



Teacher Professional Learning, Inclusive Pedagogy, and Social-Emotional Learning in Post-Pandemic Schools: A Comparative Mixed-Methods Study of Collaborative and Compliance-Based Reform Models

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ABSTRACT

Post-pandemic schooling has intensified concerns about student disengagement, learning loss, emotional well-being, teacher workload, and institutional resilience. While many education systems have introduced social-emotional learning and inclusive pedagogy reforms, their effectiveness depends substantially on how teacher professional learning is organized and sustained. This article compares two school reform models: a collaborative professional learning model and a compliance-based professional development model. Drawing on sociocultural learning theory, inclusive pedagogy, teacher learning scholarship, and social-emotional learning frameworks, the study analyzes institutional reports, teacher development records, classroom observations, student engagement indicators, attendance data, and school climate surveys collected between 2021 and 2025. The findings indicate that collaborative professional learning strengthens inclusive instruction, relational pedagogy, student participation, and emotional learning support more effectively than short-cycle compliance training. The comparative evidence demonstrates that teacher learning functions as a mediating mechanism between institutional reform policy and student educational outcomes. Schools that organized teacher development through inquiry groups, peer observation, reflective planning, and shared

pedagogical problem-solving produced stronger improvements in student engagement, classroom belonging, and adaptive instructional practice. This article contributes to learning sciences and educational research by proposing a framework linking teacher collaborative learning, inclusive pedagogy, social-emotional support, and educational resilience.

Keywords: teacher professional learning; inclusive pedagogy; social-emotional learning; post-pandemic education; student engagement; educational resilience; collaborative learning; school reform; teacher development; learning sciences

INTRODUCTION

The post-pandemic period has produced one of the most significant educational recovery challenges of the twenty-first century. Schools across diverse national contexts face overlapping difficulties involving academic disruption, student disengagement, emotional distress, attendance instability, teacher exhaustion, and widening educational inequalities. These challenges are not merely temporary consequences of emergency remote learning; they reflect deeper structural vulnerabilities within schooling systems, including fragile student support mechanisms, uneven teacher professional capacity, limited institutional adaptability, and persistent inequities in access to meaningful learning opportunities.

International organizations have repeatedly emphasized that educational recovery requires more than remediation of academic content. UNESCO, OECD, UNICEF, and the World Bank have argued that post-pandemic reform must address learner well-being, inclusive participation, teacher support, and institutional resilience. The educational problem is therefore multidimensional: students require academic recovery, emotional reconnection, social belonging, and renewed engagement with learning communities. Teachers, meanwhile, require sustained professional learning structures that help them respond to increasingly complex learner needs.

This article examines how teacher professional learning mediates the relationship between post-pandemic school reform and student educational outcomes. It argues that reforms promoting social-emotional learning and inclusive pedagogy cannot succeed through policy mandates alone. Their effectiveness depends on whether teachers are supported to collectively interpret student needs, redesign classroom practice, evaluate participation barriers, and develop relational pedagogies responsive to diverse learners.

The issue matters theoretically because it connects teacher learning with student learning. Learning sciences scholarship emphasizes that learning is socially mediated, contextually situated, and shaped by participation in meaningful practices. If student learning depends on interaction, belonging, scaffolding, and identity formation, then teacher professional learning must also be understood as a social and situated process. Teachers do not simply implement reforms; they learn how to reinterpret instructional goals, adapt pedagogical routines, and respond to complex classroom realities.

The issue also matters pedagogically because inclusive education and social-emotional learning require subtle forms of instructional judgment. Teachers must identify disengagement, respond to anxiety, support peer belonging, differentiate participation structures, and create classroom environments where cognitive learning and emotional safety are mutually reinforcing. These capacities cannot be built through isolated workshops alone. They require sustained inquiry, collaborative reflection, classroom-based experimentation, and institutional trust.

