for all individuals. However, in practice, the implementation of inclusive education models often faces structural and cultural challenges, such as entrenched stigmas and stereotypes in society. Research shows that the personal experiences and attitudes of educators have a great influence on the acculturation of people with disabilities in the context of education. Those who lack firsthand experience are often more likely to perpetuate prejudices and negative stereotypes. (Rizzo et al., 2021)

The educational curriculum often does not represent people with disabilities fairly. It is known that the representation of disabled people in textbooks sometimes only portrays disabled characters as passive individuals or as objects of compassion, which do not reflect their reality and potential. Research shows that this less empowering narrative can contribute to broader discrimination, as well as reinforce negative images in society. (Mueller, 2021) (Kearney et al., 2019)

The application of inclusive language in education is very urgent, both as a means of communication and as a means of forming social awareness. Non-inclusive language can reinforce social discrimination in the form of verbal and structural discrimination. Research shows that the use of non-inclusive language in the educational curriculum can encourage the marginalization of people with disabilities. (Collins et al., 2022)

Evidence suggests that the social representation of people with disabilities contributes to society's view of them. Research has found that positive views of individuals with disabilities, especially among experienced educators, can help reduce stereotypes as well as increase empathy. (Rizzo et al., 2021; Vaucher et al., 2020)

The challenges in the representation of people with disabilities in education reflect broader social realities. Stigma and stereotypes contribute to discrimination against people with disabilities, as well as create an inclusive and equitable world of education that is hampered by existing narratives. These injustices limit access to education and contribute to social exclusion. (Harma et al., 2022)

Facing these challenges requires collaborative efforts from various stakeholders in education. It is important to create a dialogue between teachers, people with disabilities, and the education community to ensure an inclusive and empowering curriculum. Further research suggests that a disability-sensitive environment can play a role in shaping positive attitudes towards diversity. (Figar & Fernández Unsain, 2023; Germundsson, 2022)

Creating an inclusive language in education not only serves to reduce stigma but also to promote diversity and inclusion across educational institutions. By implementing a curriculum that upholds the values of inclusion, we can bridge the gap in perceptions and attitudes towards people with disabilities. It is important to consider not only the existence of people with disabilities in education, but also how they are represented through language and curriculum. By recognizing that all individuals have the right to equal educational opportunities, this step will contribute to the realization of a more inclusive and empowered society. (Aspler et al., 2022)

People with disabilities not only need to be present in the curriculum, but also must be shown as empowered and equal individuals. Transformation in their social representation is a necessary first step to creating equality in education. Through an inclusive language that considers diversity, we can open up spaces for all individuals to contribute to society. Thus, education is not only a tool of knowledge, but also a means to change the social paradigm towards a more just society for people with disabilities.

The sociology approach to disability offers a more comprehensive understanding of disability by emphasizing that the barriers faced by people with disabilities do not only come from medical conditions, but rather from the social structures and dominant norms that exist in society. Thus, an analysis of the curriculum and education system needs to be carried out to evaluate how these two elements shape the identity and social position of people with disabilities in a broader context. An unfair curriculum in the representation of persons with disabilities creates a systematic form of social exclusion, in which access to education for them is hampered by the biases and stereotypes that develop in society. (Rahmi & Muqowim, 2022)

In this context, it is important to critically review how language and social representation of people with disabilities are integrated into curriculum and educational materials. Many educational documents still reflect a view that is not fully inclusive, which has been proven through research showing that teachers and educational facilities are often not ready to support the implementation of inclusive education across the board. In addition, there are problems

in the understanding of inclusion that can hinder positive attitudes towards education for people with disabilities, resulting in limitations in their acceptance in the educational environment. (Inayatillah & Andayani, 2019; Taufik & Rahaju, 2021) (Suprihatiningrum, 2022)

By taking a deeper look at language and representation in the curriculum, we can identify the extent to which the curriculum plays a role, both in supporting and hindering inclusive education. Therefore, this research does not only focus on curriculum analysis, but also offers critical reflection and recommendations based on the sociology of disability approach for improvement. The use of inclusive language in teaching materials is essential so that people with disabilities can be seen as empowered individuals, not just objects of compassion. (Widodo & Umar, 2020)

RESEARCH METHOD

This research is qualitative with a systematic literature review method based on the perspective of the sociology of education and the sociology of critical disabilities. As a literature study, this research does not involve the collection of primary data from the field, but rather focuses on the process of searching, selection, and analysis of scientific documents relevant to the theme of inclusive language, social representation of disabilities, and the construction of disability in the educational curriculum.

