



# Inclusive Assessment in Albanian Schools: Evaluating Practices, Challenges, and Measurement Tools for Students with Special Educational Needs

Shqipe Haxhihyseni<sup>1\*</sup>, Emilda Roseni<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Education, "Aleksandër Moisiu" University of Durrës, Albania

\* [shqipehaxhihyseni@uamd.edu.al](mailto:shqipehaxhihyseni@uamd.edu.al)

DOI: 10.26417/ 7a7t7q41

## Abstract

This study examines current assessment practices for students with special educational needs within inclusive education in Albanian schools. Using a questionnaire administered to 140 support teachers in pre-university education, the research adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining descriptive statistics with thematic analysis to explore assessment approaches, sources of information, and key challenges. The findings indicate that assessment is primarily based on formative practices, classroom observation, and documentation through Individualized Education Plans (IErPs), while standardized and adapted measurement instruments are largely absent. Teachers report professional uncertainty, difficulties in translating IEP objectives into measurable indicators, and fragmented practices across schools. A comparison with international experiences highlights a clear gap between inclusive education policies and their practical implementation in Albania. The study concludes that more coherent and equitable assessment requires the development of clear measurement instruments, targeted professional training, and stronger interdisciplinary collaboration. These findings contribute empirical evidence to the Albanian context and offer practical directions for improving inclusive assessment practices.

**Keywords:** inclusive assessment, special needs, IEPs, measurement instruments

## Introduction

Inclusive education is the foundation of contemporary education systems and aims to guarantee the right of every child to receive a quality education, regardless of their abilities, background or individual needs (UNESCO, 2017). In this context, inclusion is

not limited to the mere physical admission of students to the classroom, but implies active participation, differentiated support and a pedagogical approach that values and respects diversity (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2010).

Assessment is a key element of this process, as it serves not only to measure academic achievement, but also to document individual progress, inform teaching, and support the student's personal development (Black & Wiliam, 2018). Within this framework, the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) functions as a collaborative and flexible reference that aligns assessment and instruction with students' specific strengths, challenges, and learning trajectories (Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec [MEQ], 2004). Developed jointly by the school team, parents, professionals, and, where possible, the student, the IEP establishes clear and measurable objectives and defines appropriate supports, adaptations, or modifications. Consequently, assessment for students with special needs should be flexible, individualized, and closely aligned with the objectives of the IEP, as well as with students' pace, abilities, and ways of learning.

However, in Albania, the assessment of students with special needs remains a challenging process (CSL, 2021). The current system relies mainly on numerical grades and standardized exams, which often do not align with the principles of inclusion or with individual student objectives. Teachers report significant difficulties due to limited training, unclear guidelines, and a lack of adapted assessment instruments, resulting in fragmented and non-unified practices. These challenges are consistent with findings by Duka and Haxhihyseni (2022), who report that although teachers generally hold positive attitudes toward inclusive education, they face substantial obstacles related to insufficient professional preparation, inadequate support, and difficulties in adapting curricula and assessment to diverse learners. These concerns are further reinforced by the empirical study conducted with 140 support teachers, who emphasize the absence of reliable measurement tools, professional uncertainty, and the fragmentation of assessment practices.

In contrast, countries with a consolidated tradition of inclusive education, such as Finland, Switzerland and Italy, apply flexible and personalized assessment approaches: the use of portfolios, formative feedback, functional objectives and digital technologies that document personal progress (Sahlberg, 2011; Hollenweger, 2011).

In the USA and the UK, the IEP model defines not only the objectives but also the assessment method, providing a structured and standardized process of tracking student progress (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2010).

In this context, the aim of this paper is to examine the current challenges associated with assessing students with special needs in Albania. The study focuses on identifying the gaps and obstacles that hinder effective and equitable assessment within the inclusive education framework.

A second objective is to analyze teachers' perceptions based on data collected through a questionnaire administered to 140 support teachers. This analysis highlights the practical difficulties, professional uncertainties, and varied approaches teachers experience when assessing students with individualized needs.

The paper also seeks to compare the Albanian assessment practices with international models. By examining how countries with well-established inclusive education systems implement assessment, the study identifies key differences and areas where Albania can align with global best practices.

Finally, the study aims to propose new approaches for creating a more inclusive, flexible, and effective assessment system. These recommendations include standardized instruments, clear IEP objectives, professional development, and strengthened interdisciplinary collaboration.

## **Literature Review**

Contemporary literature on inclusive education emphasizes that assessment is a necessary component to ensure the participation and progress of students with special needs. According to UNESCO (2017), an education system is fair when it offers differentiated assessment methods that take into account the diversity of students. This includes not only measuring academic knowledge, but also documenting functional skills, social development and individual progress.

