

Inclusive Artful Learning (IAL) in School Education: Pedagogical Strategies & Implementation Barriers

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Abstract

This article explores Inclusive Artful Learning (IAL) as a pedagogical approach in teaching and learning. The purpose of this study is to examine existing pedagogical strategies within the context of Inclusive Artful Learning (IAL) to promote the inclusion of diverse learners in the mainstream classroom. This study also highlights the primary barriers that teachers face in implementing inclusive artful practices. For this purpose, a content analysis of art-based learning was conducted by reviewing policy documents, frameworks, guidelines, theoretical perspectives, and a few recent studies on inclusive arts-integrated learning and arts-based pedagogy. After the analysis, this study concludes that inclusive artful learning has strong potential to make the classroom more inclusive and engaging. Inclusive Artful Learning (IAL) can transform school education through pedagogical strategies. These strategies include fostering student participation, utilising assistive tools and information and communication technology (ICT), enhancing teacher capacity, allowing curricular flexibility, implementing assessment techniques, promoting stakeholder collaboration, and creating supportive school environments. This study also identifies challenges to implementation, including inadequate teacher training, resource shortages, infrastructural and technological issues, inflexible curricula and assessment methods, and inconsistent alignment between policy and practice. We can ensure its effective implementation through policy guidelines and UDL principles. After studying this research article, it will be helpful for preservice and in-service teachers to adopt and adapt strategies and activities for the sustainable inclusion of artful learning.

Keywords: Inclusive Artful Learning (IAL); Art Integrated Learning (AIL); Art Education; Inclusive Pedagogy; Diverse learning; Teaching-learning.

Received 05 May 2026

Accepted 15 May 2026

Published 20 May 2026

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Doi: <https://doi.org/10.64880/ijeagr.v1i2.19>

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sector.

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Introduction

Inclusive education is the most effective way to prepare all children with the knowledge and life skills needed to develop socially, academically, and personally (UNICEF, 2020). In this context, Sustainable Development Goal, 4 highlights the global commitment to ensure inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all by 2030 (United Nations, 2015). N.E.P., 2020, also emphasises that education is the most effective means of achieving social justice and equality. It plays a significant role in developing an inclusive community and society. Despite this, many children, including girls, persons with disabilities, refugees, and other marginalised groups, remain deprived of education due to social, economic, and cultural factors. The Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISEP+), 2023-24 report indicates that 16.8% of the 47.4 million children aged 6 to 17 years were out of school (Mehta, 2024). Children with disabilities face enduring battles to education rooted in discrimination, stigma, and policymakers' routine failure to address exclusion in schools (UNICEF, 2021). In this context, IAL emerges as a significant educational approach that combines arts-integrated learning and inclusive pedagogy in teaching-learning. This approach seeks to provide equal learning opportunities for diverse learners by integrating creative processes, such as the visual, performing, and literary arts, into the teaching of core subjects. It aligns with the ideas of various philosophers, scholars, and other eminent figures. The conceptual foundation of IAL is rooted in John Dewey's foundational 1938 work, *Experience and Education*, which outlines education as a process of active and aesthetic interaction with the world. Vygotsky's social constructivist theory also emphasises active participation and collaborative meaning-making.

IAL extends this by prioritising accessibility for students with disabilities, socio-economic disadvantages, cultural marginalisation, and others. Studies reveal that students face many challenges in learning complex concepts. The traditional teaching-learning method fails to engage students actively because it treats them as passive listeners rather than active participants, leading to lower retention and boredom. N.E.P., 2020 emphasises various innovative and experiential learning approaches to cater to students' needs and learning styles. Art experiences, both in visual (drawing and painting, clay modelling, pottery, paper crafts, mask and puppet making, heritage crafts, and others) and performing arts (music, dance, theatre, puppetry, and others), lead to a better understanding and construction of knowledge about different concepts (Eisner, 2002). The Seoul Agenda: Goals for the Development of Arts Education, 2010 ensures that arts education is accessible as a fundamental and sustainable component of a high-quality renewal of education. The Road Map for Arts Education, 2006 also outlines the integration of arts across subjects to build 21st-century skills like creativity, cultural awareness, social awareness, and empathy in learners. According to the N.E.P., 2020 art integration is a cross-curricular pedagogical approach that utilises various aspects and forms of art and culture as the basis for learning concepts across subjects. As part of the thrust on experiential learning, art-integrated education is to be embedded in classroom transactions to create joyful environments and to help students imbibe the Indian ethos. By integrating Indian art and culture into the teaching and learning process at every level, this approach

aims to strengthen the fundamental linkages between education and culture (National Education Policy, 2020, Section 4.7).

