

From Segregation to Integration: Operationalising Inclusive Education Through Institutional Innovation and Leadership

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Abstract: The global shift towards inclusive education, driven by international human rights frameworks including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) Article 24 and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), demands systemic transformation driven by visionary leadership and institutional innovation. This paper provides a critical comparative analysis of the inclusive education frameworks in two island nations: Mauritius and Vanuatu. Contextualised for the national conference "Inclusivity in Education: Bridging Theory and Praxis," this study examines how divergent models of leadership operationalise inclusive education. Utilising qualitative document analysis and comparative-case-study methodology, the study contrasts Mauritius's centralised Special Education Needs Authority (SENA) with Vanuatu's recent university-centered, capacity-building approach through the National University of Vanuatu. Findings reveal that Mauritius leverages strong institutional leadership to pioneer dual-enrollment models and specialised resource centres, while Vanuatu innovates through systemic teacher training integration and the newly established Inclusive Education Resource Centre (IERC). The paper proposes strategic bilateral collaboration and actionable recommendations to bridge the persistent gap between inclusive education theory and classroom praxis, emphasising that effective inclusion requires both structural innovation and pedagogical capacity.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Educational Leadership, Institutional Innovation, Special Education Needs Authority (SENA), CRPD Article 24, SDG 4, Mauritius, Vanuatu, Dual-Enrollment.

1. Introduction

Inclusive education has emerged as a central global priority, fundamentally shaped by international human rights instruments. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), ratified globally, explicitly mandates in Article 24 that states recognise the right of persons with disabilities to education without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity [1]. Furthermore, Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) aims to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" [2].

However, the translation of these theoretical commitments into classroom praxis remains a profound challenge globally. Bridging this theory-praxis gap requires more than progressive

policy formulation; it demands visionary educational leadership and institutional innovation. This paper explores this dynamic through a comparative analysis of two distinct island nations: Mauritius and Vanuatu.

While both nations face the unique geographical and resource constraints characteristic of island states, they have adopted divergent leadership models to operationalise inclusive education. Mauritius has pursued a centralised, authority-driven approach characterised by structural innovations like dual-enrollment, spearheaded by strong institutional figures. Conversely, Vanuatu has recently pivoted toward a decentralised, capacity-building model, heavily investing in teacher preparation through its national university.

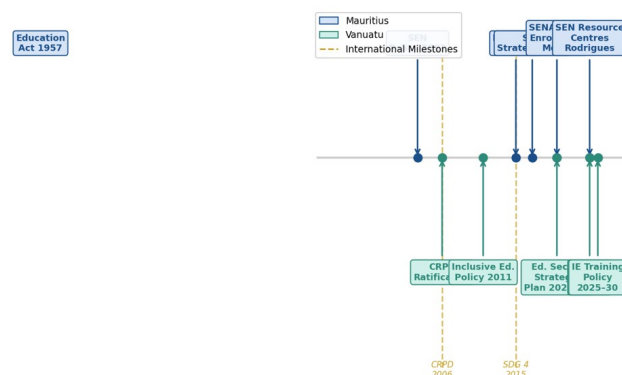


Fig. 1. The comparative policy timeline illustrates the divergent legislative pathways taken by Mauritius and Vanuatu over the past three decades

The primary objective of this study is to critically examine how these contrasting models of leadership and institutional innovation address the persistent gaps between policy intent and implementation outcomes. By mapping these approaches against established international research frameworks, the paper explores how Mauritius and Vanuatu can collaborate and learn from each other's models to actualise the rights enshrined in the CRPD and SDG 4.

2. Methodology and Research Framework

This study employs a qualitative comparative policy analysis

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methodology, heavily informed by the comparative-case-study framework utilised in international inclusive education research by scholars such as Professor Steve Sider [3]. Sider's research, which spans Canada, Mauritius, and the Caribbean, emphasises the critical role of school and systemic leadership in fostering inclusive cultures and bridging the policy-practice divide [3].

The research relies on a comprehensive review of legislative documents, government reports, and peer-reviewed scholarly literature pertaining to inclusive education in both nations. For Mauritius, the analysis focuses on the SEN Strategy 2017 and the operational framework of the Special Education Needs Authority (SENA) [4]. For Vanuatu, key documents include the Vanuatu Inclusive Education Policy (2011), the recent Inclusive Education and Training Policy (2025-2030), and reports detailing the establishment of the Inclusive Education Resource Centre (IERC) [5], [6].

