

Developing a Continuous Quality Improvement Management Model for Inclusive Education to Promote Equity in Educational Quality

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Abstract

The implementation of inclusive education is hindered by perennial structural and management issues that undermine its capacity to provide equal and high-quality learning for all. Most schools do not yet have strategic plans that integrate ongoing development with inclusive strategies. This research aims to develop and validate an inclusive education management model based on the philosophy of Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI). The ultimate goal is to ensure quality in equality through effective and structural changes. A mixed-methods design of an exploratory sequential nature was adopted. In the qualitative strand, interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with experts in inclusive education, school leadership, and practitioners to identify needs and issues in existing management practices. Thematic analysis was undertaken to produce an initial framework. Quantitative, a pilot survey was conducted among 50 inclusive education teachers to validate the clarity, usability, and relevance of the framework. The ultimate framework comprises five interconnected domains: inclusive leadership, data-driven planning, ongoing monitoring and feedback, shared policy decision-making, and fair resource allocation. Content validity was confirmed through expert review, with a high degree of agreement (Aiken's $V = 0.92$). Teacher ratings provided a mean item score of 4.46 on a scale of 5, with all items scoring above 4.20. The proposed CQI-based framework provides a practical, tried model for inclusive education leadership. The framework reconciles quality improvement processes with inclusive ideals, positioning educators as leaders of long-term, system-level reform.

1. Introduction

Inclusive education today has not only become a global discourse (Oranga et al., 2024). However, it has also evolved into a moral and policy mandate to achieve a fair and equal education system for all students. Its basic principle places each individual, regardless of differences in ability, social background, or physical and psychological condition, at the center of the quality education process. This commitment is explicitly reflected in global agendas, such as the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 4 on Quality Education and SDG 10 on Reducing Inequalities, which emphasize the importance of ensuring equal access, participation, and learning outcomes for all (Adipat & Chotikapanich, 2022).

Nonetheless, the implementation of inclusive education in various contexts, especially in developing countries, still faces complex challenges. One of the fundamental problems is the weakness of the education management system in integrating the principles of inclusivity structurally and sustainably (Karim & Hue, 2022). In many schools, strategic planning has not fully considered the diverse needs of students, and the managerial approach used remains reactive, administrative, and lacks a data-driven focus. This results in inclusivity often being positioned as a complement, rather than the primary foundation, in the management of educational institutions.

Within this framework, a more progressive management approach is needed—one that is not only adaptive to change but also encourages institutional transformation through continuous improvement

mechanisms. Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI), an approach that emphasizes data-driven continuous improvement, stakeholder participation, and cyclical evaluation of service quality, offers excellent potential for application in the context of inclusive education (Kasemsap, 2017). Although this approach has been proven effective in other sectors, such as health and industry, its use in education management, especially in those oriented towards justice and diversity, is still relatively limited and has not been systematically formulated.

Academic literature related to inclusive education tends to focus on pedagogical aspects, curriculum, and teacher competence, but still minimally discusses the operational managerial dimension (Sugawara, 2022). On the other hand, the available management models are generally normative, theoretical, and less contextual, so they are unable to address the specific needs of educational units in designing and implementing inclusive policies sustainably.

Most approaches to improving the quality of education still focus on academic achievement or administrative efficiency alone, without explicitly integrating the principles of justice into the process or outcomes (Blewitt et al., 2020). The concept of quality in education should be inseparable from who feels the benefits, as well as the extent to which all students get equal opportunities to develop. Thus, there is an urgent need to develop a management model that is not only technically effective but also oriented towards the principles of inclusivity and quality sustainability.

This research aims to develop and validate an inclusive education management model based on the principle of Continuous Quality Improvement. This model is expected to be a strategic framework that encourages educational units to manage transformation in a systematic and participatory manner. By integrating the values of quality improvement and justice, this research aims to operationalize the concept of quality in equality, an orientation that emphasizes the need for all students to experience the improvement of education as equally and fairly as possible (Li & Rao, 2023).