### ***Theoretical Approaches to Inclusive Assessment***

Black and Wiliam's (2018) studies emphasize the role of formative assessment ("assessment for learning") as an ongoing reflective process that supports student development. In this approach, assessment does not serve to punish or compare, but to guide teaching and increase motivation. Florian and Black-Hawkins (2010) argue that inclusive pedagogy requires flexibility in assessment instruments, ensuring that every student has the opportunity to demonstrate competences through different modes of expression.

Furthermore, an additional perspective on assessment in foreign language teaching is provided by Roseni and Koroshi (2020), who analyze the practices of Albanian and Italian teachers and highlight that despite the differences in contexts, teachers often rely on traditional forms of assessment that fail to adequately measure students' multidimensional competencies. The authors argue that the lack of clarity of competency criteria and the use of limited assessment tools create a visible mismatch between curriculum requirements and classroom practices, a problem that is more pronounced in the Albanian context. This finding supports the need for more flexible instruments and more comprehensive assessment approaches.

In line with this, Liedtke (2025) emphasizes that next generation learning (NGL) strategies, grounded in Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles, provide multiple means for students with special education needs to engage, learn, and

demonstrate mastery. By integrating technology, project-based learning, inquiry-based methods, and flexible competency-based assessment, NGL allows students to show their learning in ways aligned with their individual strengths and needs, moving beyond rigid, standardized assessments and fostering truly inclusive, thriving learning environments.

In addition, Roseni & Haxhihyseni (2025) argue that teachers' ability to assess students' competences is directly related to the quality of the professional training they receive. The authors show that the lack of specialized training for competence assessment creates gaps in the implementation of the foreign language curriculum and leads to fragmented, incoherent and often dependent practices on individual interpretation of teachers. In essence, their study highlights that continuous professional development is a key factor in ensuring fair, accurate and competent assessment in a contemporary curriculum.

### ***International Assessment Practices***

In countries with advanced models of inclusive education, assessment is individualized and based on development plans:

- Finland does not use numerical grades in primary education; uses personalized feedback, portfolios, and systematic observation (Sahlberg, 2011).
- Switzerland documents progress through digital portfolios and individual development plans (IDPs), which include academic, social and functional objectives (Hollenweger, 2011).
- Italy, legally, defines adaptations of exams according to the IEP-s (Individual Education Plan), allowing for different forms of assessment (European Agency, 2018).
- USA & UK, the IP (Individual Plan) model defines both objectives and assessment methods, ensuring coherence in documenting progress (Department of Defense Education Activity [DoDEA], n.d.).

These approaches demonstrate the importance of structured and tailored assessment tools (Poni, 2017), as inclusive assessment requires clear tools, operational guidelines, interdisciplinary collaboration, and the use of supportive technologies.

### ***The Albanian Situation According to Literature and Empirical Data***

Albanian studies identify the lack of adapted tools and training as the main challenges of the system (Haxhihyseni & Duka, 2022).

The MES guideline for IEP foresees individual assessment, but no practical instructions are provided for adapting the instruments or documenting semester progress (ASCAP, 2024)

Results from the empirical study with 140 support teachers confirm this situation, showing that current practices are fragmented, dependent on individual experience

and unsupported by standardized instruments. Teachers emphasize that IEP objectives are often not measurable, tests are not adapted and assessment remains unclear, subjective and emotionally difficult.

In this context, the findings of Roseni & Haxhihyseni (2025) take on even greater importance, as they show that the lack of targeted professional development for competency assessment is one of the underlying reasons for gaps in practice. This is consistent with the Albanian reality, where policies write about comprehensive assessment, but professional capacities to implement it are lacking.

These findings highlight a stark contrast between policies and practices, indicating that Albania needs a profound rethinking of the assessment system for students with special needs (Roseni, E, Haxhihyseni, S. & Selimi N., 2025)

## **Methodology**

### ***Research Design***

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to explore assessment practices for students with special educational needs.

Mixed methods research combines qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of complex phenomena (Ahmed, Pereira, & Kimberly, 2023). Qualitative methods, such as interviews, capture rich, contextual insights, while quantitative methods, like surveys, provide measurable and generalizable data. Triangulating these approaches enhances validity and allows for a deeper, multidimensional understanding, supporting practical applications in education, health, and social sciences (Love, H., et al 2022).

Quantitative data were collected through closed-ended items to capture demographic characteristics and general trends, while qualitative data were obtained through open-ended questions to elicit in-depth insights into teachers' perceptions, experiences, and challenges related to assessment. This design enabled triangulation and a more comprehensive understanding of the research phenomenon.

### ***Participants***

The study sample comprised 140 support teachers working in 9-year and secondary education schools across Albania. Participants were drawn from both rural and urban contexts, ensuring territorial diversity. Of the respondents, 69.3% were employed in rural schools, while 30.7% worked in urban settings. The sample was predominantly female (97.1%), with male teachers representing 2.9% of participants. In terms of educational level, 35.7% of teachers worked in Primary Education, 59.3% in Lower Secondary Education, and a smaller proportion in Upper Secondary Education.