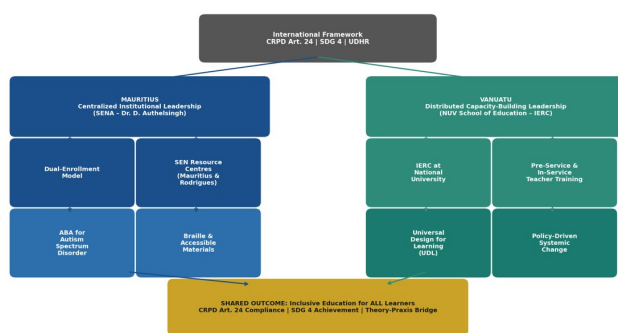


Fig. 2. The dual-pathway leadership model illustrates the conceptual framework guiding this comparative analysis

The analytical framework evaluates how leadership drives institutional innovation, focusing on structural adaptations (e.g., dual-enrollment), capacity building (e.g., teacher training), and alignment with international standards (CRPD and SDG 4).

3. The Mauritian Context: Institutional Leadership and Structural Innovation

The Mauritian approach to inclusive education is characterised by strong centralised leadership and targeted structural innovations designed to integrate a historically segregated system.

A. Centralised Leadership: The SEN Authority

A cornerstone of the Mauritian framework is the Special Education Needs Authority (SENA). SENAs represent a centralised institutional effort to manage, regulate, and monitor special education across the island. Under my tenure as Director, SENAs sought to pioneer innovative approaches to operationalise inclusive education principles in practice [7].

Research by Sider and others highlights that effective inclusive leadership requires moving beyond administrative management to pedagogical transformation [3]. The leadership approach at SENAs actively challenged the rigid boundaries between mainstream and special education, recognising that true inclusion requires systemic flexibility.

B. Structural Innovations: The Dual-Enrollment Model

Rather than accepting the status quo of 71 parallel Special Education Needs schools (predominantly run by NGOs), the Mauritian model under SENAs promoted a dual-enrollment framework. This structural innovation allows students attending NGO-run special schools to simultaneously secure seats in mainstream primary and secondary inclusive setups [7]. This approach pragmatically bridges the theory-praxis gap by providing the specialised support of the NGO sector while ensuring the social integration and academic exposure of the mainstream environment.

Further practical innovations introduced include:

- *SEN Resource Centres*: Established in Mauritius and Rodrigues, these centres serve as hubs for specialised support, ensuring inclusive practices reach isolated island communities.
- *Evidence-Based Interventions*: The systemic promotion of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.
- *Accessible Learning Materials*: The provision of Braille notes for blind students, operationalising the principle that the system must adapt to the learner.

Figure 3: Special Education Landscape - Mauritius and Vanuatu

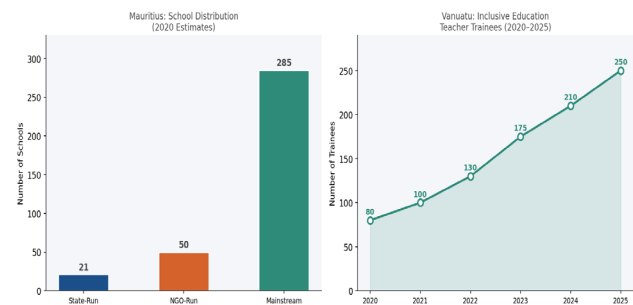


Fig. 3. The left panel illustrates the distribution of SEN schools in Mauritius, highlighting the heavy reliance on NGO-run institutions. The right panel demonstrates Vanuatu's increasing investment in teacher training

Despite these innovations, the reliance on NGO-run segregated schools indicates a systemic hesitation to fully transition to universal mainstream inclusion, suggesting ongoing challenges in comprehensive teacher preparation [4].

4. The Vanuatu Context: Systemic Capacity Building and University-Led Innovation

In contrast to Mauritius's centralised authority model, Vanuatu is pioneering a capacity-building approach, leveraging its national university to drive systemic change from the ground up.