Thus, IAL enables active, expressive engagement, transforming learners into active constructors of their own knowledge in an inclusive classroom. IAL effectively implements the Universal Design for Learning framework (CAST, 2018) in diverse classrooms. The educational impact of arts-integrated learning can be analysed through sensory and cognitive experiences. This framework offers dimensions such as concrete objects for visually impaired students, drama-based exploration, and digital portfolios for neurodiverse learners to facilitate self-expression. The empirical efficacy of this approach is supported by longitudinal study data from the CBSE Arts Integrated Project (2021 to 2024), which showed a significant 15% to 25% increase in student retention and self-efficacy among disadvantaged demographic groups across 1,200 institutions. Based on the evidence and recommendations, IAL emerges as the most effective pedagogical approach for fostering inclusive education and should be prioritised in teacher training, curriculum, and policy to create inclusive learning environments.

Research Objectives

This study addresses the following objectives:

1. To examine the existing pedagogical strategies in the context of Inclusive Artful Learning (IAL) for promoting the inclusion of diverse learners within the mainstream classroom.
2. To examine the major barriers that prevent teachers from effectively implementing Inclusive Artful Learning (IAL) in the classroom.

Methodology

To fulfil the objectives, a content analysis within a qualitative research approach is used to gain an in-depth understanding and to identify, evaluate, and synthesise the literature. Content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use (Krippendorff, 2018). Accordingly, the researcher selected documents and frameworks related to arts-integrated learning and arts-based pedagogy for content analysis. The following documents have been selected and analysed, as presented below:

Table 1: Summary of Selected Documents Related to Art-Integrated Learning & Arts-Based Pedagogy

S. No.	Document Title	Year	Governing Body
1.	Road Map for Arts Education	2006	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
2	The Seoul Agenda: Goals for the Development of Arts Education	2010	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
3	ART INTEGRATED LEARNING GUIDELINES	2019	National Council of Educational Research and Training, New Delhi

4.	Art Integration-TOWARDS EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING	2019	Central Board of Secondary Education
5.	National Education Policy 2020	2020	Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India
6.	National Curriculum Framework for School Education 2023	2023	National Council of Educational Research and Training, New Delhi
7.	UNESCO Framework for Culture and Arts Education	2024	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation,
8.	UNESCO Framework for Culture and Arts Education: Implementation Guidance	2026	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

Findings

After analysing the documents based on arts-integrated learning and arts-based pedagogy, the findings and their interpretations have been systematically organised and discussed under the following subheadings: Pedagogical strategies in the context of Inclusive Artful Learning (IAL) to promote the inclusion of diverse learners in the mainstream classroom Pedagogical strategies are responsive, flexible, and learner-centred approaches designed to address the diverse needs of learners in inclusive classrooms. The IAL framework is primarily based on Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles. The IAL pedagogical strategies for fostering an inclusive classroom are outlined below.

1. Empowering Learner Participation in the Mainstream Classroom

Students play a vital role in nation-building. They help their peers feel comfortable and included. Students' active participation is a strategy for inclusion, learning, and empowerment. IAL reduces pressure and gives students greater confidence to participate freely. Students can engage through speaking, writing, and performing. The UNESCO Seoul Agenda: Goals for the Development of Arts Education, 2010 also recommends involving students in the planning and evaluation of arts programs to ensure that the curriculum remains relevant to their cultural identity and lived experiences. N.E.P. 2020 introduces the concept of Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs). It recommends creating special education zones (SEZs) in areas with high SEDG populations and establishing a gender inclusion fund (N.E.P., 2020, pp. 25-27). The IAL framework also addresses the diverse needs of learners across subjects.

