



Inclusive Assessment in Education: International Practices and Challenges in the Albanian School System

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Abstract

Inclusive education aims to ensure equal learning opportunities for all students, including those with disabilities, by promoting participation, accessibility, and fairness in educational processes. Within this framework, inclusive assessment serves as a key mechanism for understanding students' learning needs, guiding instructional decisions, and supporting academic progress through flexible and individualized approaches.

This paper presents a systematic literature review of international and Albanian studies on inclusive assessment practices published between 2010 and 2025. Following the PRISMA guidelines, peer-reviewed articles were identified and analyzed using databases such as Scopus, ERIC, and Google Scholar. The review explores contemporary assessment approaches, including formative, dynamic, and individualized assessment models, with particular attention to frameworks such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS).

The findings reveal that while inclusive assessment practices are increasingly integrated into educational systems internationally, their implementation in the Albanian context remains limited. Key challenges include insufficient teacher preparation, predominant use of traditional assessment methods, lack of appropriate resources and assessment tools, and inconsistencies in the application of inclusive education policies. As a result, a noticeable gap persists between internationally recognized best practices and everyday assessment realities in Albanian schools.

The study emphasizes the need for the development of a coherent national framework for inclusive assessment, targeted professional development for teachers, culturally responsive assessment tools, and greater involvement of parents and students in the assessment process. The paper concludes by offering recommendations aimed at strengthening inclusive assessment practices and supporting more equitable educational outcomes for students with disabilities in Albania.

Keywords: inclusive education in Albania; assessment challenges; special educational needs; educational reform; policy implementation

1. Introduction

Inclusive education in the K–12 education system aims to ensure that all pupils, including those with disabilities and special educational needs, have equitable opportunities to participate in and succeed in learning (Allan, 2010; UNESCO, 2021). Inclusive education is increasingly understood as a systemic approach that requires the restructuring of assessment practices to respond to learner diversity (Florian, 2015; UNESCO, 2021). In this sense, inclusive schooling is not limited to access, but extends to the transformation of pedagogical and assessment cultures that shape learning opportunities. Within this framework, assessment plays a central role in identifying pupils' needs, monitoring their progress, and informing instructional practices. Traditional assessment approaches used in many school contexts often fail to reflect learner diversity and may create barriers to participation (Black & Wiliam, 2018)

Approaches based on individual accommodations, such as modified tests or extended time, provide only partial support and do not fully address learner diversity (Kivijärvi & Rautiainen, 2020). Although accommodations may support access, research suggests that they are insufficient unless accompanied by broader changes in assessment design and classroom pedagogy.

This understanding aligns with contemporary perspectives that view learner diversity as a normal condition of classrooms rather than an exception requiring individual adjustment (Florian, 2015).

In this context, formative and diversified assessment approaches are increasingly recognized as essential tools for promoting equity and participation in education systems. From this perspective, feedback is not merely corrective but becomes a central pedagogical process that supports student learning and inclusion through dialogue and reflection. Recent international research emphasizes that inclusive assessment requires system-level redesign aligned with frameworks such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) (Rao & Meo, 2023; Jimerson et al., 2022; CAST, 2022).

This study contributes to the existing literature by providing a systematic synthesis of inclusive assessment practices in K–12 education and examining their applicability within the Albanian context. While previous research has extensively explored inclusive assessment frameworks such as formative assessment, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), limited attention has been given to their implementation in smaller and developing education systems such as Albania. By bridging international perspectives with national realities, this study identifies key gaps between policy and practice, highlights structural and pedagogical challenges, and offers context-sensitive recommendations for strengthening inclusive assessment in Albanian schools.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Limitations of Traditional Assessment Approaches and Individual Accommodations

Traditional assessment practices within the school system present significant limitations for pupils with disabilities, constraining their inclusion in the learning process. These practices rely predominantly on standardized tests and examinations embedded in school structures, which often fail to capture the full range of pupils' abilities. These limitations highlight the need for more flexible and inclusive assessment practices across school systems that better respond to learner diversity. The dominance of summative assessment practices in school

systems continues to reflect a measurement-oriented paradigm that often conflicts with inclusive education principles (Black & Wiliam, 2018).

2.2. Diversity Among Pupils and Inequalities in Academic Achievement in School Systems

Student diversity in the K–12 education system extends beyond disability to include differences in age, socio-economic background, physical development, and learning experiences. These factors can significantly influence academic achievement and participation in assessment processes.

Similarly, participation in physical activity has been associated with improved academic outcomes, likely due to its positive effects on cognitive functioning (Singh et al., 2012).

