

Connecting the Dots: Inclusive Education in Canada and Trinidad and Tobago

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Abstract: This study examined the inclusive education literature focused on Canada's inclusive practices and policies that supported those in Trinidad and Tobago. The review is organized into three themes: The definition of inclusion and its development, education system and policies, and changes to schools and the classroom environment. This literature review was drafted after consulting the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analysis Protocols (PRISMA-ScR) (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). This 22-item document on the PRISMA: Transparent Reporting of Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses website was constructed and revised by an international panel of specialists conducting scoping reviews (Tricco et al., 2018). Findings from the scoping review revealed emerging evidence of Canada's influence on inclusive education in Trinidad and Tobago, which has resulted in a recognition of increased tertiary-level resources for systemic improvement. This literature review also identified issues concerning inclusive education in general and gaps in the literature.

Keywords: Inclusion, inclusive education, special education, Trinidad and Tobago, Canada.

Introduction

Inclusion is a multidimensional and evolving concept that has been cultivated differently worldwide. Past studies have explored numerous definitions and conceptualizations of inclusion, such as varying contexts, degrees, and levels of inclusion (Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018; Artiles & Kozleski, 2007). The United Nations for Education, Sciences, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2020) Global Education Monitoring Report (GEM) 2020 recognized the complexity of inclusive education, stating, "inclusive education (IE) is more complicated because process and result are conflated" (p. 5). UNESCO further builds on the concept regarding the need for inclusive education, whether it be physical, mental, or emotional support, noting that every learner "should enjoy a full and decent life in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the [learner's] active participation" (Article 23, para. 1).

The global landscape of education has changed rapidly in the past five years, given that government-funded education departments were interested in comparing education practices and policies. The UNESCO 2020 GEM report was instrumental in this drive to compare education systems. They aimed to create a more inclusive education (IE) system and better facilitate the principles of inclusion in all nations (UNESCO, 2020). Unfortunately, the report raised many criticisms regarding comparative scholarly literature.

Comparative scholarly literature in the field of education has been relatively non-existent. Much of the existing literature surrounding inclusive education focused on educational policy and the educational circumstances leading to the documenting of changes in one country at a time, with occasional comparisons with other nations (Kivinen & Kivirauma, 1989; Jahnukainen, 2011; McLaughlin & Jordan, 2005; Giota et al., 2009). For example, international comparisons of countries included Iceland and Canada (Köpfer & Óskarsdóttir, 2019); USA and Canada (Grynova & Kalinichenko, 2018); Canada and Jamaica (Gayle, 2016); and Canada and Trinidad and Tobago (Noreiga & Burkholder, 2022). These comparisons focused on the quality, utility, and accuracy when considering international education statistics, governing policy documents, and the systemic realization of these ideologies through practice. Interestingly, Canada seems to be a common country of comparison, possibly due to its level of documentation surrounding its structured support when developing IE policies and practices. In each comparison with Canada, similarities, opportunities for improvement, and differences in local practices and policies were reported. Therefore, this study aims to explore the body of literature and the connections with Canada that facilitate and develop IE in Trinidad and Tobago.

Context of the Trinbagonian¹ Canadian relationship

Historically, Trinidad and Tobago, abbreviated as T&T by Trinbagonian scholars (Conrad et al., 2010; Johnstone, 2010; De Lisle, 2009), and Canada were under England's rule until gaining independence in 1962 and 1931, respectively. T&T and Canada have shared a bilateral relationship with multitier collaborations that mutually benefit economies and educational development. Further, both nations established diplomatic ties in 1962, following the twin

¹ *Trinbagonian* refers to a person who is a national from the island of Trinidad and Tobago (Charran, 2018)

island republics' independence. Canada is T&T's largest merchandise trading partner, having a trade totalling \$588.1 million, which amounted to \$302.9 million in imports and \$282.2 million in exports (Government of Canada, 2023).