Regarding academic qualifications, 76.4% of participants held a Professional Master's degree, 15% a Bachelor's degree, 7.1% a Master of Science, and 1.4% a PhD.

Professional experience was substantial, with 70.7% of teachers reporting more than 20 years of teaching experience, while the remaining participants had between 1 and 20 years of experience. The sample reflects a high level of professional expertise and broad geographic representation, enhancing the credibility of the findings.

### ***Instrument and Data Collection***

Data were collected using an online questionnaire developed and administered through Google Forms. The instrument consisted of two sections: (1) a demographic section and (2) three open-ended questions focusing on the assessment of students with special educational needs. The open-ended items were designed to capture teachers' views on measurement instruments, sources of assessment information, and key challenges encountered in practice.

The questionnaire was distributed electronically via a secure link. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and no personally identifiable information was collected. The use of an online platform ensured equal access for participants across different regions and facilitated efficient data management.

### ***Data Analysis***

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, as generated directly from the Google Forms output. Qualitative data from open-ended responses were analyzed using thematic analysis, following systematic coding procedures to identify recurrent themes related to assessment practices, the availability and adequacy of measurement instruments, professional resources, and daily challenges faced by support teachers.

### ***Ethical Considerations***

The study adhered to established ethical research principles, including anonymity, confidentiality, and informed voluntary participation. Participants were informed that the data would be used solely for research purposes and that individual responses would not be identifiable in any publications or reports.

### ***Limitations***

This study has certain limitations. First, the sample included only support teachers, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other educational stakeholders. Second, reliance on self-reported data may introduce subjective bias. These limitations should be considered when interpreting the results and point to directions for future research involving multiple data sources and participant groups.

### ***Results***

The analysis of data collected from a survey conducted with 140 pre-university education teachers in Albania highlighted a number of issues related to the assessment process of students with special needs. The findings were structured according to thematic analysis, focusing on three questions that directly address

assessment practice: the assessment methods that teachers currently use, the sources of information on comprehensive assessment, and the most common challenges encountered during this process.

### ***Current assessment practices***

The majority of teachers reported that they follow a combination of formative and summative assessment in working with students with special needs. However, the use of these forms is not structured in the same way by everyone and often depends on individual experience and personal interpretation of guidance documents.

A significant number of teachers stated that the assessment of students with special needs relies mainly on continuous observation and on measuring progress in relation to the objectives set in the IEPs. According to the respondents, these forms allow them to better understand the individual development of the student, but are not always supported by clear measurement instruments. One teacher writes: *"I use formative assessment almost every day, but I lack standardized tools that tell me whether I am measuring real progress or according to my perception."*

Another group of teachers stated that they use simplified or adapted tests, but emphasized that there is no unified guideline on how these tests should be adapted for students with special needs. As a result, adaptation often depends on professional intuition, personal experience, or the practices of colleagues. Some teachers state that classroom assessment remains "procedural," referring to the fact that they follow standard assessment forms, which are not designed for inclusive assessment.

In addition, some teachers stated that they use the student portfolio as an alternative assessment method, especially for fields where students show difficulties in traditional forms of measurement. However, according to them, the use of portfolios is not standardized and clear criteria for interpreting learning evidence are often lacking. This makes the assessment relative and often subjective, depending on the way the teacher analyses and interprets the materials.

To conclude, current assessment practices appear diverse but not unified, highlighting the need for adapted, standardized, and valid instruments for measuring the progress of students with special needs.

### ***Sources of Information and Professional Preparation***

Answers for question 3 showed that a substantial proportion of support teachers report limited access to reliable and comprehensive sources of information regarding the assessment of students with special needs.

Among the 140 participants, over 75% indicated that they primarily rely on personal experience and informal exchanges with colleagues as their main reference for assessment practices. Other sources mentioned included occasional training sessions (42% of teachers), isolated online materials (38%), partial or inconsistent



instructions from the Ministry of Education (35%), and consultations with support teachers or school psychologists (28%).

Although approximately 55% of participants had attended trainings on inclusive education, most teachers noted that these sessions rarely focused specifically on assessment. Topics such as the use of measurement instruments, adaptation of tests, creation of performance indicators, and systematic documentation of student progress were either briefly covered or omitted entirely. This gap leaves teachers underprepared for the practical demands of individualized assessment.

Several respondents highlighted limitations of the Individualized Education Plan (IEP). While 68% acknowledged the IEP's usefulness in defining learning objectives, many emphasized that objectives are often not formulated in measurable terms, making it difficult to track and evaluate student progress reliably. One participant commented: *"The IEP tells me what the student should achieve, but not how to measure whether he has achieved it."*

An additional finding is that nearly 40% of teachers reported uncertainty regarding the distinction between formative and summative assessment, particularly in the context of inclusive education. This suggests that professional preparation in assessment methodology remains fragmented and inconsistent.

