

# Emotional Maturity: A Key Tool to Enhance Inclusive Practices

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**Abstract:** Emotional maturity and inclusive practices are critical competencies for educators striving to create equitable, empathetic, and effective learning environments. Emotional maturity encompasses the ability to recognize, regulate, and express emotions constructively. These traits empower educators to navigate diverse classrooms with sensitivity and adaptability. It also fosters trust and psychological safety among students. Inclusive practices refer to pedagogical strategies and institutional policies that ensure all learners, regardless of background, ability or identity, have equitable access to education and feel a sense of belonging. Emotionally mature educators are better equipped to implement inclusive practices, as they can manage classroom dynamics with compassion and respond to behavioural challenges without bias, and support students' social-emotional development alongside academic growth. This paper explores the dynamic interplay between emotional maturity and inclusivity in educational settings. Emotionally intelligent educators are more likely to reflect on their own biases, engage in culturally responsive teaching, and create environments where diversity is celebrated. Inclusive classrooms, in turn, nurture emotional maturity in students by encouraging empathy, collaboration, and respectful dialogue. The integration of emotional maturity into inclusive education aligns with global goals such as SDG-4 (Quality Education), promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. It also supports restorative approaches to discipline, which prioritize healing and growth over punishment. As classrooms become increasingly diverse, the need for emotionally mature educators who champion inclusive practices becomes imperative. Professional development programs must prioritize emotional intelligence training alongside inclusive pedagogy to prepare educators for the complex realities of modern education. By cultivating both emotional maturity and inclusive practices, educators can transform classrooms into spaces of empowerment, equity, and holistic learning.

In this paper the researcher concludes that emotional maturity and inclusive practices are mutually reinforcing, enabling educators to foster equitable, empathetic, and resilient learning environments. Together, they empower teachers to address diversity constructively, nurture student well-being, and advance holistic education that prepares learners for thriving in interconnected societies. A growing body of research highlights that emotionally mature educators and leaders are more effective in fostering inclusivity, as they can balance empathy with constructive feedback, manage diverse perspectives, and create psychologically safe environments (Goleman, 1995; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Shore et al., 2011). By synthesizing literature across psychology, education, and organizational studies, this paper highlights the importance of cultivating emotional maturity to counteract these fears and strengthen inclusive practices.

**Keywords :** Emotional Maturity, Inclusive Practices, Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), Psychological safety, Empathy in teaching, Student well-being.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The increasing diversity of classrooms and workplaces has made emotional maturity and inclusive practices central to effective leadership and pedagogy. Emotional maturity, often conceptualized as the ability to regulate emotions, demonstrate empathy, and respond constructively to interpersonal challenges, is a critical determinant of social and professional success (Goleman, 1995). Inclusive practices, meanwhile, encompass strategies and policies that ensure equitable access and belonging for individuals of diverse backgrounds, abilities, and identities (Øen, Krumsvik, & Skaar, 2024). Scholars argue that emotional maturity is not only a personal trait but also a professional competency that directly influences inclusivity. Jennings and Greenberg (2009) highlight that emotionally competent teachers create supportive classroom climates that reduce exclusion and foster engagement. Similarly, Shore et al. (2011) emphasize

that emotionally mature leaders in organizations build cultures of psychological safety, which are essential for inclusivity. Emotional maturity thus becomes a key tool for bridging differences, reducing bias, and fostering environments where diversity is valued.

At the same time, modern psychological fears—such as FOMO (Fear of Missing Out), FOFO (Fear of Finding Out), FOBO (Fear of Better Option), FOPO (Fear of People’s Opinion), FOMU (Fear of Messing Up), FODA (Fear of Doing Anything), FOSO (Fear of Starting Over), and FOBA (Fear of Being Alone)—pose challenges to emotional regulation and inclusive engagement. These fears, often amplified by social media and decision-making pressures, can undermine emotional maturity and hinder inclusivity (Przybylski et al., 2013; Gervais, 2023). While they are secondary to the main focus of this paper, they provide important context for understanding the barriers individuals face in cultivating emotional maturity.

### Objective:

To explore how emotional maturity enhances inclusive practices in education and workplaces, while recognizing psychological fears as barriers.