Theoretically, this research contributes to enriching the discourse of inclusive education management through a new approach based on CQI, which has not been widely developed in the context of primary and secondary education (Parker et al., 2022). Meanwhile, the model developed can be used by school principals, education managers, and other stakeholders as a tool to integrate the principles of inclusivity into the overall school policy planning, implementation, and evaluation system.

This research also provides a foundation for developing transformative leadership capacity at the school level by positioning educators as agents of change who can lead quality improvement sustainably. Thus, these findings not only answer academic needs but also answer practical challenges in building a more equitable, adaptive, and sustainable education system.

2. Methodology

This study employs an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design, which systematically integrates qualitative and quantitative stages (Islam et al., 2022). This approach was chosen because it was

considered the most appropriate for uncovering the complexities of inclusive education management in depth, while developing a grounded-based model supported by expert insights and empirical validation. The study process consists of two main phases: qualitative exploration and quantitative validation.

2.1 Qualitative Exploration for Participant Model Construction

The qualitative phase aims to gain a deep understanding of the managerial challenges and stakeholder needs in implementing inclusive education. The purposive sampling technique was used to select five key informants who had a track record and relevant expertise (Stake & Visse, 2022). Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). The interviews focused on strategic themes, including leadership, strategic planning, resource allocation, and policy implementation within the context of inclusive education.

2.2 Quantitative Validation of Participant Models

The quantitative phase was conducted to assess the feasibility of the initial model through a survey of 50 inclusive education teachers, recruited using convenience sampling techniques. Participant criteria include a minimum of two years of teaching experience in an inclusive classroom as well as involvement in planning and evaluation at the school level. The research instrument is in the form of a structured questionnaire designed to assess the clarity, relevance, usefulness, and practicality of the model. The instrument consists of 25 statements on a Likert scale (1 = very bad to 5 = very good), where each item represents a key construct within the framework of the model.

The validity of the content was assessed using Aiken's V coefficient, involving five experts in inclusive education and education management. Aiken's V value of 0.92 indicates a high consensus on the validity of the item. Reliability was measured using Cronbach's Alpha with a coefficient of 0.88, indicating high internal consistency. Descriptive statistical analysis is used to calculate the mean value and standard deviation of each item. Items with an average value below 4.20 are revised for increased clarity and substance.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Qualitative Findings: Emergent Themes from Expert Interviews and FGDs

The qualitative component of this research yielded a rich and multi-layered description of the persistent issues that still undermine the proper operationalization of inclusive education in school systems. Data were collected through the deployment of a synthesis of in-depth, semi-structured interviews and focus

group discussions (FGDs) with experts in inclusive education, school heads, and frontline practitioners (Pahwa et al., 2023). Thematic analysis of these accounts uncovered five broad, interrelated themes that not only expose existing operational deficiencies but also illuminate the systemic and cultural transformations required to position inclusivity at the very core of school governance.

The themes that emerged from leadership deficits to inequities in resource allocation represent more than a diagnosis of current practice; together, they shape the conceptual framework of a Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI)-based management system. This system is envisioned as an iterative, data-driven process that shifts schools away from sporadic compliance toward long-term cultural change.

Table 1. Continuous Quality Improvement-Based Inclusive Education Management Framework

Domain	Key Indicators
Inclusive Leadership	Leadership vision for inclusion, integration into strategic plans, equity-focused targets, and distributed leadership practices.
Data-Driven Planning	Utilization of diverse assessment data, periodic needs assessment, and evidence-based action plans.
Ongoing Monitoring & Feedback	Regular performance review, formative assessment cycles, and adaptive improvement strategies.
Shared Policy Decision-Making	Stakeholder participation in planning, policy co-creation, and periodic policy review.
Equitable Resource Allocation	Needs-based resource distribution, flexibility in reallocation, and accessibility enhancement.

3.1.1 Gaps in Inclusive Leadership

Leadership consistently emerged in participant narratives as both a critical bottleneck and a potential catalyst for change (Bilbokaitė et al., 2024). A recurring observation was that school leadership remains predominantly administrative in orientation, prioritizing regulatory compliance over the proactive cultivation of an inclusive school climate.