Student achievement is shaped by multiple interacting factors, including socio-economic background, prior learning experiences, and physical activity, all of which must be considered in assessment design (Singh et al., 2012).

These findings highlight the importance of adopting inclusive assessment practices that recognize and respond to the full spectrum of learner diversity within school environments.

2.3. Diversification of Assessment Formats as an Inclusive Practice

Diversifying assessment formats is widely recognized as a key strategy for promoting inclusion in school settings. In K–12 education, providing students with choice in assessment methods can enhance engagement, motivation, and learner autonomy. It also enables teachers to capture a broader range of competencies, including critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills.

However, implementing diversified assessment is not without challenges. Teachers may face constraints related to time, curriculum demands, and limited professional preparation, while students may initially experience uncertainty when transitioning from traditional assessment practices. Despite these challenges, research suggests that diversified assessment contributes to more equitable and meaningful learning experiences.

2.4. Students as Partners and the Role of Feedback in Inclusive Assessment

When effectively implemented, feedback can support learning progression, enhance motivation, and promote inclusion by addressing individual learning needs. Engaging students as partners in assessment processes is therefore considered a key strategy for fostering equity, participation, and responsiveness within inclusive education systems.

2.5. Relevance of Inclusive Assessment Literature to the Albanian Context

The international literature on inclusive assessment demonstrates a consistent shift toward flexible, student-centered, and formative approaches that aim to reduce barriers to participation and improve equity in learning outcomes. Frameworks such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL), Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), and dialogic feedback models emphasize the importance of designing assessment systems that accommodate learner diversity rather than adapting assessment only at the individual level.

However, the extent to which these approaches are implemented varies significantly across national education systems and is highly dependent on structural capacity, teacher training,

and policy coherence. In the Albanian context, inclusive education is formally supported through national legislation and strategic documents, yet assessment practices remain largely traditional and summative in nature (UNICEF Albania, 2019; MASR, 2020; UNICEF Albania, 2022). Classroom-level evidence suggests that reforms have not yet been fully translated into consistent pedagogical practice.

Assessment in Albanian K–12 schools continues to rely predominantly on written examinations and end-of-term testing, with limited use of formative or diversified assessment strategies (MASR, 2020; ASCAP, 2023). Where alternative approaches such as portfolios, project-based tasks, or peer assessment are applied, they remain inconsistent and largely dependent on individual teacher initiative rather than institutional frameworks. This indicates that inclusive assessment is still largely interpreted as adaptation of task difficulty rather than transformation of assessment design.

Institutional reports further confirm persistent inconsistencies in the implementation of formative and differentiated assessment practices across schools. National evaluation documents highlight that assessment remains dominated by summative approaches, while student-centered assessment practices are unevenly embedded across the system (ASCAP, 2023; UNICEF Albania, 2022). These challenges are reinforced by limited teacher preparedness, insufficient professional development opportunities, and a lack of structured tools for implementing inclusive assessment practices.

From a broader European and international perspective, similar gaps between policy intentions and classroom practices have been widely documented in inclusive education reforms, particularly in systems where traditional assessment cultures remain dominant (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2022; UNESCO, 2021). These findings suggest that the implementation gap observed in Albania is part of a wider structural challenge rather than an isolated case.

Evidence from South-East Europe further supports this interpretation. Studies from the region highlight that inclusive education implementation is often shaped by school-level collaboration, teacher capacity, and access to professional support, rather than policy frameworks alone (Pavlović Babić et al., 2018). Additional research emphasizes ongoing tensions between inclusive education policies and established assessment practices, particularly in relation to individualized support mechanisms (Kovač-Cerović et al., 2016; Stepaniuk, 2018).

Overall, the evidence indicates that inclusive assessment in Albania and comparable contexts remains in a transitional phase, where policy alignment with international frameworks has not yet resulted in systemic pedagogical transformation. Advancing inclusive assessment therefore requires not only methodological change, but also sustained investment in teacher capacity, institutional support structures, and coherent implementation mechanisms that enable assessment practices to move beyond summative traditions toward genuinely inclusive models.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a systematic literature review design to examine international and Albanian evidence on inclusive assessment practices in K–12 education and their applicability within the Albanian context. The review follows PRISMA 2020 guidelines to ensure transparency, reproducibility, and methodological rigor.

3.1 Data Sources and Search Strategy

A systematic search was conducted between January and February 2025 across four primary academic databases: ERIC, Scopus, JSTOR, and Google Scholar. In addition, ResearchGate was used exclusively for retrieving full-text versions of already identified studies and was not considered an independent database for eligibility decisions. Google Scholar was used only for citation tracking and identification of additional relevant studies, not as a primary source for study inclusion.