Many teachers stressed that guidelines provided by the Ministry of Education are often general and insufficient to ensure consistent and fair assessment practices. In the absence of clear, standardized resources, teachers frequently develop ad hoc methods or improvise their own assessment strategies, which risks creating uneven practices and variability in the quality of assessment across schools.

### ***Main Challenges During Assessment***

From the analysis of answers under question 4, the most mentioned challenge is related to the lack of measurement instruments adapted for students with special needs. Teachers stated that they do not have clear tools to measure progress and that the grades they put are often subjective and depend on personal perception. One participant wrote: *"I am not sure if the grades I put represent real progress, because I do not have clear indicators."*

*Other challenges also emerge:*

### ***Lack of Standardization of Assessment***

69,4 %, of teachers emphasized that there is no standardized or unified model for assessing students with special needs in Albania. In practice, this means that each teacher tends to develop and apply their own individual assessment approach, based on personal experience, preferences, or available resources. Consequently, there are significant variations in how assessment results are documented, interpreted, and reported, which undermines consistency and comparability across classrooms and schools.



This lack of standardization also presents practical challenges for collaboration. Cooperation between support teachers and subject / content teachers becomes difficult, as each professional may employ different assessment methods, criteria, and reporting formats. Such discrepancies can lead to confusion in monitoring student progress, inconsistencies in feedback to students and parents, and difficulties in aligning interventions or support strategies. The situation highlights the urgent need for a cohesive assessment framework, including clear guidelines, standardized tools, and shared practices, to ensure that all students with special needs are evaluated fairly and systematically.

### ***Difficulties in Translating the IEP into Measurable Indicators***

A significant number of teachers (70% of teachers) considered IEP to be a useful document and necessary tool in supporting students with special needs. However, many also highlighted that the document is not sufficient on its own for guiding day-to-day assessment practices. A recurring concern was that a considerable number of objectives within IEPs are vaguely formulated and lack clear, measurable criteria, which makes it challenging for teachers to translate them into specific assessment indicators.

This ambiguity can lead to professional uncertainty and a sense of insecurity, as teachers struggle to evaluate student progress in a systematic and consistent way. Several respondents noted that, without concrete benchmarks or performance indicators, they often rely on personal judgment or ad hoc methods, which can create inconsistencies in reporting and feedback. In essence, while the IEP provides a foundational structure, its practical effectiveness is limited unless objectives are operationalized in a measurable and actionable manner, enabling teachers to confidently track, document, and support student learning.

### ***Emotional and Professional Challenges***

Teachers frequently reported experiencing strong emotional responses when assessing students with special needs. The absence of clear, standardized assessment instruments often contributes to feelings of uncertainty, indecision, and professional vulnerability. Many participants expressed that they struggle to balance fairness, accuracy, and individualized considerations, which can make the assessment process emotionally demanding.

One teacher reflected: *"Sometimes I feel like my assessment is more of a judgment rather than a fair process."* Such emotional strain highlights that the challenges of assessing students with special needs extend beyond technical or methodological issues. They also impact teachers' confidence, decision-making, and sense of professional responsibility, potentially affecting the quality of interactions with students. The findings underscore the need for structured guidance, reliable measurement tools, and targeted professional training that not only enhance

technical competence but also support teachers' emotional resilience in conducting fair and effective assessments.

### ***Lack of Interdisciplinary Collaboration***

Nearly 46.4% of teachers reported that collaboration among subject or content teachers, support teachers, and psycho-social staff is not consistently effective in practice. Respondents highlighted that while interdisciplinary cooperation is recognized as essential for monitoring and supporting students with special needs, in many schools regular communication and structured collaboration mechanisms are lacking.

This gap often leads to inconsistencies in how student progress is documented, interpreted, and acted upon, creating challenges in aligning teaching strategies, interventions, and assessment approaches. Teachers emphasized that the absence of coordinated teamwork can result in fragmented decision-making, where different professionals may rely on divergent assessment methods or interpret the same information in contrasting ways.

Such fragmentation not only affects the accuracy and reliability of reporting but also limits the ability to provide timely and targeted support to students. These findings point to the need for systematic structures, clear protocols, and regular interdisciplinary meetings, which would facilitate coherent assessment practices and improve the overall quality of inclusive education.

Category	Description	Examples	Frequency
Lack of measuring instruments	There are no appropriate tools for measuring progress	"There is no clear standard."	high
Unclear PEI adaptation	Objectives are not measurable.	"I don't know how to measure student achievement."	high
Low standardization	Practices vary among teachers.	"Everyone assesses in their own way."	average
Professional insecurity	Fear of unfair grading.	"It feels like I'm judging."	average
Insufficient cooperation	Inconsistency between teachers' roles	"We don't have common guidelines."	low-medium

*Table 1. Summary of the findings*

The results show that the assessment of students with special needs in Albania remains a difficult and insufficiently supported process. Assessment practices are fragmented, dependent on individual experience and not supported by a clear system of measurement instruments. The lack of standards and tools adapted to this category of students is the main challenge identified by teachers. In addition, emotional and

professional difficulties, together with the lack of interdisciplinary cooperation, affect the quality of the assessment process.