Several principals were perceived as regarding inclusive education not as a core institutional value, but as an “add-on” to an already demanding workload. This perception has contributed to the compartmentalization of inclusive initiatives, which remain peripheral rather than integrated into the central processes of school governance. As one expert emphasized:

“Many principals view inclusive education as an add-on activity, rather than as a fundamental philosophy to be woven into every facet of school administration.”

(Informant 3, FGD, 2024)

This leadership stance carries far-reaching consequences. It restricts the strategic integration of inclusive practices into educational improvement programs, diminishes teacher motivation and professional autonomy, constrains the mobilization of resources, and weakens the alignment between daily operational routines and the institution's stated values (Kaur et al., 2022).

The literature strongly supports these insights. The genuine inclusive leadership requires a transformative orientation—one that challenges entrenched norms, actively engages diverse stakeholders, and fosters a school culture in which diversity is embraced as a strength (Jamal, 2024). Without such leadership, inclusive education risks becoming a fragmented, project-based endeavor lacking both durability and systemic resilience.

3.1.2 Limitations in Data-Driven Planning

A second theme relates to the underuse of data for strategic planning. Although schools often gather multiple types of assessment data—from student needs profiles to periodic progress reports—participants indicated that such data are too often filed away rather than dissected for decision-making. As one practitioner neatly put it:

"We do have assessment data, but too frequently only in archives, not the foundation for planning."

(Informant 1, Interview, 2024)

This practice embodies a reactive style of management, in which action is precipitated by crises instead of being guided by predictive, evidence-based cues. The outcome is a planning process that is susceptible to personal bias, piecemeal initiatives, and spotty implementation (Kasemsap, 2017). In the CQI model, data provide the compass for ongoing adjustment, facilitating timely and focused interventions that forestall difficulties instead of simply reacting to them.

3.1.3 Limited and Unequal Resource Allocation

The distribution of resources, including physical materials and human capital, became a critical consideration affecting the quality and feasibility of inclusive education. The research reflected considerable disparities between different schools. While some schools are equipped with resource rooms, assistive technologies, and specialist personnel, others operate with meager facilities and insufficiently trained staff (Gloria et al., 2024). These inequalities directly impede the implementation of individualized education plans (IEPs) and adaptive curricula. One focus group participant described this issue with precision:

"Not every school has special accompanying teachers, and this renders the implementation of an inclusive curriculum less than ideal."

(Informant 4, FGD, 2024)

This result highlights a more general point: equity of access does not result from policy rhetoric alone, but instead requires intentional, proportionate, and ongoing investment. The literature (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011) supports this, stating that inclusivity requires resource allocation approaches that are needs-based and flexible (Sugawara, 2022).

3.1.4 Inconsistent Monitoring and Feedback Mechanisms

Monitoring was another issue of concern. Evaluation of inclusive education programs was often irregular and problem-initiated, as opposed to being entrenched in a systematic CQI process. Such an approach restricts possibilities for reflective practice, organizational learning, and early intervention (Khoo et al., 2017).

In the absence of feedback loops, schools may be doomed to repeat flawed strategies and miss opportunities for incremental improvements. A framework based on CQI prioritizes the gathering, reflection, and adaptation of regular performance data, turning monitoring into an engine of continuous improvement rather than a compliance exercise.

3.1.5 Policy–Practice Disconnect

The last theme relates to the disconnect between official policy and daily practice. Although inclusive education policies are in place in many schools on paper, they are often not reflected in strategic plans, operational protocols, or teacher performance indicators. Variations in the interpretation of "inclusivity"—both between teaching staff and leadership and among schools—also fragment implementation.

This unevenness aligns with Slee's (2018) argument that inclusion is often realized as a "rhetorical flourish" without attendant structural transformation (Sädeharju, 2025). Effective continuous quality improvement (CQI) models require not only technical systems but also a shared language, effective communication between levels, and a shared commitment to goals.