The main objective of this study is to identify patterns of social representation of persons with disabilities in curriculum documents and educational materials, as well as to examine how the language used reflects the dominant social structures and ideologies related to disability. This study also seeks to find conceptual gaps in the existing literature and formulate directions for the development of a more inclusive and socially equitable curriculum discourse.

The data sources in this study come from a variety of scientific literature, which includes journal articles, academic books, research reports, education policy documents, and conference proceedings that discuss themes such as inclusive education, representation of disabilities, language in the curriculum, and social theory of disability. The literature was collected through systematic searches on a number of academic databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, and DOAJ. The keywords used include: "inclusive language in education", "disability and curriculum", "representation of disability", "critical disability studies", "inclusive pedagogy", and "sociology of education and disability".

The literature selection focused on publications in the last two decades to ensure linkages with contemporary discourses of education and disability, although some classical literature with strong theoretical influences remained used as conceptual foundations. The selection was made based on inclusion and exclusion criteria. The selected literature must explicitly review the issue of disability representation, language in education, or the use of sociological perspectives in discussing curriculum issues. Technical, pedagogical or individual psychological literature unrelated to socio-structural aspects was not included in this study.

The analysis process is carried out through thematic and narrative approaches, by identifying the main themes that appear repeatedly in the literature, such as the social construction of disability, the ideology of normality in education, the use of stigmatized terms, and the tendency of the curriculum to place people with disabilities as passive objects. The sociological framework of disability is used to interpret the results of the analysis, especially by referring to concepts such as the social model of disability, oppression and ableism, as well as criticism of medical approaches and deficits.

By combining thematic approaches and critical social theory, this study builds a conceptual narrative that explains how language and representation in the educational curriculum contribute to the social exclusion or inclusion of persons with disabilities, as well as opening up space for a re-reading of more equitable and equitable educational policies and practices.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Inclusive Language in Educational Materials and Curriculum Documents

Inclusive language in educational materials and curriculum documents is an important aspect in encouraging the participation of all individuals, especially for people with disabilities. In general, inclusive language is defined as the use of terms and phrases that are neutral, non-discriminatory, and respectful of the identity of each individual, regardless of their background. The basic principles of inclusive language include an appreciation for diversity, so as to create a supportive environment for all learners. In the context of education, the application of inclusive language does not only function as a communication tool, but also contributes to shaping attitudes and perceptions of the classroom environment towards people with disabilities. (Vania & Rizal, 2024a)

However, many documents and textbooks still show the use of non-inclusive language that reinforces stereotypes and stigmas against people with disabilities. Literature reviews show that terms such as "disabled" or "abnormal" are often used in educational materials, which are not only demeaning but also portray people with disabilities as a burden to society. Narratives in textbooks that promote negative and passive images of people with disabilities can create a false image in students' minds, resulting in the development of discriminatory attitudes and social exclusion. (Baroroh & Rukiyati, 2022; Septiyani & Bashori, 2025) (Surahmad et al., 2024)

The psychological impact of the use of non-inclusive language is significant. The use of biased terms can create a distance between people with disabilities and their classmates, as well as create a sense of inferiority that can hinder their active participation in teaching and learning activities. This shows that language representation in education is not just about terminology, but also about how individuals see and understand themselves in a social context. (Friska, 2023; Ramli, 2025)

In order to improve this situation, recommendations for language reformulation in the educational curriculum are urgently needed. A shift in language towards a rights- and diversity-based approach will help build a strong foundation for inclusive education. It is important for educators to undergo training on the use of language that respects all of the individual's identity and presence in the classroom. This training is expected to increase educators' understanding of the importance of creating a disability-friendly environment, as well as develop skills to design inclusive learning materials. (Devi et al., 2024; Hadianito et al., 2024) (Kurniawati et al., 2019)

With reference to the principles of inclusive education, evidence suggests that a more sensitive and open approach can lead to significant improvements in the social representation of persons with disabilities in the curriculum. The involvement of various stakeholders, including disability organizations and local communities, in the formulation of educational materials is necessary to ensure that their voices are heard and valued in the education process. (Putri & Kristanto, 2024; Utama, 2021)

A combination of efforts to promote inclusive language, training for educators, and the active involvement of people with disabilities in the curriculum will create a more equitable and equitable educational environment. In addition to improving the quality of education for all students, these measures can also contribute to the reduction of stigma and discrimination against people with disabilities in the school environment. Awareness of the importance of inclusive language should be instilled at all levels of the education system, from planning to implementation, in order to create significant changes in the way society views and treats people with disabilities. (Surahmad et al., 2024)