Further bridging the nations are several education endeavours, including the Canada-Caribbean Institute, Maple Leaf International School, the Canadian International Development Agency, offshore/distance education programs, scholarships, and other collaborations facilitated by higher education institutes, such as Brock University, University of Manitoba, University of New Brunswick, University of Trinidad and Tobago and, University of the West Indies (Government of Canada, 2020). With collegial understanding to enhance knowledge mobilization, Canada and T&T share a mutual agreement through the Canada Research Coordinating Committee that enhances interagency cooperation with an international framework and T&T's Division of Educational Research and Evaluation (DERE) to support international collaborations in educational research (Government of Canada, 2023; T&T Ministry of Education, n.d.) as well as strengthen the enterprise between the two nations (Government of Canada, 2020).

The Trinbagonian-Canadian education terrain has a strong dependent relationship with Canada given that over 78,000 Trinbagonian-Canadians live in Canada and 65,000 immigrants, according to the 2016 census, not to mention the hundreds of students who opt to continue their studies in Canada (Government of Canada, 2020). Given the educational relationship between both nations, examining Canada's educational practices and positions related to IE provides insight into gains in these areas in T&T.

Methodology

The scoping literature review used in this study was drafted after consultation using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analysis Protocols (PRISMA-ScR) (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). After an initial literature review, a conceptual framework with inclusion and exclusion criteria was formed to explore the literature further. Figure 1 presents an overview of these criteria and the number of articles examined.

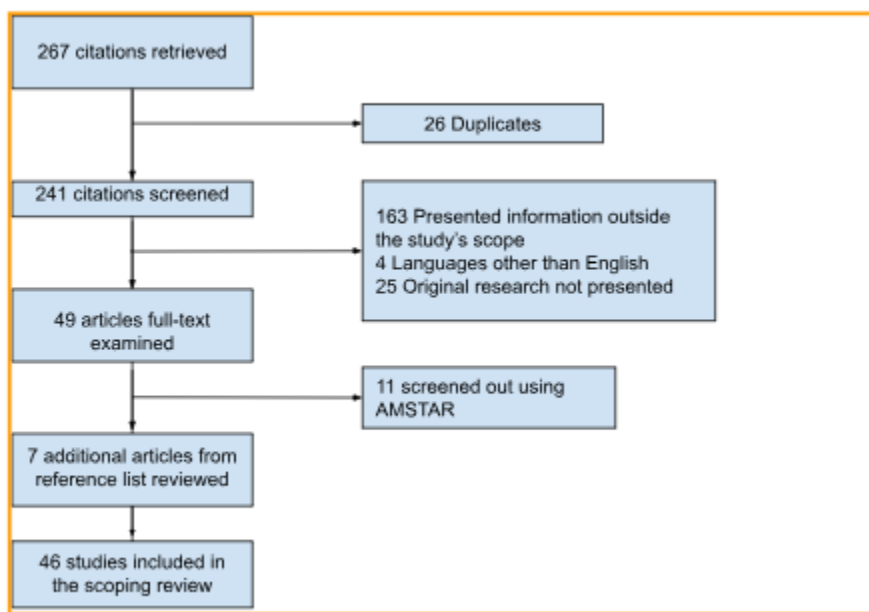


Figure 1: Selection of studies for scoping review

The search results were filed online using Google Scholar into five categories and subsequently downloaded into the reference management software Zotero 6.0.26, removing duplicate files. Journals were peer-screened during the analysis phase. The authors also considered all bookmarked literature through initial consultation, and a shortlist was created before moving to the next steps. The implementation of the AMSTAR tool promoted qualitative and systematic knowledge synthesis. Next, a comprehensive quality check focused on the research journals was performed before being incorporated into the findings section. Documents scoring eight or greater were considered high quality, 4–7

was moderate, and 0–3 indicated low quality. Articles for each research objective were then subdivided into themes and placed in chronological order for a more comprehensive review (Tricco et al., 2018). As shown in Figure 1, which summarizes the selection process, 46 relevant papers were identified according to the criteria discussed for this scoping literature review. A comprehensive review of all studies revealed that 14 articles examined the definitions of inclusion and its development, 15 discussed the shifting education policies, and 17 explored the impact of these changes in the learning environment. One limitation noted for this type of literature review was that relevant articles may have been missed due to the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Findings and Discussion