3.1.6 Creation of the First CQI-Based Management System

Synthesis of qualitative findings resulted in the creation of a CQI-based inclusive education management model comprising five interdependent areas:

1. Inclusive Leadership: Leaders as inclusion champions, incorporating it into cultural and strategic imperatives.
2. Data-Driven Planning: Strategic integration of diverse data types into planning cycles.
3. Ongoing Monitoring and Feedback: Ongoing assessment to aid adaptive learning.
4. Shared Policy Decision-Making: Active participation of all stakeholders in policy development and review.

5. Equitable Resource Distribution: Fair distribution that matches set needs.

These areas operate within a plan–do–check–act cycle, thereby underpinning cyclic learning processes in governance. While UNESCO's guidelines (2009) and Ainscow's model provide critical starting principles, this framework strengthens the cyclic dimension driven by data and includes explicit accountability arrangements with various stakeholders (Li & Rao, 2023).

3.2 Quantitative Findings: Validation of the Framework

3.2.1 Participant Demographics

The validation phase engaged 50 teachers who were deeply involved in inclusive education. Each had at least two years of direct classroom experience, ensuring they brought both practical insight and reflective depth to the process. This experience threshold was intentional—it meant participants had weathered the realities of inclusion, navigated daily classroom challenges, and participated in broader school-level planning and evaluation (Supriyanto et al., 2024). In other words, they were not only implementers but also decision-makers shaping how inclusion takes form in their schools.

Their educational backgrounds were equally diverse. The majority (62%) held bachelor's degrees, 28% had earned master's degrees, and the remaining 10% possessed diplomas or other advanced professional credentials. This spread of qualifications meant the validation process benefited from multiple vantage points: those grounded in hands-on practice, those well-versed in research and policy discourse, and those who straddled both worlds. This diversity is particularly valuable in testing a management model, as it avoids the echo chamber of a single perspective (Inman & Roberts, 2022). It brings together voices that can question theory from the lens of lived experience and, conversely, ground practical approaches in well-established educational frameworks.

By design, this demographic composition ensured that the feedback reflected the layered realities of inclusive education. Teachers with higher degrees often contributed a nuanced understanding of policy frameworks and evidence-based strategies, while those with more practice-oriented training offered grounded, student-centered perspectives. When these are combined, the evaluation of a model like CQI is richer, more balanced between aspiration and feasibility, and more sensitive to the practicalities of translating management principles into real classroom improvements.

Table 2. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variable	Category	Percentage (%)
Education Level	Diploma	10
	Bachelor's Degree	62
	Master's Degree	28
Teaching Experience in Inclusive Education	2–5 years	46
	6–10 years	38
	>10 years	16

3.2.2 Item-Level Validation

The proposed CQI-based framework was distilled into 25 measurable indicators, evenly distributed across five domains: **inclusive leadership**, **data-driven planning**, **ongoing monitoring and feedback**, **shared policy decision-making**, and **equitable resource allocation**. These indicators were rated using a 5-point Likert scale, where one represented “very poor” and 5 represented “very good.” The results were striking: the overall mean was 4.46, and no single indicator fell below 4.20.

Such consistently high scores are rare in validation studies and speak to the model’s clarity, applicability, and perceived value in the school setting. In particular, the domains of *inclusive leadership* and *ongoing monitoring* emerged as especially resonant with teachers, perhaps because they align most closely with the levers of change educators see and feel in their daily work. Leadership commitment, for example, often sets the tone for whether inclusive education thrives or struggles, while ongoing monitoring provides the feedback needed to sustain momentum (Wayne K. Hoy, 2008).

The absence of low-scoring indicators is telling—it suggests that the framework avoided common pitfalls such as redundancy or overly abstract language. Teachers did not see it as an ivory-tower construct divorced from reality, but rather as a practical tool they could envision using in their schools. In the language of CQI itself, this stage confirmed that the model’s *plan* component is both conceptually robust and operationally viable.

3.2.3 Content Validity

To strengthen the framework’s academic rigor and contextual relevance, five seasoned experts in inclusive education policy and school management conducted an in-depth review. They applied Aiken’s V—a statistical measure of content validity—to assess the conceptual adequacy, operational clarity, and contextual relevance of each indicator. The resulting coefficient of **0.92** was well above the accepted benchmark for strong content validity.