## Discussion

The discussion of the findings of this study highlights several interrelated issues that directly affect the way teachers assess students with special needs in Albanian schools. The results indicate that, although national educational policies promote an inclusive approach, actual assessment practices largely depend on individual teacher interpretation and often lack standardized or adapted instruments.

The *Assessment in Inclusive Settings: Key Issues for Policy and Practice* report underscores the importance of developing assessment practices that foster learning and participation for all students, particularly those with special educational needs (SEN), in mainstream classrooms. It advocates a shift from deficit-focused, medically-oriented assessments toward educational, formative approaches that actively inform teaching and learning. The report further explores how national policies and legal frameworks influence assessment practices and identifies both challenges and promising strategies for inclusive assessment. Recommendations are offered for policymakers, teachers, school organizations, and specialist teams to enhance learning outcomes through inclusive assessment (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2018).

Similarly, the book *Educational Assessment: Principles, Policy and Practice* provides a comprehensive overview of the role of assessment in education, emphasizing its evolution from primarily summative evaluations to a broader combination of formative, diagnostic, and performance-based approaches that guide instruction and student support. It examines foundational concepts such as validity, reliability, and fairness, highlights the importance of ethical and inclusive practices, and considers how assessment policies at both national and international levels shape classroom implementation and equity. Practical guidance is offered on designing and using assessments, including integrating technology and balancing diverse assessment types to support meaningful learning outcomes, while also looking ahead to future trends in educational assessment (Josephine, 2024).

These findings align with international literature, which stresses that effective assessment of students with special needs requires clear, flexible tools based on measurable objectives (Black & Wiliam, 2018; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2010).

One of the main findings of this study is the lack of adapted measurement instruments, which makes assessment subjective and uneven, often depending on the teacher's experience. In countries such as Finland and Switzerland, the assessment of students with special needs relies on specific tools designed to measure individual progress, enabling a fair and personalized approach (Hollenweger, 2011; Sahlberg, 2011). In contrast, teachers in Albania report improvising assessment forms due to

the absence of clear guidelines, creating a gap between inclusive principles and classroom practices.

Moreover, the results indicate that the Individualized Education Plan (IEP), although important for defining student objectives, is not always translated into measurable assessment indicators. Teachers often struggle to express student progress clearly when objectives are not formulated in measurable terms. This issue is consistent with other regional studies, which suggest that the IEP frequently functions as a planning tool rather than a practical assessment instrument. Schildkamp et al. (2020) conducted a systematic review of 54 studies to identify critical teacher prerequisites for effective formative assessment in classroom practice. Their findings highlighted the essential role of teachers in implementing both Data-Based Decision Making (DBDM) and Assessment for Learning (AfL).

Teachers need strong knowledge and skills, including data literacy, assessment literacy, pedagogical content knowledge, goal-setting abilities, and the capacity to provide timely and actionable feedback. Additionally, psychological factors such as teachers' attitudes and perceived control, and social factors including collaboration and support networks, significantly influence the effective use of formative assessment. These results emphasize that formative assessment is not an isolated activity but must be integrated into classroom instruction, necessitating shifts in teacher practices, teacher-student dynamics, and professional development programs.

Tutunaru (2023) similarly highlights that effective assessment and feedback are crucial for improving student learning. Reviewing 29 studies from 1980 to 2023, the research shows that formative assessment and constructive feedback—both positive and negative—enable students to identify strengths and weaknesses, develop self-regulation, and enhance motivation.

Best practices include delivering frequent, specific, and individualized feedback, training teachers in feedback strategies, incorporating peer and self-assessment, and utilizing technology to support evaluation. Collectively, these approaches foster a supportive learning environment that promotes continuous student growth and achievement.

Another important finding is related to teachers' professional uncertainty during the assessment process. Many teachers perceive the process as emotionally charged and difficult to implement fairly. This uncertainty, reflected in their responses, is closely related to the lack of professional support and specific training. Previous studies, including those of the Albanian authors themselves (Duka & Haxhihyseni, 2022) have emphasized that teachers' professional development is a key element that influences the quality of evaluation and their competence to make fair and informed decisions.

The results also revealed that interdisciplinary collaboration among subject/content teachers, support teachers and psycho-social staff is not always functional. This

creates a significant gap in the way information on student progress is documented and interpreted. In cases where communication between the parties is weak, the assessment risks not fully reflecting the student's developmental profile. This finding is in line with international literature, which emphasizes the importance of multidisciplinary collaboration as a condition for accurate and comprehensive assessment (European Agency, 2018).