Theme 1: Definitions of inclusion and its development

Philosophical Perspective. Within Hodkinson's (2011) examination of the theoretical perspective regarding what it means to be inclusive, the author also defined the boundaries of the existence of inclusion, which Hansen (2012) described as limitless. Hodkinson's (2011) conceptualization of otherness as "there can be no inside without the outside" (Hansen, 2011, p. 343) philosophizes that one construct would not exist without the other, and the dichotomy of inclusion versus exclusion defines its existence. In this context, the problem of practicality emerges: Can inclusion be achieved, and if so, how can its success be measured?

Practical Approach. In a practical sense, Katz (2013) examined inclusion through two subtypes. One type of inclusion is what the author considered full and equal interaction through academic activities in a mainstream classroom setting; this type is called academic inclusion. The other type of inclusion is the opportunity to develop socially and emotionally through interactions, which Katz (2013) termed social inclusion. Katz's definition extended beyond that of the classroom environment (Slee, 1998; Specht & Young, 2010), recognizing a much larger picture of those with special needs as belonging to the citizenry and promoting social justice (Katz, 2013; Lipsky & Gartner, 1996; Loreman, 2014). However, the topic of inclusion in education transcends more than those identified with special needs, exceptionalities, or the differently abled (Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018). Articulating a definition of inclusion is not about defining a people or group who should or should not be included but rather a process of meeting the needs of diverse learners (Hansen, 2012; Katz, 2013; Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018). Thus, we need not decide who or what type of inclusion is meant to frame the concept but rather the practical implementation. For instance, within a secondary classroom in the Canadian province of Prince Edward Island, an educational assistant (EA) may support a student with a mild learning disorder, such as dyslexia or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, in the same space as other mainstream students once assessed by Student Services under the Public Schools Branch. This practice with an EA provides academic support for the student. Katz noted that this practice allows for some interaction with classmates while building social inclusion, both of which have limitations. The first limitation can occur when a student becomes dependent on the EA. A second limitation is when a student becomes isolated from classmates due to being supported by an adult accompaniment through most classes (Katz, 2013). Either way, these interactions or lack thereof may result in lower perceived belonging.

Canada. Within Canada, there are a multitude of definitions of IE that capture the unique values of provincial governments. For example, in British Columbia (BC), where 17% of Canada's aboriginal population resides, IE is examined from a cultural perspective where all students are in age-appropriate, regular classes with support, contributing to a holistic educational approach (Inclusion BC, 2024). The generalized definition from BC does not specify minority groups or Indigenous learners but offers all-encompassing terminologies such as accepting *individual differences* (Inclusion BC, 2024). As a second example, in Alberta, conceptualizing IE has been defined as a way of thinking, a values-based approach, universal acceptance and belonging (Government of Alberta, 2024). Ontario also uses a values-based approach. However, their vision of IE extends from their Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy 2009, which defines an "equitable, inclusive education system is one in which all students, parents [or guardians], and other members of the school community are welcomed and respected, and every student is supported and inspired to succeed in a culture of high expectations for learning" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2024). In Canada's northern territory, IE is articulated as a process by the Nunavut Department of Education in their IE policy (Nunavut Education Act, 2008). Similar to UNESCO's view of IE as the removal of barriers (UNESCO, 2020), Nunavut's goal is also to remove obstacles that can lead to the exclusion of learners, which is underpinned by two pillars of thought: safe and caring schools, and student success (Nunavut Education Act, 2008). In contrast, Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) adopted the philosophy of promoting students in "all aspects of the learning environment regardless of any facet of

diversity" (Government of Newfoundland & Labrador, 2023, para. 4). As such, NL has several components defining inclusion as a philosophy. One such definition is that it promotes "the right of all students to attend school with their peers, and to receive appropriate and quality programming" (para. 1). Further emphasizing Nunavut's definition, NL's definition also focuses on school culture in creating a safe and caring environment.

