

When Capability Does Not Become Practice: Capability-Practice Mismatch in Inclusive Lower- Secondary Education

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ABSTRACT:

Teachers may know how to teach inclusively without enacting that knowledge consistently, while some teachers who rate their capability modestly may still display adaptive practice. This explanatory sequential mixed-methods study treats capability-practice mismatch as an empirical phenomenon rather than measurement noise. Data comprised surveys from 120 lower-secondary teachers, interviews with 14 teachers selected from four capability-practice profiles, interviews with 10 students with disabilities, and 12 classroom observation episodes. Self-perceived capability was positively but modestly associated with inclusive practice (Spearman's $\rho = .291$, $p = .001$), whereas contextual support showed a stronger association ($\rho = .393$, $p < .001$). The two mismatched profiles accounted for 35% of the sample. High-capability/low-practice teachers described bottlenecks involving time, class size, monitoring, and coordination; low-capability/high-practice teachers relied more on cycles of trying, observing, and adjusting. Integration showed that monitoring mattered when it recalibrated support, coordination mattered when responsibility continued beyond information exchange, and support remained inclusive when student agency was preserved. We propose the provisional Inclusive Enactment Conversion (IEC) lens to explain how personal capability is converted, or fails to be converted, into inclusive action under contextual constraints.

Keywords: inclusive education, self-perceived capability, inclusive practice, teacher agency, capability-practice mismatch.

1. Introduction

Inclusive education depends not only on what teachers know or believe they can do, but on whether those resources can be enacted in specific classrooms (Dignath et al., 2022). In lower-secondary settings as Viet Nam, subject pacing, large classes, multiple teachers, and coordination demands can make this conversion difficult. A teacher may know how to differentiate a task or monitor a learner and still be unable to sustain those practices; conversely, another teacher may rate personal capability modestly while using adaptive routines learned

through experience. The gap between perceived capability and enacted practice is therefore theoretically important rather than a minor measurement problem.

Research consistently links teacher self-efficacy with attitudes, readiness, and inclusive practice, but these associations are not equivalent to direct behavioral correspondence (Malinen et al., 2013; Wray et al., 2022; Yada et al., 2022). Recent studies likewise show that perceived competence and preparedness can coexist with implementation needs in differentiation, collaboration, monitoring, and support (Alazemi

& Larkins, 2025; Nemček et al., 2024; Prosen & Smrtnik Vitulić, 2025). Secondary-school research further emphasizes resources, training, organizational structures, workload, and workplace support as conditions of enactment (Chrzanowska, 2021; Lindner et al., 2026; Rasmitadila et al., 2023). These findings suggest that self-perceived capability should not be used as a surrogate for classroom practice.

A second problem is methodological. Inclusive-education research still relies heavily on self-report, while direct observation remains comparatively limited (Cameron, 2014; Finkelstein et al., 2021). Surveys can identify beliefs and average associations, but they cannot show whether support is adjusted in response to a learner, whether coordination leads to a next action, or whether a student retains an active role after help. In explanatory mixed methods, divergence between survey profiles and observed practice can therefore be used to locate mechanisms rather than dismissed as error (Fetters et al., 2013; Guetterman et al., 2015).

1.1. Capability, practice, and enactment conversion

We distinguish self-perceived capability (CAP), agency/action beliefs (AG), and enacted inclusive practice. CAP concerns teachers' judgments of their capacity to meet inclusive demands; AG concerns initiating and sustaining professional action; practice concerns differentiation, accessibility, monitoring, social-emotional support, and coordination. The Teacher Efficacy for Inclusive Practices tradition informs CAP (Sharma et al., 2012), while inclusive-pedagogy and observable-practice research foreground what teachers actually make possible in classrooms (Finkelstein et al., 2021; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). The two directions of mismatch may reflect different mechanisms: high CAP with low practice may indicate blocked enactment, whereas low CAP with high practice may indicate adaptive routines that have developed faster than confidence.

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) provides the central frame because personal factors, behavior,

and environment are reciprocally related (Bandura, 1986). CAP and AG are treated mainly as personal resources; inclusive practices as behavior; and time, class size, accessibility, coordination, and school support as environmental conditions. Ecological accounts of teacher agency reinforce this relational view of professional action (Li & Ruppert, 2021; Miller et al., 2022). From mixed-method integration, we develop a provisional Inclusive Enactment Conversion (IEC) lens: the process through which personal resources are, or are not, converted into inclusive action under classroom conditions. IEC is not a questionnaire scale or validated causal model. It organizes four mechanisms emerging from the data: contextual convertibility, monitoring-calibration, coordination continuity, and student-agency preservation.