Regarding sources of information, teachers report that they rely mainly on personal experience and on materials distributed in a fragmented manner. The lack of specific training for the assessment of students with special needs is mentioned as one of the main gaps. According to participants, the offered trainings often have a broad focus and do not address the technical aspects of assessment: the formulation of indicators, the construction of rubrics, the adaptation of tests and the use of alternative data collection tools. This suggests the need for policies more focused on the professional preparation of teachers in the field of inclusive assessment.

The findings also indicate that the assessment of students with special needs in Albania is at a stage where policy and practice are not synchronized. While the legal framework promotes inclusion, teachers do not yet have the necessary tools to conduct fair and evidence-based assessment. This gap between policy intentions and practical implementation has been widely documented in the international literature, especially in the context of education systems that are in transition towards inclusive models.

Another important finding relates to teachers' professional uncertainty during the assessment process. Many teachers perceive evaluation as emotionally charged and difficult to implement fairly, a challenge closely tied to the lack of professional support and specific training. Previous studies, including those of Albanian scholars (Duka & Haxhihyseni, 2022), emphasize that professional development is a key factor influencing the quality of evaluation and teachers' competence to make fair and informed decisions. Yet, the results also reveal that interdisciplinary collaboration among subject/content teachers, support teachers, and psycho-social staff is not always functional, limiting the potential for holistic student support.

In this regard, international research provides valuable insights. Borg and Drange (2019), through a literature review and case studies in Norwegian elementary schools, found that interprofessional collaboration, particularly involving social workers and school nurses, produced small-to-moderate positive effects on student outcomes such as behavior, attendance, self-efficacy, and academic achievement. More importantly, school-wide initiatives like social and emotional learning programs demonstrated stronger and more lasting impacts by improving school climate, reducing problem behavior, and enhancing teachers' ability to support diverse student needs.

Recent findings from Bosnia further highlight the evolving role of psychosocial support in schools. Bjelopoljać and Marjanović (2025) examined how teachers'

psychosocial support influences adolescents' socio-emotional competences in Una-Sana Canton. Surveying 73 teachers, they discovered that students aged 12–15 particularly need guidance in self-awareness, self-management, social skills, responsible decision-making, and social awareness. The authors conclude that art-based psychosocial teacher training not only enhances student outcomes but also strengthens teacher well-being, recommending its expansion to all educators.

Taken together, these findings illustrate a shift: while earlier studies emphasized the need for professional development and functional collaboration to reduce uncertainty in teaching and assessment, more recent research emphasizes the importance of structured, innovative training programs—such as art-based psychosocial approaches—that can simultaneously improve student socio-emotional competences and teacher satisfaction.

This not only affects the quality of the assessment, but also the professional self-confidence of the teacher. At this point, the scientific literature emphasizes that the development of clear and valid instruments is a fundamental element to reduce subjectivity and increase the transparency of the assessment process.

The discussion of the findings indicates that, while the Albanian education system has made notable progress toward inclusive education, significant gaps persist in the area of assessment practices for students with special educational needs. Current approaches tend to prioritize access and placement, whereas assessment remains fragmented, largely informal, and insufficiently standardized. As a result, existing practices often fail to capture students' actual progress, functional abilities, and individual learning trajectories in a reliable and comparable manner.

To move toward an assessment system that genuinely reflects the learning outcomes and developmental progress of students with special educational needs, a systemic and coordinated shift in practice is required. Central to this shift is the development of standardized assessment instruments that are aligned with inclusive education principles and adapted to diverse categories of need. Such instruments would support consistency across schools while allowing for flexibility in individual evaluation. In parallel, Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) must be revised to ensure that learning objectives are clearly formulated, functional, and measurable, enabling ongoing monitoring and evidence-based decision-making.

Equally critical is the strengthening of teachers' professional development in inclusive assessment. Targeted training should focus on the use of assessment tools, interpretation of data, and alignment between assessment outcomes and instructional strategies. Furthermore, effective assessment cannot be achieved in isolation; therefore, enhanced interdisciplinary collaboration among support teachers, subject teachers, school psychologists, and other specialists is essential to ensure a holistic understanding of students' academic, social, and emotional development.

Finally, the establishment of clear and coherent guidelines from educational authorities is necessary to support consistent implementation at the school level. Such guidance would help reduce variability in assessment practices, clarify roles and responsibilities, and promote alignment between national policy objectives and classroom-level practice. Collectively, these measures highlight the need for a comprehensive reassessment of current assessment frameworks and underscore the importance of sustained institutional support to advance inclusive assessment in the Albanian educational context.

