

Transforming Education: Inclusive Strategies in South-East Asia's Newlyconverted Universities



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ABSTRACT: Inclusive education is a critical approach for promoting equity and social justice in higher education, particularly in newly-converted universities in South-East Asia. This study aims to identify best practices for inclusive education by conducting a systematic literature review (SLR) using the PRISMA framework. Key themes include institutional policies, faculty development, student support systems, curriculum design, and challenges to inclusivity. Findings highlight effective strategies for ensuring accessibility, embracing diversity, and supporting marginalized students. These insights are essential for universities like the State University of Northern Negros (SUNN) as they implement inclusive practices. Recommendations provide a benchmarking framework to guide SUNN in creating an equitable learning environment where all students can thrive.

KEYWORDS: Inclusive Education, Inclusive Strategies, Social Justice, Transformational Education, Transformational Leadership

I. INTRODUCTION

The trend of inclusivity with respect to educational practices is an important domain as it moves in parallel with the overall societal vertical and the diversity of student populations where educational structures must learn to adapt. In the current context of rapid economic development and globalization that heightened demand for higher education which must be equitable also, this study is very relevant to Southeast Asia.

In recent studies, inclusive education has been recognized to play a significant role in the university as a means to social cohesion and diversity (UNESCO, 2020). Indeed, the converted universities in Southeast Asia are a small version of what is happening worldwide and they attempt to put inclusive agendas into practice (such as for marginalized communities and nontraditional learners) that become reflections of global trends. Extending access to learning is not only a necessary shift, but also one that requires critically reconsidering pedagogies and policies in the different settings of higher education which are conducive with meaningful student engagement alongside improved success (Smith & Lee, 2021).

In the current setting, the State University of Northern Negros (SUNN) has recently undergone a significant transition, attaining its status as a state university. As part of this transition, SUNN aims to progressively adopt inclusive education, ensuring that all students, regardless of background, abilities, or circumstances, have equal opportunities for academic success and personal development. Inclusive education is a vital approach in modern educational systems, as it emphasizes the need to provide an equitable learning environment where diversity is embraced, and no student is left behind. Given SUNN's recent conversion, it is crucial to align its practices with global and national standards of inclusivity. However, as a newly converted state university, SUNN faces unique challenges, particularly in implementing inclusive education effectively and efficiently.

Inclusive education refers to an educational approach where all students, regardless of their abilities, backgrounds, or needs, are welcomed and supported within mainstream classrooms. This method aims to provide equal learning opportunities by accommodating diverse needs and promoting participation for everyone (UNESCO, 2017). Inclusive education emphasizes the removal of barriers to learning and fosters an environment where every student can thrive academically and socially (Ainscow & Miles, 2008). In practice, inclusive education goes beyond integrating students with disabilities into regular classrooms. It encompasses modifying teaching methods, curriculum, and classroom environments to ensure accessibility for all learners (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). In the post-pandemic era, inclusive education has experienced significant transformations driven by technology, equity, and mental health priorities. The rapid adoption of digital tools for remote learning has underscored the need for accessible technologies and platforms that support diverse learning needs (Crawford et al., 2021; UNESCO, 2021). Blended and hybrid learning models, combining in-person and online instruction, provide flexibility for students with disabilities and

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accommodate differentiated instruction (Mulenga & Marbán, 2020). There is a renewed focus on mental health and well-being, incorporating counseling and social-emotional learning to support marginalized and vulnerable students (Chakraborty et al., 2021). Teacher training now emphasizes inclusive pedagogies for both physical and virtual classrooms (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020). Additionally, bridging the digital divide has become a priority to ensure equitable access to quality education for students from low-resource settings (OECD, 2020). These trends are supported by policy developments aimed at fostering equity and accessibility in educational recovery plans (UNESCO, 2021).

To ensure the successful adaptation of inclusive educational strategies, it is essential for SUNN to learn from the experiences of other state universities that have undergone a similar conversion. Benchmarking the best practices of inclusive education from these institutions can provide SUNN with valuable insights into policy development, curriculum design, faculty training, and resource allocation. By studying the methods and initiatives of these universities, SUNN can identify effective approaches that are both practical and adaptable to its unique context.

This research aimed to explore the best practices of inclusive education from newly converted universities and how they can be tailored to meet the needs of SUNN. Specifically, the researchers seek to:

1. identify the inclusive education strategies
2. assess the impact of these inclusive strategies
3. develop a comprehensive benchmarking framework

Through this study, SUNN will be better positioned to implement inclusive education successfully, fostering an environment where all students, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds, can thrive academically and socially.