Existing literature provides strong foundations for this argument. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory positions learning as mediated participation within social contexts. Lave and Wenger's theory of communities of practice explains how professional knowledge develops through shared practice and collective meaning-making. Darling-Hammond and colleagues demonstrate that effective teacher professional development is sustained, collaborative, content-focused, and connected to classroom practice. Jennings and Greenberg argue that teachers' social-emotional competence shapes classroom climate and student learning. Florian and Black-Hawkins emphasize that inclusive pedagogy requires extending what is ordinarily available to all learners rather than separating students into deficit categories.

While previous studies emphasize the importance of teacher development, current educational scholarship remains limited in three respects. First, many studies examine teacher professional learning without sufficiently linking it to post-pandemic student well-being and inclusion. Second, social-emotional learning is often studied as a student intervention rather than as an institutional and pedagogical transformation requiring teacher learning. Third, inclusive pedagogy reforms are frequently evaluated through policy compliance indicators rather than through classroom interaction, belonging, and learner participation.

This study addresses these gaps through a comparative mixed-methods analysis of two school reform models. The first model is a collaborative professional learning model in which teachers participated in inquiry groups, peer observation, shared lesson study, reflective planning, and student support teams. The second model is a compliance-based professional development model organized around mandated workshops, standardized training modules, policy reporting, and implementation checklists.

The comparison is educationally significant because both models formally aimed to strengthen social-emotional learning and inclusive pedagogy, but they differed substantially in how teacher learning was organized. This allows analysis of whether reform effectiveness depends more on policy adoption or on professional learning culture.

The novelty of this article lies in its integration of teacher learning theory, inclusive pedagogy, social-emotional learning, and post-pandemic institutional recovery. Rather than treating teacher development as a technical delivery mechanism, the article conceptualizes it as a central learning system through which schools transform educational relationships and classroom participation.

The analytical framework guiding the study follows the relationship:

Teacher Professional Learning → Inclusive Pedagogical Adaptation → Relational Classroom Climate → Student Engagement → Social-Emotional and Academic Resilience

This study therefore aims to comparatively analyze how collaborative and compliance-based teacher professional learning models influence inclusive pedagogy, student engagement, classroom belonging, and post-pandemic educational resilience.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a comparative mixed-methods design to investigate how different models of teacher professional learning mediated the implementation of inclusive pedagogy and social-emotional learning reforms in post-pandemic secondary schools between 2021 and 2025. Two school reform models were selected because they represented contrasting institutional approaches to the same educational challenge: rebuilding student engagement, belonging, and learning continuity after pandemic-related disruption. The first case consisted of a collaborative professional learning model involving teacher inquiry groups, peer observation cycles, interdisciplinary student support teams, shared lesson design, and reflective school improvement meetings. The second case consisted of a compliance-based professional development model characterized by standardized training modules, mandated reporting, policy briefings, and implementation checklists. The theoretical-methodological alignment drew on sociocultural learning theory, communities of practice, inclusive pedagogy, and social-emotional learning scholarship, enabling analysis of teacher learning as a socially mediated process rather than a linear transmission of reform knowledge. Data sources included teacher professional learning records, school improvement plans, classroom observations across 40 lessons, anonymized attendance and engagement indicators, student climate survey summaries, curriculum adaptation documents, and institutional evaluation reports involving approximately 2,700 students and 186 teachers across the two reform contexts.

The analysis integrated comparative thematic coding, classroom interaction analysis, descriptive interpretation of engagement and attendance trends, and triangulated educational interpretation. Teacher learning documents were coded for evidence of collaboration, reflective inquiry, instructional adaptation, inclusion planning, and social-emotional responsiveness. Classroom observations examined teacher questioning, student participation, peer interaction, relational support, differentiated access, and emotional climate. Student engagement and attendance indicators were analyzed as contextual signals rather than definitive causal measures. Cross-case synthesis identified similarities and differences in implementation mechanisms, pedagogical enactment, and student outcomes. Triangulation across documents, observations, and institutional indicators strengthened interpretive validity, while ethical safeguards included anonymization of schools, teachers, and student-level data. The study is limited by its comparative case design and by the complexity of isolating reform effects in post-pandemic schooling, yet it provides analytically transferable evidence regarding how teacher professional learning structures shape inclusive and social-emotional educational transformation.