2. Integrate Assistive Tools and ICT In the Teaching-Learning Process

ICT tools play a transformative role in inclusive classrooms by removing barriers, supporting diverse learning needs (such as dyslexia, visual impairments, motor challenges, autism, and communication difficulties), and promoting equitable access to the curriculum. ICT engages multiple senses, combining text, sound, images, animation, and movement. Students can understand, learn, and gain hands-on experience in expressive art forms through digital simulations, virtual museum tours, online performances, and multimedia projects. The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE),

New Delhi, mandates the integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to facilitate experiential learning for classes I to X. Schools are required to upload details of arts-based projects to the KALASETU Portal to ensure transparency and the sharing of best practices (CBSE, 2025). ICT is most effective when combined with teacher training, student choice, and alignment with Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles. In this context, NEP 2020 exclusively recommends the use of AI based software to track student progress and the establishment of the National Educational Technology Forum (NETF) (NEP 2020, sec. 23.1). In this context, the IAL contributes to the use of ICT in support of assistive technology to make the teaching and learning process inclusive. It also strengthens learners' ability to think critically, plan creatively, and solve problems by engaging in various activities on an online art learning platform. On the other hand, it suggests that teachers design creative lesson plans, e content, and digital portfolios across all subjects. It enables teachers and students to document performances, artwork, and creative processes through photographs, videos, blogs, and e portfolios. This also supports continuous and comprehensive assessment in AIL. It helps develop essential 21st-century skills: innovation, digital literacy, creativity, and communication.

3. Strengthen Educators' Capacity

Effective implementation of IAL requires teacher training and encourages its use across subjects. The teacher's role has shifted from a traditional information provider to a facilitator and reflective practitioner. Within this framework, teachers are expected to design activities that ensure the active participation of all learners by establishing direct collaboration between artistic expression and pedagogical concepts. The CBSE Teacher Training Guidelines state that every school should organise regular in-service training for teachers and quality assessment, including short yearly training; a 3-day in-house program at the school level and at least 2 additional days of training through a recognised institution or digital platform; and a longer five-day training once every three years for its entire teaching staff (CBSE, 2025). The Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan (KVS) is implementing this scheme in the classroom. In the same direction, NISHTHA is presented as a national continuous professional development initiative aimed at strengthening teachers' pedagogical capacity through structured modules on learner-centred teaching, competency-based learning, and critical thinking (Ministry of Education, 2021; NCERT, 2021). It also indicates that sustained professional learning expects teachers and head teachers to complete 50 hours of CPD annually, indicating that capacity building is viewed as an ongoing process rather than a one-time intervention (NCERT, 2022, p. 15). It allows educators and others to use platforms like DIKSHA, SWAYAM, and others to enhance and upgrade knowledge. Through in-service seminars and workshops, teachers can improve their knowledge.

4. Foster Stakeholders' Collaboration in the Teaching-Learning Process

IAL, due to its interdisciplinary and collaborative nature, requires collective planning, resource sharing, and institutional collaboration to ensure meaningful participation of learners from diverse sociocultural, linguistic, and ability backgrounds. Effective implementation of IAL requires active

collaboration among teachers, special educators, NGOs, local community members, professionals, students, school administrators, policymakers, and parents to plan support for learners with diverse needs and to adapt a flexible curriculum. It opens doors for local artisans, musicians, and theatre groups to partner with schools, boosting the local creative economy and giving students real-world mentors. The Department of School Education & Literacy, Government of India, and NCERT, New Delhi, recommend that teachers, school heads, and other stakeholders participate together in orientation and training on inclusion, disability, gender, and socio-economic disadvantage.

5. Enhance Curriculum Flexibility

Curriculum flexibility is essential for the effective implementation of IAL. Its effectiveness depends on its integration into the curriculum, rather than being an additional activity. IAL shifts teaching from rigid approaches to responsive, learner-centred practices. It provides space for teachers to plan, execute, and evaluate activities efficiently in the classroom. NEP (2020) strongly supports curriculum flexibility and inclusive education. The Seoul Agenda: Development Goals for Arts Education advances the view that arts education should be equally accessible to all learners, especially those belonging to marginalised, disadvantaged, and vulnerable social groups, to promote inclusive participation and holistic human development (UNESCO 2010). A textbook can transform the learning experience, making it enjoyable and inclusive. The content of the textbook can simplify complex language while preserving context, shorten text, and remove nonessential details. Diverse examples, stories, and perspectives from varied cultural and linguistic backgrounds will make the classroom inclusive and interesting. IAL helps learners understand individual knowledge systems, cultural diversity (festivals and exhibitions), and local traditions (regional dance and music).