Scope and Limitations

This study focused on newly-converted universities in South-East Asia, which may have unique cultural, social, and political contexts. As a result, the findings and recommendations might not be fully generalizable to universities outside this region or to older, more established institutions. The specific historical and regional factors influencing these universities' inclusive education strategies could limit the applicability of the findings to broader contexts. The concept of inclusive education may be interpreted and implemented differently across institutions and countries. This variability in how inclusivity is defined and understood may complicate cross-university comparisons. Inconsistent policies or approaches to inclusivity across the region could challenge the identification of universal "best practices." Data collection could be limited by restricted access to internal documents, policies, or sensitive student data from some universities. Differences in institutional transparency or willingness to share information may lead to an incomplete understanding of each university's inclusive practices. Furthermore, obtaining reliable data on student outcomes, especially those related to marginalized groups, might prove challenging. Cultural factors unique to SouthEast Asian nations, such as attitudes toward disability, gender, ethnicity, or economic disparities, may influence the acceptance and effectiveness of inclusive education strategies. These contextual differences might pose challenges in drawing universal conclusions, as cultural factors often dictate the success of educational reforms.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study draws from key educational theories and models of inclusion that provide a foundation for understanding and analysing inclusive strategies in newly-converted universities in South-East Asia. This framework integrates Inclusive Education Theory, Transformational Leadership Theory, and Social Justice Theory to explore how newly-converted universities can effectively implement and sustain inclusive education practices.

These theoretical perspectives collectively provide a comprehensive framework for analysing the inclusive strategies of newly-converted universities in South-East Asia. Inclusive Education Theory serves as the foundation, guiding the identification of inclusive practices. Transformational Leadership Theory highlights the role of leadership in promoting and sustaining inclusive education. Social Justice Theory emphasizes the necessity of equitable practices in addressing social inequalities.

Fraser (1997) and Gewirtz (1998) argue that educational institutions have a responsibility to redress social inequalities by ensuring equal opportunities for all learners. This theory is pivotal in assessing the equity-driven policies in the universities under study.

II. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study was conducted thru a systematic literature review (SLR). This involves identifying, analysing, and synthesizing relevant research studies, reports, and articles on inclusive education strategies in newly-converted universities, particularly in

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South-East Asia. The review followed a structured, transparent methodology to ensure that the literature search is comprehensive, replicable, and minimizes bias.

Research Instrument

In a systematic literature review, there was no primary data collected through surveys or interviews. Instead, the research instruments were:

Search Strategy and Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria:

A set of predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria were developed to guide the selection of relevant studies. It focused on research articles, reports, and studies published in the last 10 years, in English, that discussed inclusive education in newlyconverted universities or similar contexts. Databases like Google Scholar, Scopus, ERIC, and others were utilized for this search.

PRISMA Framework:

The **PRISMA** (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework was also used to document and organize the search process, including how articles are identified, screened, and selected.

Systematic Literature Review Stages Using PRISMA Approach

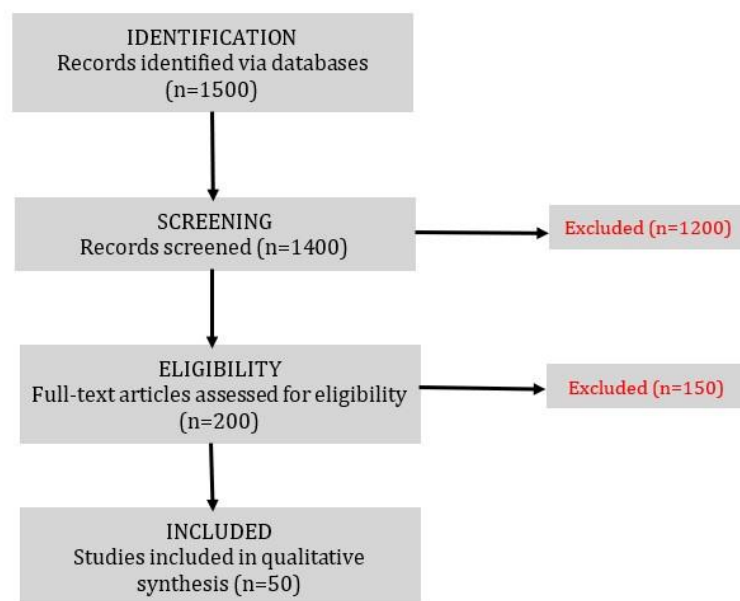


Figure 1. The PRISMA Framework

The PRISMA framework is a standardized method for conducting systematic reviews and meta-analyses. It ensures transparency, completeness, and reliability in the reporting process. Its framework consists of four main steps: Identification, Screening, Eligibility, and Inclusion.