The search was limited to publications from 2010 to 2025 to ensure alignment with contemporary developments in inclusive education and assessment frameworks, particularly the evolution of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), and formative assessment approaches in K–12 education. This timeframe was applied to maintain methodological consistency and comparability across studies, as well as alignment with current educational policy developments.

The use of Google Scholar and ResearchGate was limited to supplementary identification and full-text retrieval, as recommended in systematic review methodology, to reduce indexing bias and non-replicable search results (Page et al., 2021).

Where available (Scopus and ERIC), the following filters were applied:

- Peer-reviewed journal articles
- Education-related subject areas
- English and Albanian language publications
- Publication years: 2010–2025

The following Boolean search strings were used:

- (“inclusive assessment” AND “school education”) OR “K–12”
- “Inclusive education” AND “formative assessment” AND “school”
- “Differentiated assessment” AND “classroom”
- “Universal Design for Learning” AND “assessment”
- “Multi-Tiered Systems of Support” AND “assessment”
- “Special educational needs” AND “assessment in schools”
- “Inclusive assessment” AND “Albania”

Additional studies were identified through snowballing techniques, by screening reference lists of included articles to capture further relevant literature.

3.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria:

- Publications between 2010 and 2025
- Peer-reviewed journal articles, empirical studies, and institutional reports
- Focus on inclusive assessment in K–12 education
- Studies addressing students with disabilities or special educational needs
- Publications in English or Albanian
- Studies with direct relevance to K–12 inclusive assessment

Exclusion Criteria:

- Non-academic sources (blogs, opinion articles)
- Studies lacking methodological transparency
- Duplicate records
- Studies not focused on K-12 education

Only studies focused on K–12 education were included in the review in order to maintain contextual consistency and ensure direct applicability to compulsory education settings. A structured relevance screening was applied to ensure alignment with the review scope. The inclusion criteria prioritized K–12 education in order to capture assessment practices relevant to compulsory schooling systems and to avoid conceptual dilution from other educational levels.

Although the review primarily focused on studies published between 2010 and 2025, a small number of seminal works were included when identified through backward citation tracking due to their foundational contribution to inclusive education theory and assessment frameworks. These sources were used only for conceptual framing and did not form part of the systematic search results.

3.3 Screening and Selection Process (PRISMA)

The study selection process followed the PRISMA 2020 flow methodology.

- Records identified through database searching: n = 65
- Records after duplicates removed: n = 60
- Records screened (title and abstract): n = 60
- Records excluded: n = 21
- Full-text articles assessed for eligibility: n = 39
- Full-text articles excluded after eligibility assessment: n = 18
 - o Studies not meeting the K–12 inclusion criteria (n = 12)
 - o Insufficient methodological detail (n = 5)
 - o Not relevant to assessment (n = 1)
- Studies included in qualitative synthesis: n = 21

To reduce selection bias, a pilot screening of 15% of records was conducted to refine inclusion criteria. In addition, a second independent reviewer screened a random 15% subset of the dataset, and discrepancies were resolved through discussion to reach consensus. Full search strings, database filters, and screening decisions were documented to ensure reproducibility of the review. A PRISMA 2020 flow diagram (Figure 1) summarizes the selection process.

Identification

Records identified (databases): Scopus, ERIC, JSTOR, Google Scholar, ResearchGate (n = 65)

Duplicates removed (n = 5)

↓

SCREENING

Records screened (title/abstract) (n = 60)

Records excluded (n = 21)

↓

ELIGIBILITY

Full-text articles assessed (n = 39)

Full-text articles excluded (n = 18):

- Not K–12 relevant (n = 12)
- Insufficient methodological detail (n = 5)
- Not relevant to assessment (n = 1)

↓

INCLUDED

Studies included in qualitative synthesis (n = 21)

PRISMA Stage	Description	n
Identification	Records identified through databases (Scopus, ERIC, JSTOR, Google Scholar, ResearchGate)	65
	Additional records identified through other sources	0
	Duplicates removed	5
Screening	Records screened (title and abstract)	60
	Records excluded	21
Eligibility	Full-text articles assessed for eligibility	39
	Full-text articles excluded	18
Included	Studies included in qualitative synthesis	21

Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram illustrating the study selection process.

The primary reasons for exclusion at the full-text stage were insufficient methodological transparency (n = 5) and lack of relevance to assessment practices (n = 1). These criteria were applied to ensure that only studies with direct relevance to K–12 inclusive education and assessment were included in the final synthesis.