1.2. The present study

The study addressed four research questions:

RQ1. How do teachers rate their self-perceived capability, agency/action beliefs, inclusive practices, and contextual support?

RQ2. How is self-perceived capability associated with inclusive practice, and what matched or mismatched capability-practice profiles emerge?

RQ3. How do teacher interviews, student voice, and classroom observations explain the two mismatched profiles?

RQ4. When the strands are integrated, what conditions enable or constrain the conversion of capability into inclusive practice?

2. Methodology

2.1. Setting and participants

The study involved Grade 1513-1523 teachers from three lower-secondary schools in Vietnam. Data were collected between June 11 and August 26, 2026. Three schools were selected by lottery from an accessible frame meeting the inclusion criteria; this reduced researcher discretion within the eligible frame but does not make the sample representative of Hanoi.

The initial survey yielded 126 responses. Six cases were excluded using prespecified data-quality criteria, leaving 120 teachers (83 subject teachers and 37 homeroom teachers). Mean teaching experience was 10.75 years ($SD = 5.94$), and typical class size was 42.03 students ($SD = 3.48$). Fourteen teachers were purposively selected

across four capability-practice profiles: four high-high, three high-low, three low-high, and four low-low. Ten students with disabilities were interviewed, and 12 classroom episodes were observed. Observations covered five high-high, four high-low, and three low-high episodes; no observation was available for the low-low profile.

Table 1. Sample characteristics and survey-domain statistics (N = 120)

Indicator	n (%) or M	SD	α
Subject teacher	83 (69.2%)	-	-
Homeroom teacher	37 (30.8%)	-	-
Teaching experience (years)	10.75	5.94	-
Typical class size	42.03	3.48	-
Agency/action beliefs (AG)	3.48	0.78	.841
Self-perceived capability (CAP)	3.42	0.71	.789
Instructional support/differentiation (ISD)	3.34	0.81	.854
Accessibility (ACC)	3.22	0.76	.851
Progress monitoring (MON)	3.18	0.81	.830
Social-emotional support (SES)	3.53	0.79	.851
Coordination (COL)	3.22	0.65	.731
School support (SS)	3.18	0.81	.838
Individualized education planning (IEP)	3.18	0.60	.677
Assessment adaptation (ADA)	3.23	0.64	.671

Note. IEP and ADA had α coefficients below .70 and are retained only as contextual indicators.

2.2. Design

An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was used. The quantitative phase described survey domains, examined associations between capability and practice, and created four profiles using sample medians. Profile sampling connected the phases by selecting teachers from matched and mismatched cells. Teacher interviews, student interviews, and classroom observations then explained the profiles and the quality of enactment. Integration occurred at profile and mechanism levels; student accounts were not linked to individual teacher scores where the design did not permit such linkage (Fetters et al., 2013; Guetterman et al., 2015).

2.3. Questionnaire and measurement structure

The five-point questionnaire covered agency/action beliefs (AG), self-perceived capability (CAP), instructional support/differentiation (ISD), accessibility (ACC), progress monitoring (MON), social-emotional support (SES), coordination (COL), and school support (SS). Individualized education planning (IEP) and assessment adaptation (ADA) were retained as contextual indicators. Domains were conceptually informed by SCT, teacher efficacy, teacher agency, inclusive pedagogy, and observable inclusive-practice research (Bandura, 1986; Finkelstein et al., 2021; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Li & Ruppert, 2021; Sharma et al., 2012). IEP and ADA had α coefficients below .70 and were not treated

as validated subscales. Because the source materials did not include exact item wording, no items were reconstructed; the original instrument

should be supplied as supplementary material for submission.

Table 2. Measurement domains and operational focus

Code	Operational focus	α
AG	Initiating, selecting, adjusting, and sustaining professional action	.841
CAP	Judgments of capacity to meet inclusive teaching demands	.789
ISD	Adjusting tasks, difficulty, prompts, and organization	.854
ACC	Making instructions, materials, tasks, and participation routes accessible	.851
MON	Using learner evidence to inform subsequent decisions	.830
SES	Supporting participation, emotional safety, behavior, and belonging	.851
COL	Exchanging information and allocating/following responsibility	.731
SS	Organizational, human, and structural support for enactment	.838
IEP	Context-specific use of individualized goals/plans	.677
ADA	Adapting assessment or evidence-gathering procedures	.671

Note. Domain descriptions summarize the available measurement structure; they are not reconstructed questionnaire items.

