# CHALLENGES TEACHERS FACE DEALING WITH STUDENTS WITH ADDITIONAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN A MAINSTREAM CLASSROOM


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## Introduction

Inclusive education places students with Additional Educational Needs (AEN) in mainstream classrooms.This requires teachers to differentiate instruction and manage diverse learning and behavioural needs. Differentiated instruction is central to inclusion but difficult in large, time-limited classrooms. Although teachers support inclusion, many feel underprepared and under-resourced. This study explores teacher preparedness, key challenges, and supports for inclusive practice.




## Research Questions

The research questions below represent the core focus of the study

1. How prepared mainstream teachers feel to support students with AEN
2. The key challenges teachers encounter in inclusive classrooms
3. The supports that facilitate inclusive practice

## Methodology

01 A mixed-methods research design was used to explore teachers' experiences of supporting students with AEN.

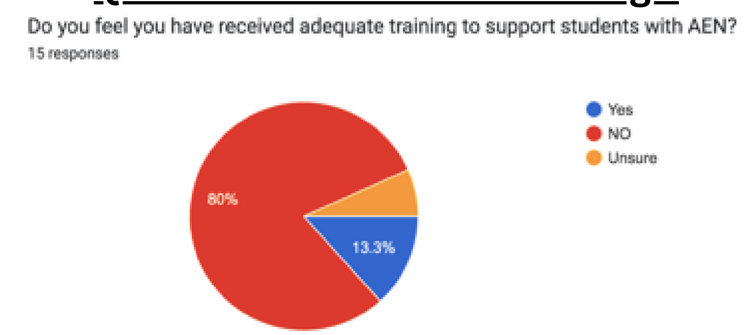
02 Participants were qualified post-primary teachers working in a mixed-gender mainstream school

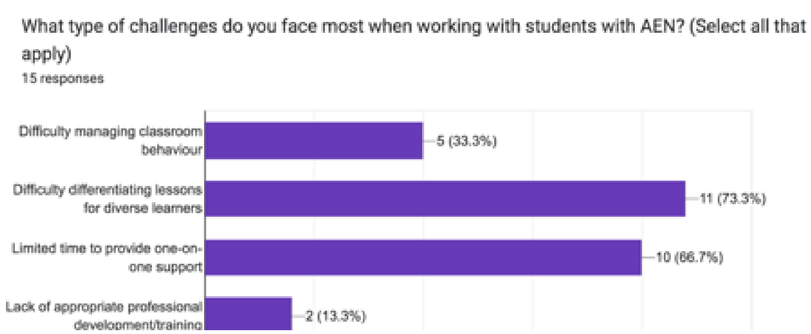
03 Quantitative data were collected through an online survey (15 questions) distributed to 20 teachers.

04 Qualitative data were gathered through two semi-structured interviews focusing on inclusion and classroom challenges.

05 Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis, with ethical approval granted by Hibernia College

## Quantitative Research Findings




## Results

Survey and interview data indicate that while teachers strongly support inclusive education, many experience difficulty implementing it in practice. 80% of respondents reported feeling inadequately trained to support students with AEN, highlighting a gap between policy expectations and teacher preparedness.
This lack of preparation was reflected in classroom practice, with 73.3% of teachers identifying differentiated instruction as a major challenge.Teachers reported that large class sizes, limited time, and curriculum pressures restricted effective differentiation. Teachers reported collaboration with SNAs reduced stress and allowed more effective inclusive practice.

## Analysis

The findings reveal a gap between inclusive education policy and classroom practice, particularly in relation to teacher preparedness and curriculum adaptation. Teachers' experiences align with research highlighting limited training and support as barriers to effective inclusion (Scanlon & McGilloway, 2006; Lambe & Bones, 2006). Difficulties with differentiated instruction reflect wider concerns that inclusive pedagogy is challenging without sufficient time and resources (Norwich & Lewis, 2001).Collaboration with SNAs and special education staff emerged as a key factor in sustaining inclusive practice

## Conclusion

This study highlights the significant challenges teachers face in supporting students with AEN in mainstream classrooms. A clear gap exists between teacher preparedness and the supports required for effective inclusion. While teachers are committed to inclusive practice, limited time, resources, and collaboration restrict implementation. Addressing these gaps is essential for meaningful inclusion, as effective support enables all students to thrive (Florian & Spratt, 2013)