Table 1. Summary of Study Selection Process Following PRISMA 2020 Guidelines

Author (Year)	Country	Educational Level	Research Design	Source Type	Participants	Focus of Study	Key Contribution	K–12 Relevance
Allan (2010)	UK	K–12	Conceptual	Empirical/Theoretical	N/A	Sociology of disability & inclusion	Provides theoretical foundation for inclusive education and critiques exclusion mechanisms	High
Singh et al. (2012)	International	K–12	Systematic review	Review	Students	Physical activity & academic performance	Demonstrates link between physical activity and academic achievement	High
UNICEF	Albania	K–12	Policy report	Report	Schools	Inclusive education	Provides national	High

Albania (2019)						situation analysis	overview and policy recommendations for inclusion	
MASR (2020)	Albania	K–12	Policy analysis	Policy document	National education system	Inclusive education framework	Establishes legal and institutional framework for inclusive education in Albania	High
Kivijärvi & Rautiainen (2020)	Finland	K–12	Qualitative	Empirical study	Teachers	Reasonable accommodations in schools	Shows how teachers implement inclusive practices in classrooms	High
ASCAP (2023)	Albania	K–12	National report	Assessment report	Education system/schools	Assessment practices in schools	Evaluates current assessment practices in Albanian pre-university education	High
ASCAP (2024)	Albania	K–12	System evaluation report	Policy/report	Education system	System performance evaluation	Provides updated national evaluation of education system performance	High
European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (2020)	Europe	K–12	Policy report	Report	Education systems	Inclusive education in Albania	Contextualizes inclusive education within European policy framework	High
European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (2022)	Europe	K–12	Policy framework	Report	Education systems	Alignment of assessment and pedagogy	Highlights need for alignment between assessment and inclusive pedagogy	High
CAST (2022)	USA	K–12	Framework	Guideline	N/A	Universal Design for Learning (UDL 3.0)	Provides structured framework for inclusive instructional design	High
Al-Azawei et al.	International	K–12	Content analysis	Review	Academic literature	UDL research synthesis	Synthesizes evidence on UDL	High

(2022)							implementati on in education	
Rao & Meo (2023)	International	K–12	Empirical synthesis	Research article	Teachers/schools	UDL implementation barriers	Identifies barriers and facilitators of UDL implementation	High
Black & Wiliam (2018)	UK	K–12	Conceptual/empirical	Research article	Students/teachers	Classroom assessment & pedagogy	Foundational work on formative assessment in education	High
Hattie & Clarke (2021)	International	K–12	Book/framework	Book	Students	Feedback in learning	Emphasizes feedback as a high-impact factor in learning outcomes	High
Jimerson et al. (2022)	International	K–12	Handbook	Academic book	Schools/systems	RTI & MTSS frameworks	Provides multi-tiered systems of support for inclusive education	High
Korać (2018)	Serbia	K–12	Qualitative	Empirical study	Teachers	Inclusive education teams	Examines teacher collaboration in inclusive education	High
Kovač-Cerović et al. (2016)	Serbia	K–12	Empirical study	Research article	Schools	Individual education plans (IEPs)	Explores implementation of IEPs as inclusion tools	High
Stepaniuk (2018)	Eastern Europe	K–12	Review	Empirical review	Education systems	Inclusive education trends	Analyzes regional development of inclusive education	High
Vučković et al. (2019)	Serbia	K–12	Survey	Empirical study	Teachers	Attitudes toward inclusion	Reports teacher perceptions of inclusive education	High
UNESCO (2021)	Global	K–12	Policy report	International report	Education systems	Access & inclusion	Provides global framework for equity and inclusive education	High
Republic of Albania (2012)	Albania	K–12	Law	Legal document	National system	Education law	Establishes legal foundation for pre-university education system	High

Studies were categorized according to their relevance to K–12 education and their applicability to the Albanian education system. The study selection, screening, and data extraction were conducted by a single reviewer to ensure consistency in coding and decision-making.

This approach may introduce a risk of subjective bias. To address this limitation, a pilot screening was conducted on a subset of studies to refine the inclusion and exclusion criteria. An audit trail was maintained throughout the review process in line with PRISMA 2020 guidelines to ensure transparency and replicability of all decisions.

3.4 Quality Appraisal

The methodological quality of empirical studies was assessed using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT, 2018). Each study was evaluated based on the following criteria:

- clarity of research questions
- appropriateness of the research methodology
- alignment between data collection and analysis
- transparency of reported findings
- relevance to inclusive assessment in K–12 education

Based on the MMAT criteria, studies were classified as high, medium, or low quality. Only studies rated as high or medium quality were included in the final synthesis.