Overall, greater attention to the use of language in educational materials and curriculum is crucial. This is necessary in an effort to create an inclusive and just society, in which every individual, regardless of his or her physical and mental condition, can contribute and participate fully. The psychological and social well-being of people with disabilities depends on the existence of a language that values their experiences and identity, which in turn can erase the negative stigma that exists in society. (Tikasni et al., 2024)

The use of language in educational materials not only conveys information, but also reflects the social values embraced by a society. In the context of inclusive education, language plays a central role in shaping students' perspectives on differences, including people with disabilities. However, various studies show that the language used in textbooks, curriculum documents, and learning materials is still loaded with terms that are biased, stigmatical, or even exclusive to people with disabilities.

Instead of using diction that reflects diversity and equality, a number of narratives in textbooks reinforce the stereotype that people with disabilities are lacking, weak, or pitiable individuals. This kind of representation not only

creates social distance between students with disabilities and non-disabilities, but also has the potential to hinder the development of positive self-identity for students with disabilities.

The following table presents a comparison between the non-inclusive languages commonly found in educational materials and the suggested inclusive language alternatives, along with the accompanying narrative context:

Table 1. Example of Comparison of Non-Inclusive Language vs Inclusive Language in Textbooks

No.	Terms/Narrative in Textbooks	Category	Non-Inclusive Language	Recommended Inclusive Languages	Note
1	"Normal children play in the park"	Implicit Exclusion	"Normal child"	"Children" / "all children"	Assert the "normal" norm as the default
2	"People with disabilities need help"	Bias Terminology	"Defective"	"Persons with disabilities" / "disabled"	The term "disability" emphasizes the lack of
3	"We have to be patient with children with disabilities"	Paternalistic Narrative	"Be patient in the face"	"Interact Equivalent to"	Assuming children with disabilities as a burden
4	"He remains enthusiastic even though he is paralyzed"	Heroic Narrative	"Keep your spirits up though"	"He actively participates in activities"	Describing people with disabilities as extreme 'inspiration'
5	There is no mention of people with disabilities in the entire book	Invisibility	—	Include representations of people with disabilities in a variety of contexts	Systematic absence from the narrative

The table above shows that the use of non-inclusive language in textbooks is often implicit, but has a strong symbolic impact in reinforcing the social separation between students with disabilities and non-disabilities. Some terms such as "normal child", "disabled", or "paralyzed" not only reflect a medical point of view or deficit towards disability, but also mark an unequal social position. Meanwhile, narratives that portray people with disabilities as "inspiring" or "extraordinary for staying enthusiastic" can also be an unequal form of representation because they place people with disabilities within the framework of extreme social expectations.

Instead, inclusive language seeks to prioritize equality, diversity, and empowerment by avoiding stigmatizing terms and adopting humanizing narratives. The use of terms such as "disabled" or "persons with disabilities", as well as the representation of persons with disabilities in active and equal roles, creates a more equitable symbolic space in the curriculum.

For the sake of creating an inclusive and empowering learning environment, curriculum reform is not enough just to insert the topic of disability in the subject matter. More fundamental is how the language used in the curriculum reflects the principles of social justice and diversity. In this context, inclusive language becomes an important element that is not only communicative, but also ideological—it shapes the way of view, behavior, and social relations in the educational space.

A number of literature agrees that there are certain principles that must be upheld in the application of inclusive language, especially in relation to people with disabilities. These principles include the use of neutral terms, the avoidance of compassionate narratives, and the need for representation of people with disabilities in diverse and empowering contexts. However, in practice, the formal education curriculum still shows various forms of incompatibility between the principle and the implementation that occurs. (Nadhiroh & Ahmadi, 2024; Setiawan & Apsari, 2019; Vania & Rizal, 2024b)

The following table summarizes the main principles of inclusive language and the ideal form of implementation in the context of the curriculum, as well as some common problems that are still found based on the literature review:

Table 2. The Principles of Inclusive Language and Its Implementation in the Curriculum

Principles of Inclusive Language	Ideal Implementation in the Curriculum	Common Problems Found
Avoid negative meanings	Use neutral terms such as "disabled"	There are still many books that use "defective", "incapable"
Emphasizing equality, not mercy	Role-based narrative	Books emphasize "pity" or "passively special"
Diverse and contextual representation	Disabled people present in various social roles	Often only appears in the "special cases" section
Language is not restrictive	Use diction that opens up possibilities	Narratives often focus on limitations

The table above shows that although the principles of inclusive language are widely known in the academic and educational policy spheres, their application in curriculum documents and learning materials is still inconsistent. For example, there are still many terms such as "disabled" or narratives that implicitly place people with disabilities as a passive or problematic group. On the other hand, equal and contextual representation of people with disabilities is still very limited, often even absent altogether from general learning materials.