## **Conclusion**

The results of the study indicate that, despite notable progress toward inclusive education, the assessment of students with special educational needs in Albania remains a complex and insufficiently structured process. While the national legal and policy framework formally endorses inclusion, the practical realities of assessment reveal persistent challenges related to the absence of adapted measurement tools, limited methodological guidance, and fragmented professional practices. Data collected from 140 support teachers suggest that individual assessment is largely shaped by personal experience and professional judgment rather than by the systematic use of standardized and validated instruments.

Teachers consistently report difficulties in translating Individualized Education Plan (IEP) objectives into clear and measurable indicators, adapting assessment tasks to diverse learner profiles, and documenting student progress in a systematic manner. As a result, assessment practices tend to be uneven across schools and, in some cases, subjective in nature. These challenges contribute to professional uncertainty and emotional strain among teachers, highlighting that the lack of appropriate assessment instruments is not merely a technical shortcoming but also a factor that influences teachers' sense of responsibility, confidence, and the quality of teacher-student interactions.

When compared with international practices, a clear contrast emerges. Education systems that have successfully institutionalized inclusive education rely on coherent assessment frameworks that integrate measurable objectives, structured rubrics, portfolios, and digital tools to monitor progress over time. Such approaches enhance transparency, consistency, and equity, ensuring that assessment serves both pedagogical and developmental purposes for all learners. In the Albanian context, the absence of a similarly structured assessment approach creates a noticeable gap between inclusive education policies and their implementation in everyday school practice, underscoring the need for systemic reform in assessment design and support mechanisms.

## **Recommendations**

To improve the current situation, it is recommended that educational policy frameworks and responsible institutions place greater emphasis on the development



of standardized assessment instruments that are explicitly adapted to different categories of special educational needs. Such instruments should be flexible enough to accommodate individual differences while maintaining consistency across schools, ensuring fairness, comparability, and reliability in assessment practices.

Equally important is the strengthening of teachers' professional training in the area of comprehensive assessment. Training programs should move beyond theoretical orientations and include practical examples, clearly defined and measurable indicators, and systematic methods for documentation. This would enable teachers to assess student progress more accurately and to align assessment outcomes with instructional planning and individualized support.

In addition, Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) require careful review and refinement. Objectives within IEPs should be clearly formulated, functional, and measurable, allowing for continuous monitoring of student progress. Well-defined goals not only support more meaningful assessment but also enhance communication among teachers, specialists, and parents regarding students' learning trajectories.

Another critical recommendation concerns the strengthening of interdisciplinary cooperation. Effective assessment of students with special educational needs depends on collaboration among teachers, school psychologists, support teachers, and other specialists. Such cooperation provides a more holistic understanding of students' academic, social, and emotional development and reduces the risk of fragmented or inconsistent evaluations.

Finally, the integration of digital technologies should be prioritized to support the documentation of student progress and the use of learning analytics. Digital tools can facilitate systematic data collection, improve transparency, and enable evidence-based decision-making in both assessment and instructional adaptation.

These recommendations are consistent with findings from other countries that have successfully transitioned toward inclusive education models. They suggest that Albania has the potential to develop a fairer and more effective assessment system for students with special educational needs by integrating international best practices and grounding reforms in a systematic analysis of current practices.

The assessment of students with special needs in Albania requires deep structural reform and sustained professional support. Only through the use of clear, unified assessment instruments and coherent practices can an assessment system be established that genuinely reflects students' progress, abilities, and individual potential.

**Acknowledgements.** We would like to express our sincere gratitude to all individuals and institutions who contributed to the successful completion of this study, conducted within the framework of the READ Project, Cohort 4, entitled *"Enhancing Inclusive Assessment Practices for Students with IEPs: Supporting English Language Proficiency and Equity in Education."* This research would not have been possible

without the institutional, financial, and professional support provided throughout its various stages. In particular, we gratefully acknowledge the financial support and institutional backing provided by NASRI (National Agency for Scientific Research and Innovation - (<https://arsimi.gov.al/institucionet-e-mas/>) and READ – AADF (<https://www.aadf.org/>), whose commitment to advancing research and inclusive educational practices in Albania has been instrumental in enabling this study. Their support created the necessary conditions for systematic data collection, analysis, and dissemination of findings. Our profound appreciation is also extended to the participating schools and support teachers, whose openness, collaboration, and professional engagement were essential to the realization of this research.