Findings and Discussion

1. Teacher Professional Learning as Institutional Learning Infrastructure

The comparative findings indicate that teacher professional learning functioned as an institutional learning infrastructure rather than a supplementary reform activity. In the collaborative model, professional learning was organized as ongoing inquiry into student participation, classroom belonging, and instructional adaptation. Teachers regularly examined classroom evidence, discussed student engagement patterns, redesigned lessons, and reflected on relational challenges. This structure positioned teachers as active interpreters of reform rather than passive recipients of policy.

In the compliance-based model, professional development was more episodic and administratively oriented. Teachers completed training modules, attended briefings, and submitted implementation records. While this model ensured formal policy coverage, it offered fewer opportunities for teachers to collectively investigate classroom problems. As a result, implementation was more uneven and frequently depended on individual teacher motivation.

The educational findings indicate that collaborative teacher learning strengthened pedagogical coherence across classrooms. Teachers developed shared language around belonging, participation barriers, differentiated access, and emotional safety. This shared professional discourse helped schools align inclusive pedagogy with everyday instructional decisions.

By contrast, the compliance-based model produced greater variation between policy intention and classroom enactment. Teachers understood the general importance of inclusion and social-emotional learning, but many reported uncertainty regarding how to integrate these goals into subject-specific instruction. This reflects a structural challenge within reform implementation: policy clarity does not automatically produce pedagogical capacity.

The finding aligns with communities of practice theory, which suggests that professional knowledge develops through shared participation, negotiation of meaning, and collective problem-solving. It also supports teacher professional development research showing that sustained, collaborative, practice-embedded learning is more effective than short-term training.

Institutionally, the evidence suggests that schools should treat teacher professional learning as a core condition of reform sustainability. Social-emotional learning and inclusive pedagogy require interpretive professional judgment. Therefore, reform models must create time, trust, and collaborative structures for teachers to learn from classroom evidence.

2. Inclusive Pedagogy and Classroom Participation

The second finding concerns how teacher learning models shaped inclusive classroom practice. In the collaborative model, teachers were more likely to redesign participation structures so that students could engage through multiple pathways: oral discussion, written reflection, peer collaboration, visual representation, practical demonstration, and digital response tools. Inclusive pedagogy was therefore enacted as expansion of learning access for all students rather than as separate accommodation for selected learners.

Classroom observations revealed higher levels of distributed participation in the collaborative model. Teachers used open questioning, structured peer dialogue, formative checks, and flexible grouping to support students who had become disengaged or anxious after the pandemic. Students were more frequently invited to explain reasoning, ask questions, and participate without fear of immediate judgment.

In the compliance-based model, inclusive pedagogy was often interpreted through procedural accommodation. Teachers implemented required supports but less frequently redesigned the broader learning environment. Inclusion therefore remained more individualized and reactive rather than embedded in classroom culture.

This difference has important cognitive implications. Inclusive pedagogy is not merely a matter of access; it shapes the conditions under which students can think, communicate, and develop confidence as learners. When participation structures are narrow, students with anxiety, language barriers, learning difficulties, or disrupted schooling histories may withdraw. When participation structures are flexible, students can re-enter learning through supported interaction.

The comparative evidence demonstrates that teacher collaboration helped educators identify hidden participation barriers. Teachers in inquiry groups discussed which students were silent, which tasks produced anxiety, which grouping patterns excluded learners, and which feedback practices supported confidence. This collective analysis enabled more precise instructional adaptation.

The findings align with inclusive pedagogy scholarship arguing that effective inclusion requires transforming ordinary classroom practice rather than adding isolated interventions. They also support sociocultural theory because participation in learning communities shapes cognitive development. Students learn not only through exposure to content but through opportunities to participate meaningfully in shared activity.

The policy implication is that inclusive education reforms should not be reduced to compliance monitoring. Schools require professional learning systems that help teachers analyze classroom participation and redesign instruction accordingly.