### Conceptual Framework:

Although emotional maturity and inclusive practices remain the central focus, psychological fears provide insight into barriers individuals face:

- **FOMO (Fear of Missing Out):** Associated with social media use, FOMO leads to anxiety, reduced well-being, and impaired academic performance (Przybylski et al., 2013; Elhai et al., 2020).
- **FOFO (Fear of Finding Out):** Linked to avoidance of medical diagnoses and health screenings, FOFO reflects emotional immaturity in confronting difficult truths (Paxman et al., 2017; Colino, 2025).
- **FOBO (Fear of Better Option):** Coined by McGinnis, FOBO describes decision paralysis in contexts of abundant choice (Helps, 2025).
- **FOPO (Fear of People’s Opinion):** Gervais (2023) identifies FOPO as a “hidden epidemic” constricting human potential, undermining authenticity and inclusive engagement.
- **FOMU (Fear of Messing Up):** Common in professional contexts, FOMU leads to risk aversion and reduced innovation (Hyken, 2025).
- **FODA (Fear of Doing Anything):** Ivanchev (2022) links FODA to irrational decision-making in financial markets, amplified by social media.
- **FOSO (Fear of Starting Over):** Emerging in career contexts, FOSO reflects anxiety about change and reinvention (Mathers, 2025).
- **FOBA (Fear of Being Alone):** Kislev (2020) shows FOBA drives individuals into unhealthy relationships, undermining emotional independence.

These fears illustrate the importance of emotional maturity in overcoming avoidance, indecision, and social anxiety, thereby enabling inclusive practices.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Inclusion Criteria

Sources were selected based on the following criteria:

- Peer-reviewed articles published in reputable journals.
- Studies explicitly addressing emotional maturity, emotional intelligence, or inclusive practices.
- Literature examining psychological fears in relation to emotional regulation and social inclusion.
- Publications in English between 1990 and 2025 to capture both foundational theories and contemporary developments.

## **2.2 Emotional Maturity and Inclusive Practices**

Calandri, Mastrokoulou, Marchisio, Monchietto, & Graziano (2025) conducted a systematic review showing that teacher emotional competence is a prerequisite for inclusive education. They argue that emotionally mature teachers are better able to balance empathy with classroom management, which is essential for fostering inclusivity. Kreitman (2022) reviewed literature on inclusive practices in classrooms and found that children's social and emotional development significantly benefits when teachers demonstrate emotional maturity. Inclusive classrooms reduce peer rejection and stereotypes, while emotionally mature teachers help navigate conflicts and foster belonging. A study highlighted by Aarhat International Journal (2021) found that emotional maturity strongly supports student adaptation in inclusive classrooms. The research emphasized that emotionally mature students and teachers are better able to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4 (quality education) by closing gaps and promoting inclusivity. Clarke (2010) demonstrated that emotional intelligence training in workplaces improves team cohesion and inclusivity. Leaders with emotional maturity are more likely to foster psychological safety, reduce bias, and encourage diverse participation. Jennings & Greenberg (2009) argue that emotionally competent teachers create supportive classroom climates that reduce exclusion and foster engagement. This aligns with Brackett & Rivers (2014), who found that emotional intelligence programs improve inclusivity by strengthening empathy and communication.

## **2.3 Emotional Maturity and Emotional Intelligence**

Emotional maturity is often discussed in relation to emotional intelligence (EI). Goleman (1995) defined EI as encompassing self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills, all of which contribute to emotional maturity. Salovey and Mayer (1990) earlier conceptualized EI as the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, discriminate among them, and use this information to guide thinking and action.

Research consistently shows that emotional maturity enhances inclusivity. Jennings and Greenberg (2009) found that emotionally competent teachers create supportive classroom climates that foster student engagement and reduce exclusion. Brackett and Rivers (2014) demonstrated that EI training improves interpersonal relationships and inclusivity in schools. Hagenauer and Volet (2014) emphasized that teacher-student emotional connections are central to inclusive learning environments. In organizational contexts, Carmeli (2003) showed that emotionally intelligent leaders enhance organizational commitment and inclusivity.