## References

- [1] Ahmed, A., Pereira, L., & Kimberly, J. (2024). Mixed methods research: Combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches. *Civil Engineer and Researcher*.
- [2] ASCAP. (2024). Zbatimi i kurrikulës për nxënësit me aftësi të kufizuara. <https://www.ascap.edu.al/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Zbatimi-i-kurrikules-per-femijet-me-aftesi-te-kufizuar-ne-AP.pdf>
- [3] Bjelopoljak, A., & Marjanović, S. (2025). The impact of teachers' psychosocial support on students' socio-emotional competences: The HEART program in Bosnia and Herzegovina. *Interdisciplinary Description of Complex Systems*, 23(4), 354–364. <https://doi.org/10.7906/indecs.23.4.3>
- [4] Black, P., & Wiliam, D. (2018). Inside the black box: Raising standards through classroom assessment. *GL Assessment*.
- [5] Borg, E., & Drange, I. (2019). Interprofessional collaboration in school: Effects on teaching and learning. *Improving Schools*, 22(3), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1365480219864812>
- [6] Center for School Leadership. (2021). Inclusive education in Albania: Analytic study. [https://csl.edu.al/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/inclusive\\_education\\_in\\_albania\\_-\\_analytic\\_study.pdf](https://csl.edu.al/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/inclusive_education_in_albania_-_analytic_study.pdf)
- [7] Department of Defense Education Activity. (n.d.). Individual development plan (IDP) process. <https://www.dodea.edu/offices/human-resources/work-dodea/individual-development-plan-idp-process>
- [8] Duka, A., & Haxhihyseni, S. (2022). Teacher attitudes and challenges in inclusive classrooms. In *Proceedings of the 4th International Conference on Modern Research in Education, Teaching and Learning*. <https://www.dpublication.com/abstract-of-4th-icmetl/48-10407/>
- [9] European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education. (2018). Inclusive assessment frameworks across Europe. <https://www.european-agency.org/resources/publications/special-education-across-europe-2003>

- [10] European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education. (2018). Assessment in inclusive settings: Key issues for policy and practice. [https://www.european-agency.org/sites/default/files/assessment-in-inclusive-settings-key-issues-for-policy-and-practice\\_Assessment-EN.pdf](https://www.european-agency.org/sites/default/files/assessment-in-inclusive-settings-key-issues-for-policy-and-practice_Assessment-EN.pdf)
- [11] Florian, L., & Black-Hawkins, K. (2010). Exploring inclusive pedagogy. *British Educational Research Journal*, 37(5), 813–828. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01411926.2010.501096>
- [12] Haxhihyseni, S., & Duka, A. (2022). Challenges of teachers in inclusive classes, preschool and primary education in Albania. Në Proceedings of the 4th World Conference on Research in Teaching and Education. <https://www.dpublication.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/83-6492.pdf>
- [13] Hollenweger, J. (2011). Development of an ICF-based eligibility procedure for education in Switzerland. *BMC Public Health*, 11(Suppl. 4), S7. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-11-S4-S7>
- [14] Josephine, E. (2024). Educational assessment: Principles, policy, and practice. Infinity Publication Pvt. Ltd.
- [15] Liedtke, K. (2025, November 19). Create inclusive, thriving learning environments for students with special education needs. Modern Classrooms Project. <https://www.nextgenlearning.org/articles/inclusive-thriving-learning-environments-for-students-with-special-education-needs>
- [16] Love, H., Cook, B., & Cook, L. (2022). Mixed-methods approaches in special education research. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*, 37. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ldrp.12295>
- [17] Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec. (2004). Common individualized education plan framework. <https://rcpaq.org/en/information/parent-participation-organization-ppo-2/>
- [18] Poni, M. (2017). Best practices for inclusive education for children with special education needs in Albania. Save the Children. <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/best-practices-inclusive-education-children-special-education-needs-albania>
- [19] Roseni, E., & Haxhihyseni, S. (2025). The role of teachers' professional development in assessing students' competencies in the foreign language curriculum. *Journal of Education, Culture and Society*, 16(2), 567–583.
- [20] Roseni, E., & Haxhihyseni, S. (2025). The role of teachers' professional development in assessing students' competencies in the foreign language curriculum. *Journal of Education, Culture and Society*, 16(2), 567–583.
- [21] Roseni, E., Haxhihyseni, S., & Selimi, N. (2025, October). ALBATEST – Formative language assessment tool for ages 7–15 [Paper presentation]. READ International Scientific Conference, Tirana, Albania.
- [22] Roseni, E., & Koroshi, A. (2020). Assessment practices of Albanian and Italian teachers in English classrooms. *English Language Teaching and Linguistics Studies*, 2(2). <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.1234567>

- [23] Sahlberg, P. (2011). Finnish lessons: What can the world learn from educational change in Finland? Teachers College Press.
- [24] Schildkamp, K., van der Kleij, F. M., Heitink, M. C., Kippers, W. B., & Veldkamp, B. P. (2020). Formative assessment: A systematic review of critical teacher prerequisites for classroom practice. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 103, 101602.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2020.101602>
- [25] Tutunaru, T. (2023). Improving assessment and feedback in the learning process: Directions and best practices. *Research and Education*, 8, 38–51.
- [26] UNESCO. (2017). A guide for ensuring inclusion and equity in education. UNESCO. <https://www.minedu.gov.gr/publications/docs2023/eidiki-agogi/A.%20UNESCO%20Guide%202017.pdf>