3. Social-Emotional Learning, Belonging, and Student Engagement

The third finding concerns the relationship between teacher professional learning and social-emotional learning. In the collaborative model, social-emotional learning was integrated into classroom routines, teacher-student interaction, peer collaboration, and academic tasks. Teachers treated emotional safety, belonging, and academic engagement as interconnected rather than separate domains.

Classroom observations showed that teachers in the collaborative model more frequently used relational check-ins, supportive feedback, structured collaboration, and reflective dialogue. These practices helped students reconnect with learning after prolonged disruption. Attendance records and student climate surveys indicated stronger improvements in belonging and engagement over the study period.

In the compliance-based model, social-emotional learning was more often implemented through designated activities or scheduled lessons. While these activities had value, they were less consistently connected to academic instruction. Students therefore experienced social-emotional support as an additional program rather than as part of the learning environment.

The evidence suggests that social-emotional learning becomes more powerful when embedded within pedagogy. Students develop confidence, persistence, empathy, and self-regulation through repeated participation in classrooms where relationships, feedback, and collaboration support learning. Emotional development is not separate

from cognitive development; it shapes whether students are willing to take intellectual risks, persist through difficulty, and participate in academic dialogue.

This finding aligns with educational psychology research emphasizing that motivation, belonging, and self-regulation are central to achievement. It also supports learning sciences perspectives that cognition is situated within social and emotional contexts. Post-pandemic recovery therefore requires relational pedagogy, not only academic remediation.

The comparative evidence further indicates that teachers need collaborative spaces to process the emotional complexity of post-pandemic classrooms. In the collaborative model, teachers used professional learning meetings to discuss student anxiety, disengagement, conflict, and classroom climate. This reduced professional isolation and supported more consistent responses to student needs.

The institutional implication is that teacher well-being and student well-being are interconnected. Schools cannot expect teachers to sustain social-emotional learning reforms without professional communities that support reflective practice and emotional labor.

4. Educational Outcomes, Reform Sustainability, and Institutional Resilience

The fourth finding concerns broader educational outcomes and institutional resilience. In the collaborative professional learning model, attendance improved more consistently, student climate survey results showed stronger perceptions of belonging, and classroom observations indicated higher participation. Academic improvement was gradual rather than immediate, but student engagement indicators suggested stronger foundations for long-term recovery.

In the compliance-based model, short-term implementation indicators were strong because schools completed required training and documentation. However, classroom-level change was less consistent. Some teachers implemented inclusive and social-emotional strategies effectively, while others treated them as external requirements. Reform sustainability therefore remained dependent on individual commitment rather than institutional learning culture.

This comparison demonstrates that educational outcomes should be interpreted multidimensionally. Post-pandemic recovery cannot be measured only through test scores. Attendance, belonging, participation, classroom trust, emotional regulation, and teacher capacity are also essential indicators of educational resilience.

Table 1. Comparative Matrix of Pedagogical Innovation, Learning Processes, and Educational Outcomes

Variable	Case 1: Collaborative Professional Learning Model	Case 2: Compliance- Based Professional Development Model	Empirical Evidence	Analytical Interpretation
Reform Orientation	Teacher inquiry and	Policy implementation	School improvement	Reform meaning

n	shared pedagogical problem-solving	n and mandated training	nt plans and training records	depended on professional learning culture
Teacher Learning Structure	Sustained collaboration, peer observation, reflective planning	Episodic workshops and implementation checklists	Teacher development records	Collaborative learning produced stronger pedagogical coherence
Inclusive Pedagogy	Flexible participation pathways for all learners	Procedural accommodations for identified students	Classroom observations	Inclusion was stronger when embedded in everyday instruction
Social-Emotional Learning	Integrated into classroom climate and academic interaction	Implemented through discrete activities	Lesson records and student climate surveys	SEL was more effective when pedagogically integrated
Student Engagement	Improved participation, belonging, and attendance	Uneven engagement improvement	Attendance and engagement indicators	Engagement depended on relational classroom conditions
Teacher Role	Reflective practitioner and collaborative designer	Policy implementer and compliance reporter	Professional learning documents	Teacher agency mediated reform sustainability
Institutional Resilience	Built through shared capacity and adaptive routines	Dependent on formal monitoring	Institutional evaluation reports	Sustainable reform required collective learning infrastructure
Education al Outcome	Stronger belonging, participation, and adaptive	Stronger documentation but weaker classroom	Cross-case synthesis	Policy adoption alone did not guarantee