What this number reflects in practice is a rare consensus. The experts agreed that the model succeeds in bridging the sometimes wide gap between abstract CQI principles and the moral imperative of equity. In their feedback, they emphasized that the inclusion of domains like *equitable resource allocation* and *shared policy decision-making* shifts the model from being merely aspirational to being actionable. This is crucial because inclusivity cannot remain a rhetorical flourish in policy documents—it has to be embedded in the way schools allocate resources, set priorities, and measure success (Mbon et al., 2023).

Such expert endorsement adds weight to the model’s legitimacy, making it more likely to gain traction in policy-making circles and among school leaders. In effect, strong content validity does not just mean the model is “right” on paper—it means it has a fighting chance to influence practice at scale.

3.2.4 Reliability

The framework’s internal consistency was tested using Cronbach’s Alpha, yielding a coefficient of **0.88**. This score far surpasses the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978), indicating that the indicators within each domain reliably measure the same underlying construct.

For practitioners, this is more than a technical footnote—it means that the tool will yield consistent results even when applied in different schools, with other teachers, and in various contexts. In inclusive education, where variability in resources, teacher preparedness, and student demographics is the norm, such stability is invaluable. High reliability suggests that school leaders could use the framework for longitudinal tracking, confident that changes in scores over time reflect fundamental shifts in practice rather than measurement error.

This reliability also supports the idea of CQI as an ongoing process. If you can trust the tool’s measurements, you can trust the feedback loop it creates—using it not just once for validation, but repeatedly to guide continuous improvement cycles.

3.2.5 Refinements Post-Validation

While the validation process was overwhelmingly positive, the CQI ethos demands that even strong designs be open to refinement. Both participating teachers and expert reviewers provided suggestions that were integrated into the final model.

One significant adjustment involved simplifying technical terms in the *data-driven planning* domain. Initially, some indicators used statistical terminology that might have been daunting for educators without formal research training. By rephrasing these in plain language—without sacrificing precision—the framework became more accessible and therefore more likely to be adopted.

Another key refinement enriched the *inclusive leadership* domain with concrete, real-world examples drawn from participating schools. Instead of describing leadership solely as a set of abstract competencies, the revised model now illustrates these through scenarios, such as a principal setting

equity-focused targets, a leadership team embedding inclusion goals into teacher evaluations, or a school leader facilitating collaborative planning across diverse staff. These examples not only clarify expectations but also spark ideas for immediate application.

In a way, these refinements are a meta-demonstration of the CQI process itself—listening to stakeholders, making targeted adjustments, and moving closer to a tool that is both rigorous and usable. By the end of the validation stage, the framework was not only academically defensible but also *field-ready*.

Table 3. Validation Results of the Framework

Domain	No. of Indicators	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Inclusive Leadership	5	4.52	0.35	4.20	4.90
Data-Driven Planning	5	4.45	0.40	4.20	4.85
Ongoing Monitoring & Feedback	5	4.50	0.38	4.25	4.88
Shared Policy Decision-Making	5	4.43	0.42	4.20	4.82
Equitable Resource Allocation	5	4.39	0.41	4.20	4.80
Overall Mean: 4.46					

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 CQI as a Strategic Lever in Inclusive Education

The findings of this study reaffirm the seminal arguments advanced by Deming (1986) and Juran (1992), who viewed Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) not merely as a collection of technical tools for monitoring performance, but as a holistic philosophy for adaptive and sustainable organizational change (Sioutou et al., 2022). In the context of inclusive education, this philosophy acquires particular relevance, as it reframes improvement as an iterative, participatory, and context-sensitive process rather than a prescriptive, top-down directive. The validation results—showing consistently high scores across all domains—suggest that educators recognize the value of CQI’s cyclical process of planning, action, reflection, and refinement, particularly when these processes are directly aligned with addressing the diverse and evolving needs of learners.