Trinidad and Tobago. Definitions of IE vary in general and in the focus of this study within the two countries and their associated legislation. T&T's Ministry of Education in response to global calls from the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the UNICEF Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989), the United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (1993), UNESCO's Salamanca statement (1994), and Dakar World Education Forum (2000), a movement for the development and implementation of T&T's Vision 2020 Action Plan (2007-2010), was enacted. The Vision 2020 Action Plan detailed improvements to the education sector, creating a universal and equitably based citizenry. While making these improvements, Vision 2020 also created vital legislation to guide best practices. The legislature included the Equal Opportunities Act (2000), the National Policy on Persons with Disabilities (2000), and the Inclusive Education Policy (2009). Although the nation has used the expressions "special needs", "persons with disabilities", or "giftedness," the term inclusion was first noted in the National Policy on Persons with Disabilities (2000). In its definition of inclusion, with a functional and bureaucratic approach, the National Policy on Persons with Disabilities stated, "Inclusion means enabling pupils to participate in the life and work of mainstream institutions to the best of their abilities, whatever their needs" (National Policy on Persons with Disabilities, 2000, p. 1).

Ten years later, T&T's last revision of the Inclusive Education Policy (2009) defined IE as "a developmental process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities" (p. 3). This definition is embodied in the academic and social inclusion concepts defined by Katz (2013). The policy further adopted terminologies such as *giftedness* whereby a student demonstrated potential exceptional levels of performance that required special learning needs above what is offered to the majority of learners. It also noted the term *special education designed for learners* as referring to persons who "cannot profit maximally from regular education such that they require trained personnel, modifications in the curricula, teaching methods, instructional materials and adaptations in facilities and equipment" (Inclusive Education Policy, 2009, p. 4). T&T also emphasized broadening the school curriculum acknowledging the diverse needs of learners "whether due to age, ethnicity, language, levels of ability, culture, religion and chronic health concerns" (Inclusive Education Policy, 2009, p. 5).

Theme 2: Education Systems and Policy Changes

Segregation Practices. Segregation in terms of inclusion refers to the practice of separating students into segregated schools or self-contained special education programs away from the rest of the school community. In Canada, the 1960s were a time of segregation, as all SWSNs were placed in segregated educational institutions or alternative schooling (Ellis & Yoon, 2019; Timmons, 2007). However, the landscape began to change prior to 1994 Article 24, thanks to the concerted efforts of parents demanding a better quality of education for their children and working with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (Inclusion BC, 2024). They played a pivotal role in building awareness and changing perceptions about the needs of SWSN (Ellis & Yoon, 2019; Timmons, 2007), leading to a decline in public support for the practice of segregation and raising concerns.

In the 1970s, students with disabilities in T&T were being placed in specialized schools with limited opportunities for further education (Pedro & Conrad, 2006; Conrad et al., 2010). However, a significant shift occurred after the Education Act of 1979. The government established the Special Education Unit, which was tasked with developing operational guidelines, including the creation of an Individualized Education Plan/Programme and overseeing all special education schools nationwide. This move was aimed at improving the accessibility of learning for students with visual, hearing, physical, and mental challenges; however, the initiative did not eliminate the segregation of special needs students for T&T (Pedro & Conrad, 2006).