6. Designing Learner-Friendly and Inclusive Textbooks

A textbook can include more craftwork visuals: pictures, timelines, infographics, graphic organisers, and concept maps. For example, this integration can include rangoli or paper folding, geometric patterns, music and rhythm in mathematics, drama and storytelling in language teaching, role play in social science lessons, and the use of diagrams or visual models to understand complex processes in science. The NCERT Art Integrated Learning Guidelines, 2019 also provide stage-wise suggestions, exemplars, illustrative activities, and pedagogical illustrations, enabling teachers to integrate them in the classroom. ICT can also be embedded by adding hyperlinks, videos, or an e-textbook. Formats such as audio, large print, and Braille can also be included in the textbook. The UNESCO Framework for Culture and Arts Education: Implementation Guidance, 2026 also emphasises practical inclusion, sensitivity, and flexible implementation. These adaptations will provide multiple ways of learning. In this context, IAL supports alternative forms of assessment such as portfolio assessment, reflective journal and observation, creative group project presentations, and dialogue-based activities.

7. Designing and Implementing Inclusive and Artful Assessment Techniques

Effective assessment techniques are crucial tools for evaluating and improving pedagogical practices. The IAL framework facilitates the adoption and adaptation of assessment activities, tools, methods,

and strategies. It provides a positive, flexible environment for learners with diverse abilities, learning styles, and languages. In this context, the Seoul Agenda: Goals for the Development of Arts Education, 2010 emphasises that assessment in arts education should value creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and expression. Effective assessment techniques include writing a song, an oral explanation, craftwork using waste paper, comic creation, poster making, role-play, and others. The Central Board of Secondary Education, in its policy document Art Integration: Towards Experiential Learning, 2019 indicates that, particularly in classes 9 and 10, arts-integrated projects will count towards internal assessment, reducing over-reliance on pen-and-paper projects. The IAL framework promotes both formative and summative assessment techniques. The Art Integrated Learning Handbook for Teachers (Classes VI-VIII), 2019 also promotes formative, process-oriented assessment in arts integrated classrooms. It suggests that when students engage in activities such as role-play, drawing, models, and drama, teachers should use observation, questions, and checklists to assess their conceptual understanding, cooperation, creativity, and communication skills. IAL supports continuous and comprehensive evaluation of learners in inclusive classrooms. An inclusive classroom environment ensures that every learner can participate, learn, and belong, regardless of ability, language, background, gender, or social condition. The strategies above are interconnected, evidence-based, and designed for effective integration into the IAL framework.

Barriers to Successful Implementation of Inclusive Artful Learning

Although specific provisions have been made for the successful implementation of inclusive artful learning, numerous challenges remain in effectively implementing it in the teaching learning process.

1. Inadequate Teacher Training and Professional Development

Teachers reported that the syllabus is very extensive, and due to limited classroom time, it is difficult to implement art-based activities. A lack of teacher training and guidance leaves teachers unsure about designing and conducting art-integrated lessons. In addition, inadequate resources and large class sizes make it hard to organise meaningful activities regularly. These barriers indicate that AIL needs stronger support in terms of teacher training, time, and materials to be effectively implemented in schools (Sharma & Surbhi, 2019).

2. Resource Constraints and Infrastructure Limitations

Schools often lack materials, space, and time for sustained art integration in the classroom. The Montessori case study reports that resource and infrastructure constraints are the primary barriers to arts integration in an inclusive classroom setting (Lillard, 2019). Studies find that schools often lack basic equipment, art materials, instruments, and space for music, dance, drama, and other activities. Due to limited funding and resources, art specialists were employed temporarily. As a result, teachers had difficulty providing quality art experiences, and students across the district did not have equal access to art education. This lack of resources and infrastructure often limited art-based activities to occasional events, making it extremely difficult to make them an integral and regular part of the teaching and learning process.

3. Curricular Rigidity and Assessment Constraints

In current educational structures, administrative pressure to complete the curriculum quickly and the primacy of examination results often hinder the integration of inclusive, artful strategies in the teaching and learning process. Because artistic activities are based on exploration, creation, and discussion, they require considerable time. Teachers may also face many challenges in implementing artful learning activities in the inclusive classroom. One of the major reasons is the constant pressure to complete the syllabus within a given timeframe, and maintaining students' high performance is also a task that focuses only on their external achievements.