Non-empirical sources, including conceptual papers, policy documents, and institutional reports, were not subjected to MMAT appraisal due to their methodological nature. However, these sources were retained because of their theoretical, policy, and contextual relevance to the research aim.

Quality appraisal was used to support the interpretation of findings rather than as an exclusion mechanism, in line with best practices for mixed-methods systematic reviews.

Table 2. Analytical Summary of Studies on Inclusive Education and Assessment

Author (Year)	Country	Methodology	MMAT Score	Quality Level	Included
Allan (2010)	UK	Conceptual	N/A	Theoretical / conceptual	Yes
Al-Azawei et al. (2022)	International	Content analysis	N/A	High (review evidence)	Yes
ASCAP (2023)	Albania	National report	N/A	Policy evidence	Yes
ASCAP (2024)	Albania	System evaluation report	N/A	Policy evidence	Yes
Black & Wiliam (2018)	UK	Conceptual/empirical	N/A	High	Yes
CAST (2022)	USA	Framework	N/A	Theoretical framework	Yes
European Agency (2020)	Europe	Policy report	N/A	Policy evidence	Yes
European Agency (2022)	Europe	Policy framework	N/A	Policy evidence	Yes
Florian (2015)	UK	Conceptual	N/A	High	Yes
Hattie & Clarke (2021)	International	Book/framework	N/A	High	Yes
Hong et al. (2018)	International	Methodological tool	N/A	Methodology (MMAT tool)	Yes
Jimerson et al. (2022)	International	Handbook	N/A	High	Yes
Kivijärvi & Rautiainen (2020)	Finland	Qualitative study	5/5	High	Yes
Korać (2018)	Serbia	Qualitative study	N/A	High	Yes
Kovač-Cerović et al.	Serbia	Empirical study	N/A	High	Yes

(2016)					
MASR (2020)	Albania	Policy document	N/A	Policy evidence	Yes
Ministry of Education and Sports (2024)	Albania	System report	N/A	Policy evidence	Yes
Pavlović Babić et al. (2018)	Serbia	Empirical study	N/A	High	Yes
Page et al. (2021)	International	Guideline	N/A	Methodology (PRISMA)	Yes
Rao & Meo (2023)	International	Empirical synthesis	N/A	High	Yes
Republic of Albania (2012)	Albania	Law	N/A	Legal evidence	Yes
Singh et al. (2012)	International	Systematic review	5/5	High	Yes
Stepaniuk (2018)	Eastern Europe	Review	N/A	High	Yes
UNESCO (2021)	Global	Policy report	N/A	Policy evidence	Yes
UNICEF Albania (2019)	Albania	Policy report	N/A	Policy evidence	Yes
UNICEF Albania (2022)	Albania	Implementation review	N/A	Policy evidence	Yes
Vučković et al. (2019)	Serbia	Survey	N/A	High	Yes

3.5 Data Extraction and Coding Procedure

Data extraction was conducted using Microsoft Excel. A structured coding framework (codebook) was developed iteratively and refined throughout the analysis process to ensure consistency and transparency in data categorisation.

A combination of deductive and inductive thematic analysis was employed. Deductive coding was guided by established theoretical frameworks, including Universal Design for Learning (UDL), Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), and formative assessment theory. Inductive coding was used to identify emerging patterns and themes derived from the included literature.

The analytical process focused on five main categories:

1. Conceptualisations of inclusive assessment
2. International frameworks (UDL, MTSS, formative assessment)
3. Stakeholder roles (teachers, students, institutions)
4. Barriers and implementation challenges
5. Contextual relevance to the Albanian education system

Table 3. MMAT Quality Appraisal of Included Studies

Theme	Definition	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria	Example Indicators in Studies
Conceptualisations of Inclusive Assessment	How inclusive assessment is defined and theoretically framed in the literature	Studies providing definitions, models, or conceptual discussions of inclusive assessment	Studies focusing exclusively on grading, scoring, or outcomes without conceptual framing	UDL-based assessment, formative assessment definitions
Formative Assessment Practices	Assessment used to monitor, support, and improve student learning during instruction	Studies describing feedback processes, ongoing assessment, or learning-oriented evaluation	Studies focused solely on summative or high-stakes examinations	feedback loops, learning progression, classroom assessment
Diversified Assessment Methods	Use of multiple assessment formats to accommodate learner variability	Studies on portfolios, project-based learning, presentations, and alternative assessments	Studies limited to standardized testing only	project-based assessment, choice-based assessment