This gap shows that policy changes alone are not enough without being accompanied by cultural transformation of educational institutions, including teacher training, rewriting teaching materials, and improving the evaluation system. By understanding the principles of inclusive language and recognizing weak points in current implementation, policymakers and education practitioners can begin to build curricula that are more equitable, representative, and respectful of learner diversity.

Social Representation of Persons with Disabilities in the Narrative of Formal Education

Social representation of people with disabilities in formal education narratives is a very important issue in the context of achieving inclusion. In this case, the typology of representation of people with disabilities in the curriculum is usually grouped into several categories, such as as victims, as heroes, as social burdens, or even not present at all (invisibility). For example, in many curricula, we find narratives that portray people with disabilities as individuals who suffer or need help, which creates a paradigm that they are "victims" of their circumstances. On the other hand, there are also some representations that establish people with disabilities as "heroes," often emphasizing their struggles as well as the spirit of overcoming limitations, although these have both positive and negative sides that need to be evaluated further. (Novanto et al., 2024; Nurrohman, 2023)

Furthermore, a literature review on visual representation and narrative of people with disabilities shows that there is a visual bias that contains elements of compassion or emphasis on disability. Research shows that textbooks and educational media often feature images and stories that do not reflect the reality of people with disabilities as a whole, but rather reduce them to stereotypical images, such as in studies that discuss the representation of people with disabilities in educational materials. This not only leads to misunderstandings but also reinforces the stigma that exists

in society, which can ultimately affect the way non-disabled students interact with friends with disabilities. (Aliyono et al., 2023; Novanto et al., 2024)

A comparison between the representation of people with disabilities in conventional curriculum and inclusive curriculum shows us that there are significant differences when the curriculum is designed with an inclusive paradigm. In an inclusive curriculum, people with disabilities are valued as empowered and potential-driven individuals, replacing traditional narratives that put them in more marginalized positions. Findings from research in some schools show that when the curriculum incorporates elements of inclusion, interaction between students becomes more positive and cooperation increases, signaling that this approach can help create a better learning space for all. (Khoiruman et al., 2023) (Prasetya, 2022)

The impact of such representation on social interaction in schools cannot be ignored. There is a clear relationship between the curriculum narrative and the behavior of students and teachers towards friends with disabilities. Stereotypes reproduced through educational institutions often persist in interpersonal relationships among students. When narratives and representations in the curriculum contain elements of discrimination or bias, students tend to mimic these attitudes in their daily social interactions, forming prejudiced attitudes that can result in exclusion from their different peers. (Kusnandi, 2017) (Hudatullah, 2022)

Faced with this reality, it is imperative to undertake reforms that focus on fairer representation for people with disabilities in education. Research shows that inclusive education also requires training for educators on the importance of using language and examples that encourage understanding and respect for diversity. This will not only help create a more inclusive educational space but also equip students to appreciate the diversity as well as potential of each individual in society. (Walad et al., 2025)

From the existing analysis, it can be concluded that the development of an inclusive curriculum with useful representation is essential to improve understanding and social connectedness between students with special needs and those who do not. By removing stigma from the curriculum and introducing equitable social models, education can serve as an effective tool for social transformation. Innovation in the teaching and use of inclusive curriculum has the potential to significantly change the way we interact in schools and provide an empowering learning experience for all students, regardless of their abilities. (Wajdu, 2019) (Soleman, 2020)

Dissolving curriculum templates with positive social representation for people with disabilities is very important in the learning process. This aspect in the long run will not only support individuals with special needs, but also create a more inclusive and productive learning environment within the overall education system. A rights-based and social justice approach is indispensable in the renewal of the formal education curriculum. Therefore, curriculum development needs to be continuously maintained and adjusted so that the abilities of diverse individuals can be properly integrated in the learning process. (Naibaho & Silitonga, 2022; Waruwu et al., 2025)

On reflection, it is important to realize that education is not only about the delivery of information, but also a way to shape social behaviors and attitudes. Therefore, the proper representation of persons with disabilities in the formal education narrative is not just an addition, but must be one of the many main focuses in the development of future curriculums. By understanding the tipping point in the social representation of people with disabilities, we can work together towards education that is truly inclusive and empowers all individuals without exception. (Rahadania, 2024; Yanti, 2024)