In practice, CQI offers a pathway for embedding inclusivity into the operational fabric of schools, moving it beyond the realm of temporary or isolated initiatives. Applied systematically, it enables educational institutions to identify emerging challenges—such as inequities in resource allocation or barriers to instructional accessibility—and to respond swiftly through targeted, evidence-based interventions. This

adaptive capacity is especially crucial in inclusive settings, where student populations and their needs are subject to continual change. By fostering a mindset that “nothing is ever final,” CQI positions inclusive education as a dynamic and evolving practice that grows in tandem with the communities it serves.

4.2 Bridging Structural and Managerial Gaps

The proposed CQI-based management model addresses several long-standing weaknesses within inclusive education systems, particularly the underutilization of school data, the irregularity of monitoring practices, and persistent inequities in the distribution of resources. As Ainscow (2020) has noted, these limitations often create a gap between the aspirational rhetoric of policy and its operational reality. By embedding data-driven planning, systematic monitoring, and equity-oriented allocation within a recurring improvement cycle, the model provides a mechanism for translating equity from an abstract principle into a measurable, enacted component of daily school practice.

The recursive nature of CQI also reduces the risk of reform fatigue. This common phenomenon occurs when schools engage in fragmented, short-term projects without established structures for sustained follow-up. Instead of relying on isolated interventions that lose momentum over time, CQI institutionalizes a rhythm of reflection and adaptation, enhancing system resilience in the face of leadership turnover, policy changes, or funding fluctuations. By aligning structural mechanisms with managerial processes, the model increases the likelihood that inclusive practices will endure and evolve, even in contexts marked by resource limitations or political volatility.

4.3 Inclusive Leadership as a Driver of Reform

The results of this study are consistent with the work of Leithwood and Jantzi (2005) and Theoharis (2007), both of whom emphasize that transformative leadership is crucial to achieving lasting and meaningful inclusive education reform. The high ratings in the “Inclusive Leadership” domain underscore teachers’ perceptions that leadership commitment serves as both a catalyst for advancement and a safeguard against regression (Bešić et al., 2017). Leaders who view diversity as a strategic asset—rather than a challenge to be managed—are better equipped to mobilize collective action toward shared educational goals. This reframing elevates equity from a compliance obligation to an ethical and pedagogical imperative.

Operationally, inclusive leaders cultivate trust by involving stakeholders in transparent, collaborative decision-making processes, while ensuring that institutional priorities remain aligned with the needs of marginalized learners. They champion innovation, support experimentation with alternative pedagogical strategies, and acknowledge incremental progress as a sign of meaningful change. Furthermore, they create enabling structures—such as collaborative planning teams and professional learning communities—that distribute leadership across the organization. Such distributed leadership ensures

that the commitment to inclusion becomes a shared institutional value, embedded in culture rather than dependent on the vision of a single individual.

4.4 Practical Considerations for Educational Administration

A key strength of the validated framework lies in its capacity to translate policy aspirations into actionable procedures. Recommendations such as conducting annual needs assessments provide schools with a structured mechanism for evaluating the adequacy and fairness of resource allocation, thereby reducing their dependence on ad hoc or reactive decision-making (van der Graaf & Siarova, 2025). Similarly, institutionalizing cross-departmental meetings for data review ensures that planning processes are both evidence-informed and collectively owned. In this way, inclusivity is operationalized not only as a guiding principle but also as a measurable and enforceable practice.

The framework also emphasizes integration into existing routines, minimizing additional administrative burdens while enhancing the purposefulness of day-to-day operations (Somerton et al., 2021). This embedded approach facilitates scalability, allowing schools with varied capacities and resources to adopt the model without significant structural disruption. By fostering continuous reflection and coordinated action, the framework encourages a culture of sustained improvement that remains responsive to evolving needs over time.

4.5 Policy Implications and Sustainable Educational Equity

At the policy level, the CQI-based model presents a coherent, evidence-driven strategy for advancing inclusive education that is both adaptable and measurable. By institutionalizing collaborative decision-making processes, it enhances transparency, legitimacy, and accountability—qualities essential for building trust among stakeholders (Khoo et al., 2017). Its emphasis on equitable resource allocation and continuous monitoring provides policymakers with tangible mechanisms for narrowing disparities in access and learning outcomes.