A. Policy Evolution and the Absence of Parallel Structures

Vanuatu's approach is shaped by the historical absence of formal special education structures. Unlike Mauritius, Vanuatu does not have a deeply entrenched parallel system of NGO-run special schools [8]. The Vanuatu Inclusive Education Policy (2011) and the recently launched Inclusive Education and Training Policy (2025-2030) mandate that all children,

regardless of disability, have equal educational opportunities within existing community schools [5], [6].

B. University-Led Innovation: The IERC and Teacher Training

Recognizing that policy mandates fail without pedagogical capacity, Vanuatu's leadership has focused innovation on teacher preparation. In late 2024, the government, in partnership with the National University of Vanuatu's School of Education, launched the nation's first-ever Inclusive Education Resource Centre (IERC) [6].

This represents a significant institutional innovation. Rather than creating a separate authority to manage disabled students, Vanuatu has embedded inclusive education expertise directly within its primary teacher training institution. The School of Education has integrated inclusive practices into pre-service training, recently placing over 250 trainees across schools to implement inclusive curriculum strategies [9].

This capacity-building leadership model aims to create a generation of teachers for whom inclusive pedagogy is foundational rather than an add-on specialisation. However, scholars note that without specialised support structures for complex disabilities, mainstream teachers in Vanuatu may struggle to implement effective inclusion in resource-constrained environments [8].

5. Comparative Analysis: Divergent Paths to CRPD and SDG 4 Compliance

A comparison of the Mauritian and Vanuatu models reveals two distinct leadership pathways toward actualising CRPD Article 24 and SDG 4, summarised in Table 1.

A. Research Mapping: Leadership and the Theory-Praxis Gap

Applying Professor Steve Sider's comparative-case-study framework to these models yields significant insights [3]. Sider argues that inclusive school leadership requires navigating complex intersections of policy, community expectations, and resource limitations.

In Mauritius, strong institutional leadership has successfully created structural bridges (dual-enrollment) across a fragmented system. However, the reliance on specialised authorities can sometimes absolve mainstream educators of the responsibility to adapt, maintaining a subtle form of pedagogical segregation even within integrated physical spaces.

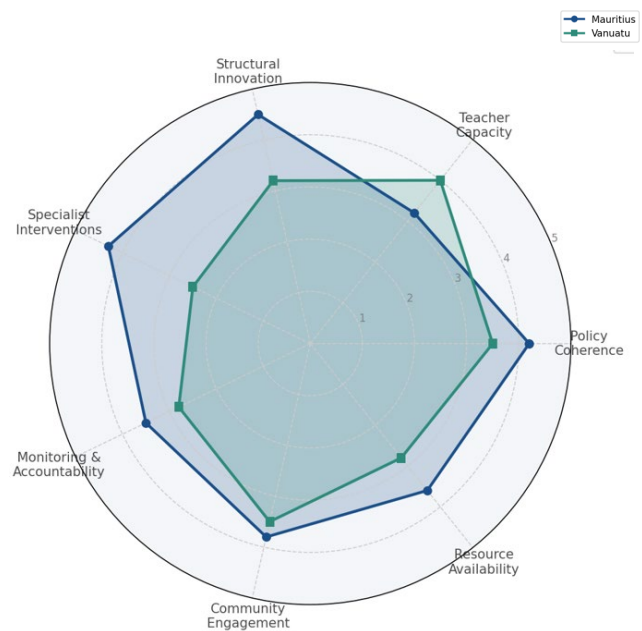


Fig. 4. The comparative institutional capacity index highlights Mauritius's strength in structural innovation and specialist interventions versus Vanuatu's strength in teacher capacity building

In Vanuatu, the leadership focus on universal teacher training addresses the pedagogical core of inclusion. By centering the IERC within the National University, Vanuatu is attempting to change the fundamental culture of teaching. Yet, without the specialised, targeted interventions seen in the Mauritian model (like ABA programs), students with severe disabilities may experience "integration without inclusion" being physically present but pedagogically unsupported [8].