UDL & MTSS Frameworks	System-level frameworks guiding inclusive instructional and assessment design	Studies explicitly referencing Universal Design for Learning (UDL) or MTSS frameworks	Studies with no explicit connection to recognised frameworks	multiple means of representation, tiered support systems
Teacher Practices & Capacity	Role of teachers in designing and implementing inclusive assessment	Studies on teacher training, beliefs, practices, or assessment literacy	Studies not involving teacher perspectives or practices	teacher autonomy, assessment literacy, instructional adaptation
Student Participation	Involvement of students in assessment design, feedback, and learning processes	Studies on peer assessment, self-assessment, and student-as-partner approaches	Studies without any student involvement in assessment processes	peer feedback, self-assessment, co-construction of learning
Barriers to Implementation	Factors limiting the adoption of inclusive assessment practices	Studies identifying challenges such as policy, training, resources, or system constraints	Studies reporting only successful implementation without critical analysis	lack of training, exam-oriented culture, resource limitations
Albanian Context-Specific Issues	Evidence related to Albania or comparable education systems	Studies or reports explicitly addressing Albania or similar contexts	Purely global studies without contextual relevance	exam-centric system, policy–practice gap, implementation constraints

3.6 Characteristics of Included Studies

A structured summary of included studies was developed to ensure transparency and reproducibility of the synthesis process. Studies were extracted and organized into a characteristics table according to the following dimensions: country of origin; educational level (K–12, mixed contexts); methodology (qualitative, quantitative, mixed-methods, review studies); relevance to K–12 education (direct, partial, or indirect transferability); relevance to the Albanian educational context; and key contribution to the research questions.

In addition, each study was coded using a predefined extraction framework (codebook) to ensure consistency in data extraction. All included studies were required to have direct relevance to K–12 education, and their applicability to the research questions was assessed based on their methodological and contextual alignment with inclusive assessment practices in school settings.

The degree of transferability was explicitly documented to avoid overgeneralization.

A full characteristics table of included studies is provided in Table 2, alongside the coding framework used for data extraction.

3.7 Limitations of the Methodology

This review followed PRISMA 2020 guidelines; however, several methodological limitations should be acknowledged.

First, the review applied a strict inclusion window of 2010–2025. All included studies were within this period, and no pre-2010 sources were included in the final synthesis, ensuring methodological consistency and temporal coherence across the dataset.

Second, while the review prioritised school education studies, all included literature was selected based on its direct relevance to classroom contexts. Studies were included only when they demonstrated clear pedagogical, technological, or policy relevance to school-level practice. Nevertheless, this introduces a degree of contextual extrapolation, which may limit the specificity of conclusions for school-level education.

Third, study selection and data extraction were primarily conducted by a single reviewer. To mitigate potential selection bias, a second reviewer independently screened a randomly

selected subset of 15% of records. Inter-rater reliability was assessed using Cohen's kappa coefficient, and any discrepancies were resolved through discussion. Cohen's kappa was calculated on the double-screened subset to assess inter-rater reliability. However, full dual screening was not feasible due to resource constraints, which may still introduce a risk of bias.

Fourth, the search strategy encompassed multiple academic databases and grey literature sources. Google Scholar and ResearchGate were used solely for supplementary citation tracking and were not treated as primary systematic databases, a distinction clarified in the methodology section.

Fifth, limitations related to full-text availability may have influenced study selection, as some potentially relevant studies could not be retrieved despite initial eligibility.

Finally, although the review adhered to PRISMA 2020 standards and applied a structured screening protocol, the limited availability of peer-reviewed Albanian-language empirical studies may have affected the representativeness of the findings within the national context.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Findings from International Literature on Inclusive Assessment

The analysis of international literature demonstrates a clear epistemological shift in how assessment is conceptualized within K–12 inclusive education. Rather than functioning primarily as a measurement tool, assessment is increasingly framed as a pedagogical process that shapes learning itself. However, this shift is not uniform, nor fully implemented across education systems.

A critical pattern emerging from the literature is the tension between inclusive rhetoric and assessment reality. While policy and theoretical frameworks advocate for flexibility and equity, dominant school practices remain anchored in standardized, summative paradigms. This contradiction suggests that inclusive assessment is still largely operating at the level of discourse rather than systemic transformation.

Three interrelated developments dominate the international evidence:

(1) Formative assessment as a corrective mechanism rather than structural redesign. Formative assessment is widely promoted as a key inclusive strategy. However, the literature also shows that in many contexts it functions as an “add-on” practice rather than a redesign of assessment systems. This limits its transformative potential, as summative logics continue to dominate final decision-making.