However, the long-term sustainability of educational equity depends not only on the robustness of the model but also on the political and institutional commitment to maintaining it. Policymakers must recognize that inclusivity is not a finite achievement but an ongoing process requiring continuous investment, professional development, and active stakeholder engagement. Embedding CQI principles into regulatory frameworks and accountability systems can help safeguard inclusivity as a living, adaptive priority rather than a temporary policy agenda. By ensuring alignment between operational practice and policy oversight, education systems can become more equitable, responsive, and capable of meeting the diverse needs of all learners.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to design and validate a Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI)-based management model that enables schools to deliver inclusive education in a manner that is both equitable and of high quality. The resulting model brings together five essential elements—inclusive leadership, data-driven planning, ongoing monitoring and feedback, shared policy decision-making, and equitable resource allocation—into a continuous plan–do–check–act cycle. Feedback from teachers and expert reviewers demonstrated strong agreement on the clarity, relevance, and usefulness of the framework (Aiken’s $V = 0.92$; Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.88$), confirming that it is not only theoretically sound but also ready for use in real school settings.

More than a technical tool, CQI emerges here as a way of thinking—a culture of steady, collective improvement that places inclusivity at the heart of how schools operate. The model directly addresses long-standing challenges, including leadership that treats inclusion as an “add-on,” the lack of consistent data use, and the uneven distribution of resources. By making improvement cyclical and participatory, it ensures that inclusive practices are not one-off projects but ongoing commitments that can adapt to changing needs.

For policymakers, this framework provides a practical roadmap for translating inclusive education policies into tangible progress. For school leaders and teachers, it provides a structured yet flexible framework for making informed decisions that benefit all learners. Ultimately, the success of this approach depends on sustained commitment, recognizing that building an inclusive education system is not a task with an endpoint, but a continuous journey toward ensuring quality and equality for every student.

Declarations

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Authors' contributions

All authors made substantial contributions to the development and completion of this research and approved the final version of the manuscript. Fahmi Syarifudin led the conceptualization of the study, developed the research framework, contributed to the research methodology, coordinated data collection, conducted data analysis and interpretation, and prepared the initial manuscript. Aan Komariah contributed to the conceptual development, research methodology, supervision, and critical review of the manuscript. Sururi contributed to the conceptualization of the study, methodological development, data collection, supervision, and critical revision of the manuscript. Taufani Chusnul Kurniatun contributed to the development of the research methodology, data analysis, interpretation of findings, and critical review of the manuscript. Dedy Achmad Kurniadi contributed to the

conceptualization and methodology of the study, supervised the research process, and critically reviewed the manuscript. Sarlota Singerin contributed to data collection, data organization, interpretation of findings, and preparation and revision of the manuscript. Kurnia Roosaliana contributed to data collection, data curation, interpretation of the findings, and manuscript preparation. Syifa Hanifa Salsabila contributed to data collection, data management, data curation, and preparation of the manuscript. Khimmataliev Dustnazar Omonovich contributed to data analysis, interpretation of the results, and critical revision of the manuscript. Rifky Aditya Ramadhan contributed to research methodology, data collection, data curation, visualization, and manuscript revision. All authors contributed to the critical revision of the manuscript for important intellectual content and approved the final version of the article.

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Availability of data and materials

The datasets used and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Ethics approval and consent to participate

This study received ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Educational Sciences, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia. All research procedures involving human participants were conducted in accordance with the ethical principles, guidelines, and regulations established by the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Educational Sciences, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia. The study involved minimal risk to participants because it employed a survey-based research design and did not involve any invasive procedures. Appropriate measures were taken to protect the physical and psychological well-being, privacy, and confidentiality of the participants.

Consent for publication

Not applicable.

Informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study. Participants were fully informed about the purpose, procedures, and potential risks of the research before survey completion. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants were free to withdraw at any time without negative consequences.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Clinical trial registration

Not applicable.

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