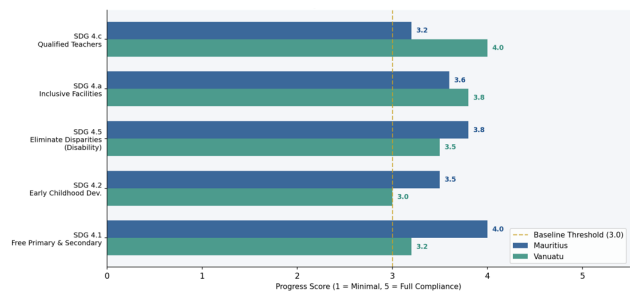


Fig. 5. Expert assessment of SDG 4 target areas demonstrates the varying strengths of the two national models

6. Bridging the Gap: Strategic Recommendations for Bilateral Collaboration

The divergent strengths of Mauritius and Vanuatu present a

Table 1
Comparative analysis of institutional models and policy frameworks

Aspect	Mauritius	Vanuatu
Leadership Model	Centralized authority (SENA) driven by institutional figures.	Distributed capacity-building driven by the National University and Ministry of Education.
Primary Innovation	Structural: Dual-enrollment bridging NGO special schools and mainstream settings.	Pedagogical: Systemic integration of inclusive education into universal teacher training.
Resource Hubs	SEN Resource Centres focused on specialized student support and interventions (ABA).	Newly established IERC (2024) focused on teacher equipping and accessible resource development.
Systemic Challenge	Overcoming the inertia of a deeply entrenched, parallel NGO-run special school system.	Supporting mainstream teachers managing complex disabilities without specialized parallel structures.
CRPD Art. 24 Approach	Creating pathways (dual-enrollment) from segregation to integration.	Mandating universal access while attempting to rapidly build pedagogical capacity.

compelling opportunity for bilateral collaboration and mutual learning among island nations.

A. Recommendations for Mauritius

1. *Integrate Inclusive Pedagogy into Universal Teacher Training:* Mauritius should learn from Vanuatu's university-centered model by mandating comprehensive inclusive education modules for all pre-service teachers at the Mauritius Institute of Education, reducing reliance on specialized SEN educators.

2. *Transition Dual-Enrollment to Full Inclusion:* While dual-enrollment is a powerful transitional innovation, leadership must develop a phased, resource-backed plan to transition students from NGO-run special schools into fully supported mainstream environments.

3. *Establish University-Based Research Hubs:* Complement the SENA resource centres by establishing a university-based IERC (similar to Vanuatu's model) focused on pedagogical research and accessible curriculum development.

B. Recommendations for Vanuatu

1. *Develop Specialized Intervention Capacity:* Vanuatu should adapt Mauritius's approach to specialized interventions (such as ABA for autism and Braille literacy) to ensure that mainstream teachers have access to specialized expertise for students with complex needs.

2. *Establish Regional Resource Networks:* Emulate the Mauritian model of establishing SEN Resource Centres in remote areas (like Rodrigues) to ensure the resources of the central IERC reach isolated island communities.

3. *Foster Dedicated Institutional Leadership:* While decentralised capacity building is strong, Vanuatu would benefit from establishing a dedicated leadership task force within the Ministry (akin to a streamlined SENA) specifically tasked with monitoring CRPD Article 24 compliance and resolving complex inclusion cases.

C. Recommendations for Bilateral Collaboration

1. *Establish an Island Nations Inclusive Education Research Network:* Create formal research collaborations between the National University of Vanuatu and Mauritian institutions to study effective inclusive models in resource-constrained island contexts.

2. *Leadership Exchange Programs:* Facilitate exchanges where Mauritian SENA leaders share structural innovation strategies (like dual-enrollment management) with Vanuatu, while Vanuatu educators share systemic teacher-training integration models.

3. *Joint Development of Accessible Resources:* Collaborate on the development of culturally relevant, accessible learning materials that can be adapted for both contexts, maximising

limited resources.

7. Conclusion

Bridging the gap between the theory of inclusive education and classroom praxis requires visionary leadership and institutional innovation. Both Mauritius and Vanuatu demonstrate that there is no single pathway to achieving the mandates of CRPD Article 24 and SDG 4.

Mauritius illustrates the power of centralised, authoritative leadership to pioneer structural innovations like dual-enrollment, effectively bridging historically segregated systems. Conversely, Vanuatu demonstrates the vital importance of systemic capacity building, utilising university-led innovation to embed inclusive pedagogy directly into the foundation of teacher preparation.

Effective inclusive education requires both the structural pathways forged by Mauritius and the universal pedagogical capacity being built in Vanuatu. By engaging in targeted bilateral collaboration, these island nations can synthesise their respective strengths, moving beyond policy rhetoric to ensure that inclusive education becomes a lived reality for all learners.

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