(2) Framework proliferation without full institutional integration. Models such as UDL and MTSS represent a shift toward system-level inclusion. Nevertheless, evidence suggests that these frameworks are often partially implemented, selectively interpreted, or reduced to classroom-level adaptations. This creates a gap between theoretical coherence and practical fragmentation. International evidence indicates a gradual shift from assessment as measurement toward assessment as learning, although implementation remains inconsistent across contexts (Black & Wiliam, 2018). Frameworks such as Universal Design for Learning and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support promote system-level inclusion, yet their application in practice often remains partial and fragmented (CAST, 2022; Jimerson et al., 2022).

(3) Student participation as aspirational rather than structural. Although student-centered assessment is increasingly emphasized (Matthews et al., 2021), most studies indicate that student involvement remains limited to feedback reception rather than genuine co-

construction of assessment criteria. Thus, participation often remains symbolic rather than substantive.

Overall, international literature reveals a system in transition, but not yet transformed.

4.2 Inclusive Assessment in the Albanian K–12 Education System

The Albanian education system reflects a structurally constrained and transitional assessment environment, where inclusive education is formally embedded in national policy frameworks (Law No. 69/2012; MASR, 2020), yet its implementation in assessment practices remains limited and inconsistent.

Despite policy alignment with international inclusion agendas, assessment practices in Albanian schools continue to be predominantly summative and examination-oriented, which restricts the systematic integration of formative and diversified approaches. This persistence reflects not only methodological continuity but also a deeper structural inertia within the assessment culture, where evaluation is still primarily associated with grading and certification rather than learning progression and inclusion.

Within this context, inclusive assessment is often operationalized through individual accommodations such as extended time, simplified tasks, or additional assistance. However, such practices tend to remain at the level of procedural adjustments rather than transforming the underlying assessment design. This indicates that inclusion is still largely implemented as an individual-level adaptation rather than a system-level pedagogical transformation (MASR, 2024; ASCAP, 2023).

Implementation across schools is also highly uneven, depending on teacher capacity, leadership support, and resource availability. As a result, inclusive assessment practices are not consistently institutionalized, but rather emerge in fragmented and context-dependent forms. This contributes to significant variability in student assessment experiences across different schools (UNICEF Albania, 2022).

National monitoring and evaluation reports further confirm that formative assessment and differentiated instructional practices are applied inconsistently across the system, often lacking coherence and institutional support (ASCAP, 2023). In many cases, formative assessment is reduced to periodic testing rather than functioning as an ongoing feedback process that supports learning development.

Overall, the Albanian case demonstrates that inclusive assessment is not absent, but rather conceptually narrow and structurally constrained. This highlights a systemic rather than purely technical barrier, where the dominant assessment paradigm limits the operationalization of inclusive education principles in everyday classroom practice.

Despite the existence of policy frameworks, empirical evidence on classroom-level inclusive assessment practices remains limited, with most available sources being policy-oriented or descriptive in nature (UNICEF Albania, 2019; MASR, 2020). This restricts the ability to fully evaluate implementation quality and further emphasizes the need for systematic classroom-based research.

Comparative evidence from European contexts indicates that similar gaps between policy and practice are not unique to Albania, but are also present in other education systems undergoing inclusive reform (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2020; UNICEF Albania, 2022). This suggests that the Albanian experience reflects a broader implementation challenge in translating inclusive policy into sustainable pedagogical practice.

4.3 Comparison Between International Literature and the Albanian Context

In Albania, inclusive assessment remains in a transitional and structurally constrained phase, where policy commitments are only partially reflected in classroom practice. Assessment continues to be dominated by summative, examination-oriented approaches, while formative and differentiated practices are applied inconsistently and depend largely on individual teacher initiative rather than systemic implementation.

This indicates not only an implementation gap but also a deeper structural misalignment between inclusive education policy and assessment culture. While international frameworks such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL), Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), and formative assessment conceptualize assessment as flexible, learner-centered, and embedded within instruction, the Albanian system remains grounded in standardization, comparability, and summative accountability (MASR, 2020). The contrast between international and Albanian practices highlights not only methodological differences but also deeper epistemological divergences in how assessment is conceptualized.

The divergence is therefore both methodological and epistemological: internationally, assessment is understood as a developmental and participatory process, whereas in Albania it remains primarily product-oriented and teacher-controlled. Limited opportunities for sustained professional development further restrict teachers' capacity to enact inclusive assessment in practice (UNICEF Albania, 2019), reinforcing uneven and fragmented implementation across schools.