The Late 1960s – 1992: Shifting Priorities. With the advocacy of several provinces in the late 1960s, Canadian education evolved into a combination system of mainstream and "segregated" (special) education. At this time, the Council for Exceptional Children in Canada was examining the practices in the US to address the concerns in the Canadian system, including the role of Individualized Education Plans/Programmes (McBride, 2013). Nova Scotia was the first province to have mandatory legislation for SWSN in 1969, followed by Saskatchewan in 1971 and

Ontario Bill 82 in 1980 (Robson, 2019). This legislature overseeing the education of students with special learning needs accompanied funding to encourage the development of programs, and shifted students from a segregated education system to one of greater integration.

The vision of Canada's Council of Ministers of Education to endorse the Canadian Human Rights Act of 1977-2019, protecting all people against harassment and discrimination, led them to develop learning materials to support and fund the training of special education teachers (Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2021). Each province and territory had varied approaches to special education teacher training (McCrimmon, 2015), with all provincial jurisdictions adopting and implementing IE frameworks. McCrimmon (2015) noted, "the implementation of inclusion after years of separated education has brought challenges... regarding teacher competencies and capabilities" (p. 235) within Canada, leading to much consideration and rethinking the way teachers were being educated.

The 1980s was also a time of rethinking the T&T education system to align with international progress, and the once-segregated specialized schools began to receive funding as a part of the public education system; however, special needs students still remained segregated from their peers (Lavia, 2008). The T&T SEU in 1989 sponsored a series of workshops facilitated by the Canadian International Development Agency and the University of Manitoba to satisfy recommendations for a comprehensive study of special education needs in T&T, which became pivotal in the Marge Report of 1984. The report greatly recommended special education teacher training, and although the workshops were viewed as successful (Pedro & Conrad, 2006; Johnstone, 2010; Conrad et al., 2010), the programme was underfunded, so it could not include training for all educators in T&T.

A core fabric of Canada's Constitution, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms of 1982, created systemic changes in freedom and equality. The Charter reinforced that all Canadians have broad equality rights such as freedom of expression, assembly, and religion. Section 15:1 of the Charter states that "every Canadian is equal before and under the law and has the right to equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, nationality or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age, or physical disability" (Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, 1982, 15.1). However, the Charter only applied to governments, not private persons, businesses or organizations. Such a limitation meant that an individual could not enforce the Charter on private schools or organizations that did not conform to Canadian government policies (Government of Canada, 2022). The movement towards IE gained greater traction in the late 20th century and early 21st century, from an integrated system to more inclusive school environments tailored to the diverse needs of Canadian students.

With a notable framework from Canada, T&T introduced the National Policy of Special Education of 1992 as a legal document to guide the development and implementation of what was termed, at the time, *disability services*. This policy emphasized education provisions for SWSN defined within the scope of the Student Support Services Division (SSSD), including sensory and physical impairments, health challenges/impairments, developmental disabilities, specific learning disabilities, neurological disorders, giftedness, intellectual disabilities, and behavioural disabilities. Building momentum, in 1994, the revised Education Act, which was informed by the UNESCO 1994 Salamanca statement, introduced supportive changes such as establishing the National Advisory Board of Education and forming the Education Facilities Company Limited to oversee infrastructure development. However, the immense attention paid to infrastructural development did not translate to implementation, and as a result, limited funding for special education needs.

Canada 1994 Onward. From 1994, Canada saw significant changes in its education system, particularly in IE, such as the introduction of federal, provincial, and territorial policies to ensure more equitable conditions and opportunities for all students. One instance of these policy improvements involved each province and territory developing specific IE systems and policies to facilitate collaboration between teachers, parents, and support professionals (Loreman, 2014). Such laws provided next-step guidelines for accommodating SWSN, providing accessibility services, improving instructional design, and adapting assessment practices.