## **2.4 Inclusive Practices in Education**

Inclusive education emphasizes equitable access and participation for all learners, regardless of background, ability, or identity. Øen, Krumsvik, and Skaar (2024) argue that inclusive practices require balancing emotional support with constructive feedback, particularly when addressing challenging behaviors. Sharma and Singh (2020) highlight culturally responsive pedagogy, differentiated instruction, and restorative discipline as strategies that foster inclusivity. Poulou (2017) found that teachers' emotional regulation skills directly influence their ability to manage diverse classrooms inclusively. Ainscow (2020) argued that inclusive education requires emotionally mature teachers who can adapt to diverse student needs. Calandri, Mastrokoulou, Marchisio, Monchietto, and Graziano (2025) conducted a systematic review showing that teacher emotional competence is a prerequisite for inclusive education.

## **2.5 Inclusive Practices in Workplaces**

In workplaces, inclusivity involves creating cultures of belonging where diverse perspectives are valued. Shore et al. (2011) emphasize that inclusive organizations promote psychological safety, strengthening emotional resilience among employees. Clarke (2010) demonstrated that EI training improves team cohesion and inclusivity. Nkomo and Hoobler (2014) highlighted that emotionally mature leaders are more likely to foster diversity management and reduce bias. Carmeli (2003) found that emotionally intelligent leaders enhance inclusivity by encouraging risk-taking and reducing indecision. Brackett et al. (2011) also showed that EI in organizational leaders predicts better conflict resolution and inclusive decision-making.

## **3. Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative synthesis approach to explore the relationship between emotional maturity and inclusive practices, while also considering psychological fears as barriers. The methodology is designed to integrate findings from peer-reviewed literature, systematic reviews, and organizational case studies across psychology, education, and workplace management.

### 3.1 Research Design

A **thematic analysis** was employed to identify recurring patterns in how emotional maturity supports inclusivity. This design allows for the integration of diverse sources, including empirical studies, theoretical frameworks, and policy reports. The focus was on extracting themes such as empathy, emotional regulation, psychological safety, and equity, which are central to both emotional maturity and inclusive practices (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Shore et al., 2011).

### 3.2 Data Sources

The review draws upon:

- **Educational contexts:** Studies on teacher emotional competence and inclusive pedagogy (Calandri et al., 2025; Poulou, 2017; Ainscow, 2020).
- **Organizational contexts:** Research on emotional intelligence in leadership and workplace inclusivity (Carmeli, 2003; Clarke, 2010; Nkomo & Hoobler, 2014).
- **Psychological contexts:** Literature on modern fears such as FOMO, FOPO, and FOBO, which influence emotional regulation and inclusivity (Przybylski et al., 2013; Gervais, 2023; Helps, 2025).

### 3.3 Analytical Framework

The analysis was guided by three key questions:

1. How does emotional maturity enhance inclusive practices in education?
2. How does emotional maturity enhance inclusive practices in workplaces?
3. How do psychological fears act as barriers to emotional maturity and inclusivity?

Themes were coded and categorized under these questions, allowing for a structured synthesis of findings.

### 3.4 Limitations

While this study provides a broad synthesis, it is limited by its reliance on secondary data. Empirical fieldwork was not conducted, and therefore the findings are interpretive rather than experimental. Additionally, psychological fears were considered in relation to inclusivity but not explored in depth as independent constructs.

## 4. Findings and Discussion

### 4.1 Education

Research consistently shows that emotionally mature teachers are more effective in fostering inclusive classrooms. Emotional maturity enables educators to demonstrate empathy, patience, and adaptability, which are crucial for managing diverse student needs (Calandri et al., 2025). Jennings and Greenberg (2009) argue that emotionally competent teachers create supportive classroom climates that reduce exclusion and foster engagement. Similarly, Poulou (2017) found that teachers' emotional regulation skills directly influence their ability to manage diverse classrooms inclusively. Inclusive practices such as culturally responsive pedagogy and restorative discipline require emotional maturity to be implemented effectively (Sharma & Singh, 2020). Teachers who can regulate their emotions are better able to provide constructive feedback without alienating students, thereby promoting equity and belonging. Emotional maturity also helps educators address psychological fears among students, such as FOMO and FOPO, which often manifest as anxiety and reluctance to participate. By modeling resilience and empathy, emotionally mature teachers counteract these fears and strengthen inclusivity.