The PRISMA framework follows a systematic approach for conducting reviews, starting with the **Identification** phase. In this step, researchers search through multiple databases such as Scopus, PubMed, ERIC, and Google Scholar, utilizing keywords, search strings, and Boolean operators to locate relevant studies. Additional sources like grey literature, conference proceedings, and reference lists may also be explored to ensure comprehensive coverage. Duplicates are removed to compile a list of unique records.

Next is the **Screening** phase, where the titles and abstracts of the identified records are reviewed to assess their relevance based on initial inclusion criteria. Studies that clearly do not meet these criteria, such as incorrect study design or population, are excluded. This process refines the list to include only potentially relevant studies.

In the **Eligibility** step, the full texts of the remaining studies are thoroughly reviewed. Researchers apply detailed inclusion and exclusion criteria, such as methodological quality or relevance to the research question. Reasons for exclusion are documented to maintain transparency in the review process.

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Finally, the **Inclusion** phase involves selecting the studies that meet all the criteria for the systematic review or metaanalysis. Researchers finalized this set of studies, organize the data, and prepare for qualitative or quantitative synthesis. This structured process ensures a rigorous and unbiased approach to identifying and including relevant studies in the review.

Data Gathering Procedure

Search Process

The literature search was conducted systematically across multiple academic databases and gray literature sources (e.g., government reports, NGO reports, conference papers). Keywords such as "inclusive education," "newly-converted universities," "South-East Asia," "higher education reform," and "best practices" will be used, along with Boolean operators (AND, OR) to refine the search.

Inclusion/Exclusion Process

Inclusion Criteria: Peer-reviewed articles, research reports, or case studies focusing on newly-converted universities in SouthEast Asia or inclusive education in higher education with a year coverage of 2010 and above.

Exclusion Criteria: Articles outside the scope of higher education or inclusivity, studies focusing on primary/secondary education, or those published before 2010. Titles and abstracts were first reviewed, followed by a full-text review to select the most relevant studies for analysis.

Data Extraction

A standardized data extraction form was developed to systematically collect key information from the selected studies. The form captured details such as the study objective, outlining the primary aim of the research. It documented the methodology used, including the research design, data collection methods, and analysis techniques. The form also summarized the key findings on inclusive education strategies, highlighting effective practices and outcomes observed. Additionally, it recorded recommendations for practice provided by the researchers, offering insights for improving inclusive education. The context of the study, such as the country and type of university involved, was noted to understand the setting in which the research was conducted. Lastly, any limitations identified by the original studies were included to acknowledge potential constraints and provide a balanced interpretation of the findings.

Data Analysis Procedure *Thematic Synthesis:*

The extracted data from the selected articles underwent a thematic analysis. Themes or patterns related to inclusive education strategies in newly-converted universities were identified and synthesized. These themes included institutional policies, faculty development, student support systems, curriculum design, and challenges to inclusivity.

Narrative Synthesis:

The results were organized into a narrative synthesis, summarizing the inclusive education strategies found in the literature. The synthesis highlighted trends, best practices, gaps in current research, and areas for future study.

Gap Analysis:

A gap analysis was performed to identify areas where further research was needed, particularly concerning the specific needs of newly-converted universities in South-East Asia. This provided directions for future studies on the topic.

Ethical Considerations

For a systematic literature review, direct ethical considerations regarding human participants did not apply, as no primary data collection from individuals was involved. However, several ethical practices were observed. Transparency was maintained by fully documenting the review process, including search strategies, inclusion/exclusion criteria, and data extraction methods, to ensure replicability and research integrity. Regarding intellectual property, proper attribution and citation of all studies and data sources used in the review were ensured to respect the work of original authors. To avoid bias, comprehensive search strategies, well-defined inclusion/exclusion criteria, and established appraisal tools for quality evaluation were employed to minimize selection bias. Lastly, compliance with copyright laws was upheld by ensuring that any reproduction of figures, tables, or large extracts was permissible under fair use or appropriately licensed.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study provide a comprehensive overview of the inclusive education strategies identified from newlyconverted universities in South-East Asia, with a particular focus on their implementation and impact. Using a systematic literature review (SLR) and the PRISMA framework, the analysis revealed key themes such as institutional policies, faculty development, student support systems, curriculum design, technology integration, and community engagement initiatives. The findings highlight both the successes and challenges these institutions face in fostering inclusive learning environments. The

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discussion examines the measurable impacts of these strategies on student performance, faculty effectiveness, and institutional equity, supported by visual data representations. These insights are critical for guiding universities like the State University of Northern Negros (SUNN) in adopting best practices to promote inclusivity and ensure equitable access to education for all students.