Provinces and territories established their policies and engaged in revisions to meet the demands of international organizations like UNESCO. In 1995, British Columbia created the Special Education Services: A manual of policies, procedures and guidelines. This document, republished in 1996, was meant to be a single reference point for legislation development and for use by school administrators to better align their programs with the School Act of 1996 and UNESCO Article 14. In 1998, Quebec launched A School for the Future: Policy Statement on Educational Integration and Intercultural Education, focusing more on allocating resources needed to support students, teachers, parents, and

school boards. The Nunavut Education Act (2008) was built on eight key principles, including Inuuqatigiitsiarniq – respecting others; Tunnganarniq – fostering good spirit; and Piliriqatigiinniq or Ikajuqtiigiinniq – working together for a common cause. Last for this period, in 2009, Ontario's Ministry of Education presented the Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, centred on the responsibilities of school boards to create and sustain the conditions needed for all students to succeed.

Trinidad and Tobago 1994 Onward. There was similar evidence in the literature that increased feedback from parents, advocacy groups, policies, and research led to T&T's National Policy on Persons with Disabilities (2000), encouraging the transition of students with special needs into mainstream education. Funding, teacher training, student support, and assistive technologies aided this transition. T&T leaders committed to providing free and compulsory primary education for all children by 2015 at the Dakar World Education Forum in Senegal in April 2000. This commitment was further embedded in the T&T Inclusive Education Policy (2009) for secondary education access for all students, including those with mild to moderate learning needs.

The Dakar World Education Framework for Action (2000) facilitated instructional support by encouraging investments in the country's university—the University of Trinidad and Tobago. One of the highest spending periods for the last 23 years, from 2001-2003, with 12-14% of the national gross domestic product (Microtrends, 2024), was spent on facilitating the development of curriculum/curriculum adaptations, student support programs, establishing resource centers, teacher training at all levels, vocational and technical education, staff professional development, and information communication technology integration.

To realign the IE vision, T&T published the Draft Special Education Policy (2013) referencing the Ministry of British Columbia's Special Education Services Guide of 1995, the Alberta Policy Framework for Services for Children and Youth with Special and Complex Needs. This document was created to reform "mechanisms for addressing the issues of access and equity for students with special education needs that arise due to physical, cognitive, behavioural, and psycho-social challenges they face, which inhabit their full learning potential and achievement" (Draft Special Education Policy, 2013, p. 5). Further reinforced by the 2005 Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, to which Canada has been a founding member, this version aligned terminologies with disabilities (medical terms), difficulties (behavioural, emotional or specific learning disorders) and disadvantages (limitations arising primarily from socio-economic, cultural, and/or linguistic factors). Most recently, T&T Ministry of Education recently published a revised Education Policy (2023-2027) that focuses on eight essential elements prioritizing inclusion and global citizenship, with a specific emphasis on supporting the needs of children from disadvantaged families. Although the policy acknowledges the need for improvement in inclusive education, there are still challenges in the current integrated system for all students, as some students with severe special needs are still segregated from mainstream classrooms.

Theme 3: Changes to the school and classroom environment

Teacher Training. Considering the need for an IE system over the past decade, teacher training in both nations has re-examined what it means to align best teaching practices for all students. Challenges by the dominant neoliberal ideologies emphasize academic achievement (Kaur, 2012) and encourage the need to re-examine the direction of teacher training. Recent studies highlighted the importance of fostering positive teacher attitudes, as it could result in lower levels of teacher self-efficiency in implementing assessment in an inclusive environment (Parey, 2021; Nandlal, 2024). To foster positive teacher attitudes, sufficient teacher preparation and professional development are vital (Giovazoliasa et al., 2019; De Lisle, 2009) compared to those without adequate preparation (Mitchell & Joseph, 2021).