2.4. Interviews, observations, and student voice

Teacher interviews examined understandings of inclusion, professional initiative, differentiation, accessibility, monitoring, coordination, and reasons for capability-practice mismatch. Student interviews focused on support that enabled continued participation, support that reduced agency, and opportunities to express preferences about adjustments. Observations used 1513-1523 codes for differentiation, accessibility, monitoring, social-emotional support, and student agency, together with action-response-outcome field descriptions. The source materials did not contain verbatim student quotations, so student voice is reported only at the pattern level; no quotations were invented.

2.5. Data analysis and integration

Quantitative analysis included data screening, descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alpha, Spearman correlations, and an exploratory Kruskal-Wallis comparison of contextual support across profiles. Profiles were created using the sample medians for CAP (3.50) and composite practice (3.3125); 'high' and 'low' therefore indicate relative sample

position rather than validated thresholds. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically using a 52-code codebook with 498 segment-level applications. For selected mechanisms, bounded quantification counted how many participants within a purposively sampled profile had at least one coded segment; these counts are not interpreted as population prevalence (Maxwell, 2010; Sandelowski, 2001). Integration used profile sampling, joint displays, and comparison of interview mechanisms with observational evidence.

3. Results

3.1. Capability, practice, and contextual support

Survey means were uneven rather than uniformly high or low. CAP averaged 3.42 and AG 3.48, while the composite practice score was 3.32. SES was the highest practice-related domain ($M = 3.53$); MON and SS were lowest (both $M = 3.18$), with ACC and COL around 3.22. Thus, relational-emotional support was reported more positively than practices requiring sustained monitoring, access arrangements, or organizational coordination.

CAP was positively associated with practice, but modestly ($\rho = .291, p = .001$). AG showed a stronger association ($\rho = .371, p < .001$), and contextual support the strongest of the three tested relationships ($\rho = .393, p < .001$).

Contextual support also differed across the four profiles, $H(3) = 30.14, p < .001, \epsilon^2 = .234$, although this exploratory cross-sectional result does not establish causality.

Table 3. Quantitative associations and profile test

Analysis	Result	Interpretation
CAP <-> practice	$\rho = .291, p = .001$	Positive but modest association
AG <-> practice	$\rho = .371, p < .001$	Stronger alignment than CAP
Contextual support <-> practice	$\rho = .393, p < .001$	Strongest tested association
Contextual support across profiles	$H(3) = 30.14, p < .001; \epsilon^2 = .234$	Exploratory distributional difference

3.2. Four capability-practice profiles

The median split produced 44 high-CAP/high-practice teachers (36.7%), 34 low-CAP/low-practice teachers (28.3%), 24 high-CAP/low-practice teachers (20.0%), and 18 low-CAP/high-practice teachers (15.0%).

The two mismatched profiles therefore accounted for 35% of the sample. Treating capability or practice as a substitute for the other would obscure more than one third of teachers in this dataset.

Table 4. Survey profiles and qualitative subsamples

Profile	Survey n (%)	Teacher interviews	Observations	Key quantitative information
High CAP - high practice	44 (36.7%)	4	5	Positive match; comparison profile
High CAP - low practice	24 (20.0%)	3	4	CAP M = 3.89; practice M = 2.94; context M = 3.18
Low CAP - high practice	18 (15.0%)	3	3	CAP M = 2.88; practice M = 3.80; context M = 3.45
Low CAP - low practice	34 (28.3%)	4	0	Context M = 2.82; no observation-based inference

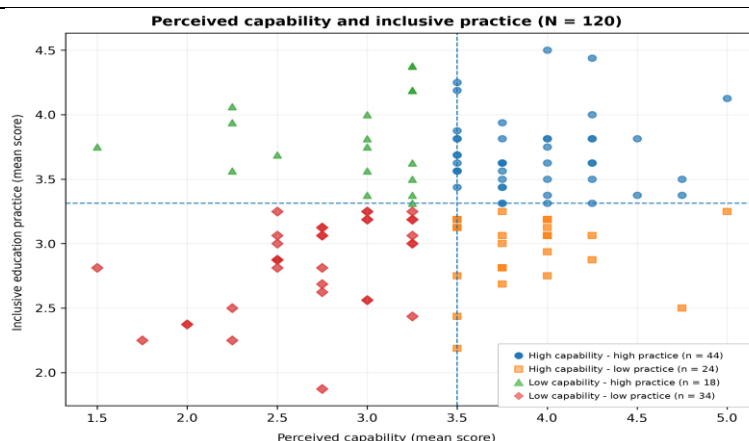


Figure 1. Distribution of self-perceived capability and inclusive practice (N = 120)

3.3. Two mismatch pathways

3.3.1. Suppressed enactment: high capability, lower practice

The high-CAP/low-practice profile challenged a linear capability-to-practice interpretation. Mean CAP was 3.89 and mean practice 2.94. All three interviewed teachers reported knowing what to do while struggling with time pressure, class size, monitoring, or coordination. The difficulty was less the absence of inclusive ideas than the inability to sustain a responsive chain of action.