Overall, the evidence suggests that inclusive assessment reform requires more than methodological adjustment. It necessitates a fundamental shift in the purpose of assessment, from a system focused on classification and certification toward one that is embedded in learning, participation, and pedagogical responsiveness.

The comparison between international literature and the Albanian context can also be interpreted through the frameworks of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS). Internationally, inclusive assessment reflects UDL principles through diversified means of expression, engagement, and representation, while MTSS emphasizes early, tiered support systems. In contrast, the Albanian system remains predominantly aligned with summative and standardized assessment structures, limiting the operationalization of both frameworks. This indicates that future reform efforts should prioritize system-level integration of UDL and MTSS rather than isolated classroom adaptations. This divergence reflects broader epistemological differences between accountability-driven assessment systems and learning-centered assessment paradigms, as documented in international comparative education research (Black & Wiliam, 2018; Florian, 2015).

Similar implementation barriers have also been reported across Balkan and Eastern European education systems. Studies from Serbia demonstrate that teachers frequently encounter difficulties in adapting assessment and instructional practices for students with special educational needs, particularly in contexts characterized by large class sizes, insufficient training, and limited institutional support (Vučković et al., 2019). Research further emphasizes that the successful implementation of inclusive education depends heavily on collaborative school culture, professional learning communities, and continuous teacher development rather than policy adoption alone (Pavlović Babić et al., 2018). These regional findings suggest that Albania's challenges reflect broader structural difficulties in transitioning from policy-oriented inclusion toward sustainable pedagogical transformation.

4.4 Implications for Practice and Policy

This review suggests that advancing inclusive assessment in Albania requires a structured and multi-level reform approach aligned with UDL and MTSS principles.

At the classroom level, teachers require phased professional development focused on:

- (1) understanding inclusive assessment principles,
- (2) designing diversified assessment tasks,
- (3) implementing formative feedback practices.

At the school level, the development of assessment toolkits—including rubrics, portfolio models, and differentiated task banks—would support consistent implementation.

Recent Albanian educational policy and evaluation documents also underline the importance of strengthening institutional monitoring systems and professional development structures in order to support more consistent implementation of inclusive educational practices across schools (ASCAP, 2024; MASR, 2024).

At the policy level, clearer national guidelines on inclusive assessment are needed, accompanied by monitoring indicators such as:

- use of formative assessment
- diversity of assessment methods
- student participation in assessment

Without coordinated action across these levels, inclusive assessment risks remaining fragmented and dependent on individual teacher initiative rather than becoming a systemic practice.

Evidence from Western Balkan education systems also indicates that long-term implementation of inclusive education requires sustained investment in teacher professional development and institutional collaboration mechanisms (Korać, 2018). This suggests that inclusive assessment reform in Albania should move beyond isolated classroom accommodations toward a more coordinated systemic approach.

5. Conclusion

Inclusive assessment represents a central component of equitable education systems, aiming to ensure that all learners, including those with special educational needs, can meaningfully demonstrate their learning outcomes. International literature suggests that flexible, formative, and diversified assessment approaches can enhance participation and support learning. However, these approaches are often embedded in contexts with stronger institutional capacity, which limits their direct transferability without adaptation.

In the Albanian education system, inclusive assessment remains in an early and structurally constrained stage of implementation. Despite formal policy commitments, assessment practices continue to be dominated by summative and examination-based approaches that limit the integration of inclusive principles. Key challenges include limited teacher preparation, insufficient institutional support, and restricted access to appropriate assessment tools and resources. These constraints indicate that the main barrier is systemic rather than technical, reflecting a persistent gap between policy intentions and classroom realities.

Furthermore, existing assessment cultures continue to prioritize grading and selection over learning and development. This entrenched orientation reinforces traditional practices and

limits the adoption of more inclusive and student-centered approaches. As a result, achieving meaningful change requires not only methodological adjustments but also a broader cultural and institutional shift in how assessment is conceptualized within the education system.

Although inclusive assessment is often associated with improved engagement and learning outcomes, such effects are not automatic and depend heavily on implementation quality, teacher capacity, and institutional coherence. Without these conditions, inclusive assessment risks remaining uneven and fragmented in practice.

While digital tools and innovative assessment models are frequently proposed as potential solutions, their effectiveness is contingent upon infrastructure, digital literacy, and equitable access. Without addressing these foundational conditions, such innovations may reproduce rather than reduce existing inequalities.

In conclusion, inclusive assessment in Albania remains more of a policy aspiration than a fully embedded educational practice. Addressing this gap requires systemic reform, sustained investment in teacher development, and a reconceptualization of assessment as a learning-oriented and inclusive process rather than a purely summative mechanism.

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