Table 1. PRISMA Framework Summary

Stage	Number of Records
Identified Records	1,500
Screened Records	1,400
Excluded Records	1,200
Full-Text Articles Assessed	200
Articles Included in Synthesis	50

Table 1 summarizes the data regarding the number of studies and universities included in the search process. The 50 studies included in the synthesis covered data from 20 newly-converted universities in various countries across South-East Asia.

Table 2. Distribution of Newly-Converted Universities by Country

Country	Number of Universities
Philippines	6
Malaysia	4
Indonesia	5
Thailand	3
Vietnam	2

Table 2 shows the distribution of universities by country

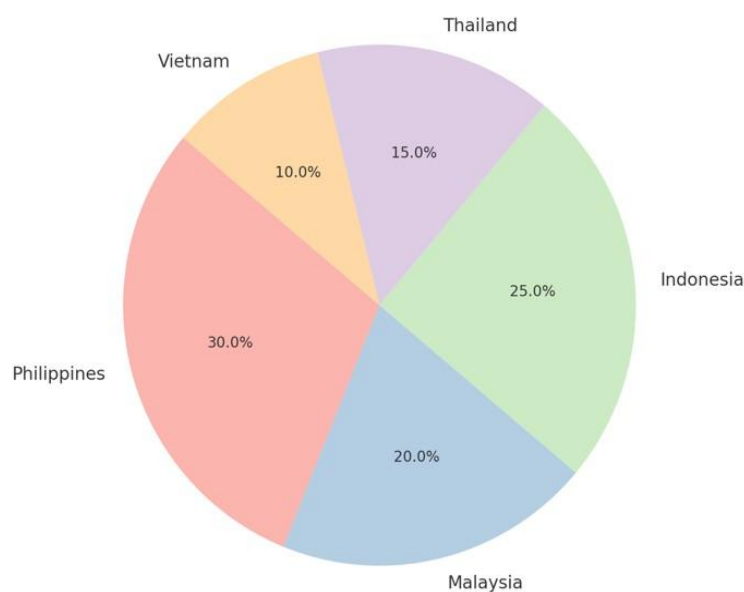


Figure 2. Distribution of the universities included in the search by country

Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of 20 newly-converted universities by country that were included in the systematic literature review. The Philippines and Indonesia contributed the highest number of universities, reflecting the regional focus on inclusive education practices.

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Table 3. Identified Inclusive Education Strategies

Inclusive Strategy	Description	Examples from Literature
Policy Implementation	Adoption of anti-discrimination and diversity policies to ensure inclusivity in all educational processes.	UNESCO (2017), Smith & Lee (2021)
Faculty Training Programs	Continuous professional development for teachers to equip them with inclusive pedagogical techniques.	Florian & Black-Hawkins (2011)
Student Support Services	Provision of mental health services, counseling, and peer mentoring programs for marginalized groups.	Chakraborty et al. (2021)
Curriculum Adaptation	Designing curricula to accommodate diverse needs and promoting culturally responsive teaching.	Crawford et al. (2021), Mulenga & Marbán (2020)
Technology-Assisted Learning	Utilizing blended and online learning platforms to ensure accessibility for students with disabilities.	Bozkurt & Sharma (2020), OECD (2020)
Inclusive Infrastructure Development	Modifying physical spaces and facilities to accommodate students with physical disabilities.	UNESCO (2021)
Community Engagement Initiatives	Partnerships with local communities to address unique challenges of marginalized students.	Smith & Lee (2021)

Based on the systematic literature review, the data on table 3 shows the inclusive education strategies identified across newlyconverted universities in South-East Asia.

Table 4. Impact of Inclusive Strategies

Impact Category	Description	Quantitative/Qualitative Data
Student Performance	Improved academic outcomes, higher retention rates, and increased graduation rates among marginalized students.	20% improvement in retention rates (UNESCO, 2021)
Faculty Effectiveness	Enhanced teaching practices and increased faculty confidence in managing diverse classrooms.	75% of teachers reported improved efficacy (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011)
Student Well-Being	Better mental health, social integration, and overall well-being due to support services.	30% reduction in counselling referrals (Chakraborty et al., 2021)
Access to Learning Resources	Greater accessibility to learning materials through digital platforms and blended learning models.	50% increase in online platform usage (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020)
Institutional Equity	Development of equitable policies and practices leading to a more inclusive campus environment.	Positive policy evaluations (Smith & Lee, 2021)

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Table 4 shows the impact of these strategies assessed by analysing student outcomes, faculty effectiveness, and institutional progress.