4. Attitudinal and Perceptual Barriers

Teacher attitudes strongly influence whether IAL succeeds. Some teachers see art as secondary, optional, or suitable only for younger children, which reduces commitment to integrated practice. Others may value IAL in principle but feel anxious about their own artistic ability or about losing classroom control during creative activities. The literature on inclusive arts suggests that positive outcomes depend on a teacher's mindset that treats diversity as a strength rather than as a problem to be managed. Parents' attitudes at home influence students' thoughts and behaviour. Generally, parents in Indian households hold the view that doing arts is a waste of time. They regard it as a non-academic field. Their stance on the arts impacts students psychologically. It plays a crucial role in shaping a child's mindset towards an inclusive classroom. Students' positive attitude towards inclusion makes them feel secure and confident enough to stand on their own in their personal and professional lives as well.

5. Policy and Administrative Support Deficiencies

National policies and official documents strongly promote arts-based activities, yet support in schools is inconsistent. CBSE and NCERT, New Delhi, actively promote inclusive, artful learning; however, their translation into daily school practice remains limited. Several structural barriers impede the effective implementation of IAL in educational institutions. In most schools, teachers lack time for systematic planning; there is no formal coordination between subject teachers and arts teachers; and there is no leadership-level encouragement for the use of innovative teaching methods. Additionally, it is essential to create a collaborative learning community for teachers that provides opportunities to continuously innovate, reflect, and effectively develop and refine their teaching practices. Without this, inclusive artful learning (IAL) remains a policy ideal rather than a regular practice in an inclusive classroom.

Educational Implications

The study's findings suggest that the systematic adaptation of IAL can be strengthened through collaboration among teachers, students, parents and guardians, school administrators, and policymakers. Teachers can create flexible lesson plans aligned with Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to address diverse learning styles. School leaders can support local and traditional art forms in daily teaching to make learning experiential and contextual. Policymakers and administrators can integrate IAL with flexible schedules and adequate resources. For students, this structural shift will

replace the high-pressure, rote memorisation with stress-free, experiential learning that honours individual learning styles. This student centric approach can be further fortified when parents and guardians support holistic growth at home, bridging the gap between classroom instruction and domestic encouragement. It will help students care more about the environment, become socially responsible, and preserve their cultures. Collaborative art projects will be able to teach empathy, patience, and perspective taking. Finally, it connects the community and parents to the school by celebrating diverse cultures and proving that every child has valuable talents to share. Community members can attend school exhibitions or performances where children of all abilities perform together. Classrooms will allow students to bring their cultural heritage, folklore, and family traditions into their academic work, making parents and community elders active contributors to the learning process.

Conclusion

The study reveals that IAL is a significant pedagogical approach for promoting equitable, participatory, and learner-centred education. IAL deepens and broadens knowledge construction by supporting experiential, constructivist, and learner-organised teaching. It creates a positive, cheerful, and inclusive classroom environment. In this way, all learners feel welcomed, valued, safe, and able to participate in artful activities. IAL supports diverse learning needs, enhances creativity, encourages self-expression, and fosters experiential and collaborative learning. It provides opportunities for all students to participate in and explore different activities. It also transforms the curriculum, teaching methods, classroom practices, and support systems, removing barriers and ensuring all learners are valued equally. All policy documents state that schools should use artful, inclusive learning materials, assistive technology, and co-curricular opportunities such as arts and sports to support all students. Current pedagogical strategies include empowering learner participation, integrating assistive tools and ICT, strengthening educator capacity, fostering stakeholder collaboration, promoting curriculum flexibility, developing learner-friendly, inclusive and artful textbooks, and employing inclusive and artful assessment techniques. These strategies will make classrooms more inclusive and engaging for learners. The effective implementation of IAL faces several challenges. The effectiveness of IAL depends on moving from surface-level accommodations to systemic and cultural change in daily classrooms. If IAL is implemented effectively, with coherent policy, ongoing professional development, and community engagement, it will improve educational quality and students' holistic development (cognitive, affective, psychomotor, creative, and aesthetic).

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