Disability as a Social Construct: A Sociological Perspective of Disability

The debate about the social model and the medical model of disability is fundamental in understanding how disability is understood and treated in society. The medical model defines disability as an individual problem that is pathological in nature, where the main focus is on the cure or improvement of the condition. In this context, policies and strategies are often focused on diagnosis and treatment, so people tend to see disability as something that needs to be "fixed". In contrast, the social model sees disability as a social construct that arises from interactions between individuals and an unresponsive environment. This approach emphasizes that the main barrier lies not in the

individual, but in social structures that do not provide adequate access and support. Criticism of the medical approach indicates that the dominance of this perspective in education policy has led to the marginalization of people with disabilities and the affirmation of non-inclusive norms. (Iarskaia-Smirnova, 2018) (Latsou & Geitona, 2018) (Young et al., 2019)

Disability is often considered a product of existing power relations and social norms. Norms regarding "normality" and the desire for the conservation of the status quo create a systematic structural exclusion of individuals who do not meet those "normal" criteria. In the context of education, institutions play a major role in shaping discourse on disability and often reinforce stigma through non-inclusive curriculums. This creates an environment where students with disabilities feel marginalized, both socially and academically. What's more, capitalizing on norms that affirm disability often hinders efforts to create more equitable and open learning spaces. (Bogart & Dunn, 2019) (Bogart & Dunn, 2019)

The sociological contribution of disability to the study of education is significant, with sociological theories such as those proposed by Foucault, Bourdieu, and Garland-Thomson providing a framework for analyzing power relations in the context of education. Foucault's theory, for example, shows how knowledge and power are intertwined, revealing how narratives related to disability are shaped and maintained within educational institutions. The concepts of stigma and performativity in the classroom contribute greatly to how students with disabilities are treated and understood by their peers, and this in turn shapes their overall learning experience. The inherent stigma often results in discrimination that occurs not only within the classroom, but outside the classroom, reinforcing existing social segregation. (Nunn et al., 2024) (Patten, 2024)

Curriculum transformation through a critical sociological approach offers opportunities to integrate the principles of social justice and disability rights into the curriculum structure. Recommendations for the formulation of more equitable education policies include the need for a thorough assessment of the content of the existing curriculum and the use of inclusive teaching methodologies. It is not only about incorporating aspects of disability education into the curriculum, but also about ensuring that the representation of disabilities in the curriculum is positive and empowering, which can provide a healthy role model for students with disabilities. (Brown & Batty, 2021) (Porkertová, 2021)

Applying a sociology approach to disability into curriculum design is expected to help in combating entrenched stigma and discrimination. In addition, it is important to involve people with disabilities in the curriculum development process to hear their unique experiences and knowledge, which can enrich the existing curriculum. Initiatives such as training for educators on how to support students with disabilities and how to build sensitivity to diversity also need to be prioritized. (O'Connor et al., 2024)

The education system must be able to create a space that not only accommodates, but also celebrates differences. Through paradigm shifts and the application of sociological approaches in curriculum development, it can be expected that future generations will have a better understanding of disability. In addition, they will be better prepared to engage with respect and empathy for the life experiences of people with disabilities. In this way, education will not only be a tool for the transmission of knowledge, but also the formation of more dynamic and inclusive social relationships in society. (Iarskaia-Smirnova, 2018)

Overall, a more inclusive and equitable education future is possible if we dare to change the existing paradigm. Education should serve as a platform to fight against ableism and discrimination, as well as provide all individuals, without exception, with equal opportunities to develop and contribute to society. In this context, the integration of sociological perspectives in education is not just a recommendation, but a necessity to create a future in which every individual is valued and has equal access to education and opportunities. (Bogart & Dunn, 2019)

CONCLUSION

This research highlights the importance of inclusive language and social representation of persons with disabilities in the educational curriculum as an important element in encouraging equitable and empowering education. Literature review shows that there are still many uses of biased, stigmatic, and non-inclusive terms in curriculum

documents and teaching materials. Representations of the disabled are often limited to narratives of compassion or heroism, even in many cases not present at all. This condition strengthens social exclusion symbolically and structurally for students with disabilities. Through the perspective of the sociology of disability, this study shows that disability is not solely a medical problem, but a product of social structures and dominant norms that create barriers and inequality of access. Therefore, curriculum transformation must involve a paradigm shift, fair use of language, and the active involvement of people with disabilities in its preparation. This study concludes that a truly inclusive education requires a curriculum that not only mentions the existence of people with disabilities, but also represents them as empowered, equal, and involved subjects in the entire educational process.

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