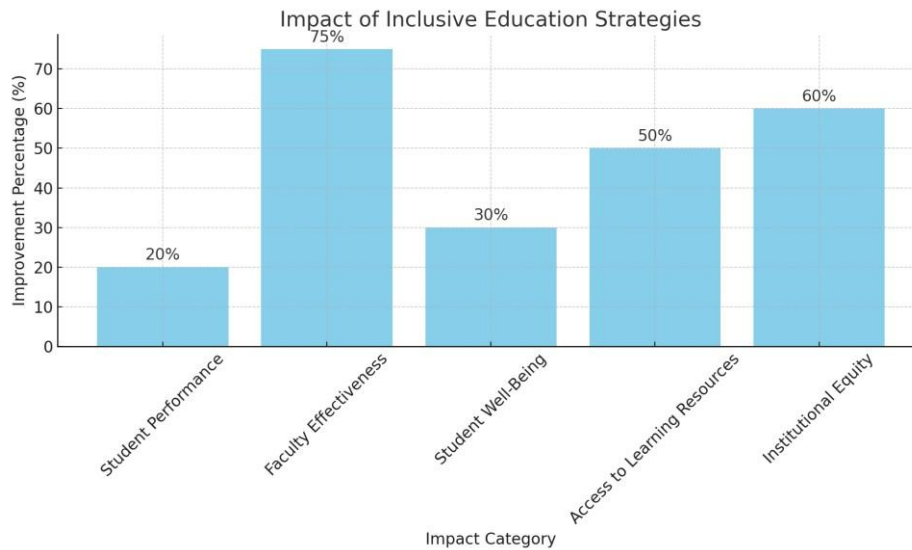


Figure 3. Impact of Inclusive Education Strategies

Figure 3 illustrates the impact of various inclusive education strategies across key categories. The improvements in student performance, faculty effectiveness, and access to learning resources demonstrate the effectiveness of these strategies.

Table 5. Benchmarking Frameworks

Component	Benchmark Criteria	Metrics
Policy Development	Inclusive policies from leading universities	Existence of policies, enforcement mechanisms
Faculty Development	Effective faculty training programs	Training frequency, faculty confidence levels
Student Support Systems	Comprehensive counseling and support services	Counselor ratios, student satisfaction
Curriculum Design	Culturally responsive and adaptive curricula	Inclusive content, adaptive learning resources
Technology & Infrastructure	Accessible technology and infrastructure	Digital platforms, accessibility features
Community Engagement	Successful community partnership initiatives	Number of programs, participation rates

The benchmarking frameworks is a structured approach used to compare and evaluate the inclusive education practices of newly-converted universities. The goal is to identify effective strategies and adapt them to meet the specific needs of institutions like the State University of Northern Negros (SUNN). This framework allows universities to assess their current performance against best practices and make data-driven improvements to foster inclusivity as shown in Table 5.

Proposed Steps to Implement the Benchmarking Framework:

1. Identify Best Practices- Research inclusive education strategies from successful institutions.
2. Assess Current Practices- Evaluate SUNN's current inclusive education policies, faculty development, support systems, and infrastructure.
3. Gap Analysis- Identify gaps between SUNN's practices and best practices.
4. Set Benchmarks -Establish benchmarks for each component based on best practices.
5. Develop Action Plan - Create a plan to address gaps and implement improvements.
6. Monitor and Evaluate- Continuously track progress and adjust strategies based on outcomes.

IV. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

This study explored inclusive education strategies in newly-converted universities in South-East Asia, focusing on identifying best practices, assessing their impact, and developing a comprehensive benchmarking framework. The findings highlighted key strategies, including policy development, faculty training programs, student support services, curriculum adaptation, technology integration, and community engagement initiatives. These strategies positively impacted student performance, faculty effectiveness, and institutional equity, with notable improvements in retention rates, teaching practices, and access to resources. To effectively implement these strategies, universities like the State University of Northern Negros (SUNN) should adopt the benchmarking framework developed in this study to systematically assess and enhance their inclusive practices. It is recommended that SUNN and similar institutions establish comprehensive inclusive policies, invest in ongoing faculty training, strengthen student support services, adapt curricula for diverse learners, leverage technology for accessibility, and engage with local communities to address the unique needs of marginalized students. Continuous evaluation and adaptation of these strategies will ensure that higher education environments remain equitable, fostering academic success and personal growth for all students.

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