Both nations have targeted special education teacher training programs. In BEd and MEd, teacher training programs in Canada offer unique opportunities beyond standard training to immerse future educators in culturally diverse experiences. One example of these unique experiences is outlined by Hill et al. (2020) in the case of Simon Fraser University (SFU) in British Columbia (BC). SFU has implemented three distinct strands of teacher education programs to improve accessibility and contextual relevance for students. While not all Canadian universities offer three avenues for teacher education, each province has a commitment to continuous improvement with its implementation of IE frameworks (McCrimmon, 2015). Despite teacher opportunities for learning about IE, Van Nuland et al. (2020) noted that during the COVID-19 pandemic, teacher education in Ontario was in a state of uncertainty due to the rapid change to remote teaching and reducing engagement time in *practica* experiences (Van Nuland et al., 2020).

Educators in T&T have identified similar issues related to teacher education in Canada. These issues include the absence of pre-service teacher training on infrastructure for students with special needs (SWSN), a lack of psychological services for SWSN, a dearth of opportunities for special education teachers to pursue professional development, and missing chances for pre-service teachers to work with SWSN during their practicum placements (Nandlal, 2021). Unfortunately, there are limited learning opportunities for teachers in T&T to specialize in working with SWSN. The University of the West Indies is the only university on the island offering training for SWSN in their Bachelor of Education in Inclusive Education and their Master of Education (MEd) in Inclusive and Special Education degree programs, which began in the 2010s.

Assistive Technologies. Assistive technologies are a valuable tool for promoting inclusive education. By incorporating technologies such as screen readers, optical character recognition, audio and visual supports, and alternative keyboards into the classroom, students with disabilities can have equal access to learning opportunities. These technologies can enhance the educational experience and promote accessibility for SWSN (UNESCO, 2023; Parey, 2022; Nandlal, 2021). Teachers can use assistive technologies to personalize the learning experience and facilitate social inclusion (Katz, 2013; Hector-Alexander, 2019). In Canada, there have been several studies on the use of assistive technologies in education, focusing on areas such as cultivating independent learners and promoting social inclusion. It is important to note that accommodations for students with special learning needs who require assistive technologies are addressed under institutional accommodations with their own set of policies and laws that mandate schools to provide to students who need them (Rioux, 2003; Yeo & Moore, 2003).

Although limited literature is available documenting the use of assistive technology in T&T, Parey (2022) explored inclusionary practices and accommodations from a broad perspective. Unfortunately, the findings from Parey's (2022) mixed methods study noted minor uses of assistive technologies in the classroom. This could be a result of a shortfall in funding as assistive technologies are available as shared resources, which is also a practice in Canadian classrooms (Charran, 2016; Nandlal, 2021). Public funding of assistive technologies has not always been a priority, given that a greater focus has been placed on the universal design of existing curricular and large-scale assessments (Parey, 2022).

Although researchers have claimed a shortfall in funding for education in T&T, which has direct impact on supporting special education services, the annual budget in 2024 was \$8.022 billion TT or 1.6 billion CAD as compared to the yearly budget in the Canadian province Ontario during 2023-2024 of 27.6 billion (OBSBA, 2023). It is challenging to compare educational funding with Canada, given that the Canadian education system falls under provincial jurisdictions.

Special Education Services. Encapsulating teacher training and assistive technologies, this section explores the special education services of Canada and T&T. Special education services is an umbrella term which includes services such as providing assistive technologies, advocating for individualized needs of students such as therapy services (physical, behavioural, speech), and providing curriculum adaptations in instructional and assessment materials. These services are modified to meet the students' needs and the activity's goal (Charran, 2018). From a historical perspective, based on the UNESCO 2020 GEM report, NGOs were considered the first group to provide special education services in most parts of the developing world. T&T has benefited from these services over the past decade. Most recently, in 2019, the T&T government supported roughly 3735 SWSN (Nandlal, 2021; UNESCO, 2021). In comparison, Canada supported 80600 SWSN (ages 15-24) during the 2017 period (Statistics Canada, 2022). Another comparison available was the average spending percentage per student in 2022. In a study conducted by Fraser Institute in 2022, Canada's spending per student rose an average of 13.2% (Fraser Institute, 2022; Statistics Canada, 2022), with some provinces budgeting a 28% increase, such as Nova Scotia, with a population of approximately one million. When compared to T&T during the same period, there was a 0.13% increase (Microtrends, 2024) in the population of 1.5 million. Considering the resources available, the SSSD, a subgroup of the MOE T&T, employed through the On-the-Job training program persons wanting to gain work experience as Special Education Teacher Aides (SETA) (Nandlal, 2021). The SETA was provided training and was primarily responsible for assisting SWSN in the classroom environment. These supports included reading and writing assistance, coping strategies, and working with the mainstream classroom teacher to develop resources and inform teaching strategies (Nandlal, 2021). Before 2012, students were placed in the classroom with little support (Lavia, 2008). This lack of support was evident in the 2011-2015 Education Sector Strategic Plan's financing framework (Ministry of Education, 2012). T&T's strategy noted