### 4.2 Workplaces

In organizational contexts, emotionally mature leaders foster inclusive cultures by promoting psychological safety, reducing bias, and encouraging collaboration (Shore et al., 2011). Clarke (2010) demonstrated that emotional intelligence training improves team cohesion and inclusivity. Carmeli (2003) found that emotionally intelligent leaders enhance organizational commitment by encouraging risk-taking and reducing indecision. Inclusive workplaces benefit from leaders who can manage their emotions and empathize with diverse perspectives. Emotional maturity enables leaders to address fears such as FOBO (decision paralysis) and FOMU (fear of mistakes), which often hinder innovation and inclusivity. By modelling resilience and encouraging authentic communication, emotionally mature leaders reduce the impact of these fears and create environments where employees feel valued and included.

### 4.3 Psychological Fears and Inclusive Practices

Although emotional maturity and inclusivity are the central focus, psychological fears provide insight into barriers individuals face:

- **FOMO (Fear of Missing Out):** Drives social anxiety and exclusion, countered by emotionally mature engagement (Przybylski et al., 2013; Elhai et al., 2020).
- **FOFO (Fear of Finding Out):** Leads to avoidance of health or performance feedback, undermining inclusivity (Paxman et al., 2017; Colino, 2025).
- **FOBO (Fear of Better Option):** Creates decision paralysis, mitigated by emotionally mature prioritization (Helps, 2025).
- **FOPO (Fear of People's Opinion):** Restricts authenticity, countered by inclusive cultures valuing diverse voices (Gervais, 2023).
- **FOMU (Fear of Messing Up):** Reduces innovation, addressed by resilience training (Hyken, 2025).
- **FODA (Fear of Doing Anything):** Amplifies irrationality, countered by emotional regulation (Ivanchev, 2022).
- **FOSO (Fear of Starting Over):** Blocks reinvention, mitigated by inclusive support systems (Mathers, 2025).
- **FOBA (Fear of Being Alone):** Drives unhealthy relationships, countered by emotional independence (Kislev, 2020).

These fears highlight the importance of emotional maturity in overcoming avoidance, indecision, and social anxiety, thereby enabling inclusive practices in both education and workplaces.

#### Synthesis of Findings

- Emotional maturity is the **foundation** for inclusive practices in both education and workplaces.
- It enables empathy, resilience, and authentic communication.
- Inclusive practices reinforce emotional maturity by providing diverse, supportive environments.

#### Psychological Fears & How They Are Countered

| Fear                                   | Barrier                | Countered by Emotional Maturity            | Countered by Inclusive Practices                           |
|----------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>FOMO (Fear of Missing Out)</b>      | Anxiety, exclusion     | Self-regulation, prioritization            | Belonging through inclusive classrooms/workplaces          |
| <b>FOPO (Fear of People's Opinion)</b> | Restricts authenticity | Confidence, resilience                     | Cultures valuing diverse voices                            |
| <b>FOBO (Fear of Better Option)</b>    | Decision paralysis     | Emotional maturity enables decisive action | Inclusive teams encourage collaboration & shared decisions |
| <b>FOFO (Fear of Finding Out)</b>      | Avoidance of feedback  | Courage to face truth                      | Supportive feedback systems in inclusive settings          |
| <b>FOMU (Fear of Messing Up)</b>       | Reduces innovation     | Resilience, growth mindset                 | Psychological safety in inclusive workplaces               |
| <b>FODA (Fear of Doing Anything)</b>   | Irrational avoidance   | Emotional regulation restores rationality  | Inclusive support networks encourage participation         |

| Fear                         | Barrier                     | Countered by Emotional Maturity | Countered by Inclusive Practices                             |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| FOSO (Fear of Starting Over) | Blocks reinvention          | Adaptability, acceptance        | Inclusive communities provide encouragement for fresh starts |
| FOBA (Fear of Being Alone)   | Drives unhealthy dependence | Emotional independence          | Inclusive environments foster connection & belonging         |

### Additional Reviews Supporting Discussion

- Aarhat International Journal (2021): Emotional maturity is linked to school adjustment in inclusive classrooms.
- Kreitman (2022): Inclusive practices strengthen children's social-emotional development.