The table demonstrates that the two reform models differed not primarily in stated goals but in mechanisms of enactment. Both promoted inclusion and social-emotional learning, yet only the collaborative model consistently transformed classroom practice. This indicates that educational reform depends on the professional learning conditions through which teachers interpret and enact policy.

The findings also suggest that institutional resilience emerges from collective capacity. Schools that create structures for teachers to learn together are better able to respond to complex student needs. Compliance systems may produce accountability, but they rarely produce deep pedagogical transformation unless connected to collaborative professional inquiry.

Conceptual Framework

Collaborative Teacher Learning for Inclusive Educational Resilience

This study proposes the following conceptual framework:

Teacher Professional Learning → Inclusive Pedagogical Adaptation → Relational Classroom Climate → Student Engagement → Social-Emotional and Academic Resilience

The framework argues that teacher professional learning is the primary mediating mechanism through which institutional reform becomes classroom transformation. Professional learning strengthens teachers' capacity to identify participation barriers, adapt instruction, and support student belonging.

Inclusive pedagogical adaptation represents the instructional process through which teachers expand access to learning by diversifying participation structures, feedback practices, grouping strategies, and classroom routines. Relational classroom climate then shapes whether students feel safe to participate, ask questions, collaborate, and persist through difficulty.

Student engagement emerges as both cognitive and emotional participation. It includes attention, effort, belonging, dialogue, persistence, and willingness to take academic risks. Social-emotional and academic resilience develop when students experience consistent support, meaningful participation, and adaptive instructional environments.

This framework contributes to learning sciences scholarship by linking teacher learning, classroom participation, emotional development, and educational resilience within a single post-pandemic reform model.

CONCLUSION

This article comparatively analyzed how collaborative and compliance-based teacher professional learning models influenced inclusive pedagogy, student engagement, classroom belonging, and post-pandemic educational resilience. The findings demonstrate that teacher professional learning is not peripheral

to school reform; it is the central mechanism through which reform becomes pedagogically meaningful.

The collaborative model produced stronger evidence of inclusive classroom practice, relational pedagogy, student participation, and social-emotional support. Teachers who engaged in sustained inquiry, peer observation, shared planning, and reflective dialogue were better able to adapt instruction to complex learner needs. The compliance-based model achieved formal implementation but generated weaker consistency in classroom transformation.

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in conceptualizing teacher learning as a sociocultural and institutional process that shapes student learning conditions. The article extends learning sciences scholarship by demonstrating that post-pandemic educational recovery depends on the interaction between teacher collaboration, inclusive participation, emotional safety, and cognitive engagement.

Empirically, the study contributes comparative evidence showing that reform models with similar policy goals can produce different outcomes depending on professional learning structures. Institutionally, the findings suggest that schools should invest in sustained collaborative teacher learning rather than relying primarily on workshops, mandates, and reporting systems.

Pedagogically, the study highlights the importance of flexible participation pathways, relational feedback, structured peer interaction, and integrated social-emotional learning. Policy makers should understand that inclusion and well-being reforms require time, trust, leadership support, and teacher agency.

The study has limitations. Its comparative case-based design limits broad generalization, and post-pandemic school recovery remains shaped by many external social and economic factors. Future research should examine longitudinal effects of collaborative teacher learning on achievement, attendance, teacher retention, student identity, and school climate across diverse education systems.

Ultimately, this article argues that educational resilience is built through professional and relational capacity. Schools recover most effectively when teachers learn together, adapt together, and create classrooms where all students can participate meaningfully in academic and social life.

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