limited resources and service allocation in areas such as assistive technologies and teacher training. The strategic plan had a budgetary allocation of \$4400 TT or \$680 CAD for developing a Special Education program.

The trifecta of developing teacher training, promoting assistive technology integration, and facilitating special education services highlighted in the UNESCO 2020 GEM report established the cornerstone of supporting an inclusive school and classroom environment. However, each nation has its unique multidimensional systems, which must be acknowledged when discussing supporting inclusion via special education services. In Canada and T&T, studies have examined post-secondary student support from an indigenous perspective (Usher, 2009), policy development support for student services, and realigning support services to meet the needs of international students (Guanglong & Montsion, 2022). These services aim to bridge the gap to increase accessibility to minority groups, which is still being addressed in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic (Gallagher-Mackay et al., 2021).

A scoping literature review of publications examining 46 selected journals was organized into three themes after consulting the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analysis Protocols. Three themes were formed regarding the literature gathered in the scoping literature review. Varying understandings of inclusion and its development, education system and policy changes, and inclusive changes to schools and the classroom environment were explored.

The analysis indicated that Canada had some influence on T&T's IE practices, as this has been increasingly evident through the definitions of inclusion and its development. The problem of practicality and the philosophical dilemma of achieving inclusion from a social and academic perspective acknowledged the variation and emphasized what was valued in each culture. However, T&T's definition of inclusion was notably broad, having had little emphasis on research surrounding IE. The second theme is education systems and policy changes that followed the practices of the 1900s to the 2020s. Considered in the *ALL MEANS ALL* expectation from UNESCO Canada's federal and provincial policies, it has contextualized its approach, tailoring policies to support the intersectionality that exists. T&T has also taken this approach, which was influenced by Canadian provincial guidelines. The chronological progression mapped similarities in both nations from segregation to integration with several recent documents from T&T referencing IE frameworks from Canada dating over a decade back. The final theme, changes to the school and classroom environment, examined teacher training, assistive technology and special education services of both nations. Teacher training was highlighted as an area of concern, with a significant gap in quality training experiences following the rapid move to remote learning during the pandemic. Additionally, whilst challenging to compare, there is a need to increase funding to support the infrastructure and further develop T&T's Special education program.

Although Canada's IE system shows greater promise, as is evident in the literature, than in T&T, both nations have a long way to go to be exemplars or models of IE. Canada and T&T have struggled to provide model IE practices, given that these changes have stemmed from advocacy efforts and NGO support. Thus, changes to IE tend to be reactive versus proactive. As a result, IE practices are limited by a larger view of what is possible to support SWSN within the classroom that often consists of one teacher, an education assistant or two, and more significant numbers of students being tested and confirmed each year requiring IE support. However, although these services provide essential support, other approaches to IE should be debated and explored in future studies, as the demands of IE programs are not always sustainable. It may also be worth considering a tiered approach where needs may be better served in a one-on-one learning environment for some students. In such cases, an IE strategy that is more equitable through an inclusive design may be more equitable than replicating an integration lens in the future.

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