### Overall Takeaway

- Emotional maturity directly **counters psychological fears** by building resilience and self-regulation.
- Inclusive practices provide the **external environment** that reinforces these strengths.
- Together, they dismantle barriers to equity, belonging, and innovation.

## 5. Implications

### 5.1 For Educators

Educators play a central role in shaping inclusive learning environments. Emotional maturity enables teachers to regulate their emotions, demonstrate empathy, and respond constructively to diverse student needs. Jennings and Greenberg (2009) emphasize that emotionally competent teachers foster supportive classroom climates that reduce exclusion. Poulou (2017) further notes that teachers with strong emotional regulation skills are better equipped to manage challenging behaviors inclusively. Teacher training programs should integrate emotional intelligence and emotional maturity development alongside pedagogical skills. This would prepare educators to address psychological fears such as FOMO and FOPO among students, thereby strengthening inclusivity.

### 5.2 For Organizations

In workplaces, emotionally mature leaders foster cultures of belonging and psychological safety. Shore et al. (2011) argue that inclusive organizations promote resilience and collaboration, while Clarke (2010) shows that emotional intelligence training enhances team cohesion. Carmeli (2003) found that emotionally intelligent leaders encourage risk-taking and reduce indecision, which directly supports inclusivity. Organizations should embed emotional intelligence training into leadership development programs. This would help leaders counter fears such as FOBO and FOMU, which often hinder innovation and inclusivity. Policies promoting psychological safety and authentic communication can further strengthen inclusive practices.

### 5.3 For Policy Makers

Policy makers influence the structural frameworks within which education and organizations operate. Ainscow (2020) argues that inclusive education policies must prioritize equity and emotional well-being. Similarly, Nkomo and Hoobler (2014) highlight that diversity management policies in workplaces require emotionally mature leadership to be effective. Policies should explicitly integrate emotional maturity as a competency for educators and leaders. This would ensure that inclusivity is not only mandated but also supported by emotional and psychological readiness. Addressing psychological fears through awareness campaigns and resilience-building initiatives can further enhance inclusivity at a societal level.

## 6. Conclusion

Emotional maturity emerges as a critical enabler of inclusive practices across both educational and organizational contexts. The literature consistently demonstrates that emotionally mature individuals—whether teachers, leaders, or

policymakers—are better equipped to foster environments of equity, empathy, and belonging (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Shore et al., 2011; Clarke, 2010). Emotional maturity allows for effective regulation of emotions, constructive responses to challenges, and authentic engagement with diverse perspectives, all of which are foundational to inclusivity. Inclusive practices, in turn, reinforce emotional maturity by providing opportunities for individuals to engage with diversity, confront biases, and develop resilience. This reciprocal relationship highlights that inclusivity cannot be fully realized without emotional maturity, and emotional maturity itself is strengthened through inclusive environments (Calandri et al., 2025; Ainscow, 2020). While the central focus of this paper is on emotional maturity and inclusive practices, the discussion of psychological fears—such as FOMO, FOPO, FOBO, and others—illustrates the barriers individuals face in cultivating emotional maturity. These fears, often amplified by social media and modern decision-making pressures, can undermine emotional regulation and inclusivity (Przybylski et al., 2013; Gervais, 2023). However, emotionally mature individuals and leaders are better positioned to recognize, confront, and mitigate these anxieties, thereby strengthening inclusive practices.

Ultimately, cultivating emotional maturity is not merely a personal developmental goal but a societal imperative. Embedding emotional intelligence training into education, leadership development, and policy frameworks can counteract psychological fears and advance inclusivity. By prioritizing emotional maturity, societies can ensure that individuals and institutions alike are prepared to thrive in increasingly diverse and interconnected environments.

### List of Abbreviations

- **FOMO** – Fear of Missing Out
- **FOPO** – Fear of People’s Opinion
- **FOBO** – Fear of Better Option
- **FOFO** – Fear of Finding Out
- **FOMU** – Fear of Messing Up
- **FODA** – Fear of Doing Anything
- **FOSO** – Fear of Starting Over
- **FOBA** – Fear of Being Alone
- **SDG** – Sustainable Development Goal
- **EI** – Emotional Intelligence

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