T007: “I do not lack ideas. What I lack is coordination time and time to monitor what happens after support. In my case, having 38 students in the class is a very real factor.”

Observation reinforced the interpretation of instability rather than global deficiency. OBS05 showed graded prompts and learner choice, whereas OBS07 and OBS12 showed less stable accessibility or monitoring. Descriptively, this profile's observation means were lower than the high-high profile for ACC (2.50 vs. 3.40) and MON (3.00 vs. 4.60). We therefore describe the mechanism as a conversion bottleneck: capability is available but is not converted consistently enough to become stable practice.

3.3.2. Practice ahead of confidence: lower capability, higher practice

The low-CAP/high-practice profile showed the opposite mismatch. Mean CAP was 2.88 and

mean practice 3.80. All three interviewed teachers described observing the learner, trying a small adjustment, and changing the next step in response. The code 'concept-practice gap' appeared for all seven teachers in the two low-CAP profiles and for none of the seven teachers in the two high-CAP profiles.

T092: “I learn more from concrete situations than from concepts, so my confidence score may be lower than what I actually do.”

Observation suggested practice built through experience rather than uniformly high performance. OBS09 used wait time until the student prepared and volunteered; OBS10 used notes from the previous lesson to reduce prompting; OBS08 repeated the same instruction three times without helping the student begin. The narrower inference is that some procedural routines may develop before they are fully represented in self-perceived capability. We call this practice-ahead-of-confidence.

3.4. Cross-source mechanisms

Across profiles and data sources, three mechanisms recurred: monitoring-calibration, student-agency preservation, and coordination continuity. Their significance lay not in whether an action occurred, but in what happened after it.

Table 5. Joint display: quantitative patterns and enactment mechanisms

Mechanism	Quantitative signal	Cross-source evidence	Integrated inference
Capability-practice gap	CAP-practice $\rho = .291$; 35% mismatch	3/3 high-low knew how but struggled to enact; 3/3 low-high adapted despite low confidence	Mismatch represents two mechanisms, not one form of error.
Monitoring-calibration	MON M = 3.18; context-practice $\rho = .393$	OBS01/10: learner evidence changed support; OBS08: repeated instruction without adaptation	Monitoring matters when information changes the level or form of support.
Student-agency preservation	Teacher survey did not directly measure recipient experience	10/10 students had choice/takeover/voice codes; OBS04: peer completed almost all of the task	Support may complete a task yet weaken inclusion if it replaces learner action.

Mechanism	Quantitative signal	Cross-source evidence	Integrated inference
Coordination continuity	COL M = 3.22; SS M = 3.18	14/14 had responsibility/next-step codes; OBS11 led to a concrete group-position change	Coordination becomes a resource when responsibility and follow-up are explicit.

Note. Qualitative coverage reflects the purposively selected sample and interview protocol, not population prevalence.

Monitoring codes appeared in all 14 teacher interviews, but quality depended on function: in OBS01 and OBS10 learner evidence changed the next support step, whereas OBS08 repeated instruction without adaptation. Monitoring therefore mattered when information was converted into calibration, consistent with the distinction between progress monitoring and instructional decision-making (Jungjohann & Gebhardt, 2023).

Student voice sharpened the quality criterion for support. All 10 students had at least one coded segment concerning choice, takeover, or voice in support decisions; because these issues were directly elicited, the count indicates consistency within the interview corpus rather than prevalence. Combined with OBS04, where a peer held the pen and completed almost all of the task, the data show that frequent help can still peripheralize a learner when assistance replaces action. The key question is who remains the actor after support (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011).

Coordination likewise depended on continuity. Responsibility for the next step appeared in all 14

teacher interviews, yet all four low-low teachers also had 'next step unclear.' In OBS11, a brief subject-teacher/homeroom-teacher exchange led to a concrete change in group positioning. Coordination became useful when information was translated into explicit responsibility and follow-up, echoing work on the organization of instructional collaboration (Rasmitadila et al., 2021).

3.5. Inclusive Enactment Conversion

Integrating the strands produced the provisional Inclusive Enactment Conversion (IEC) lens. Personal resources include CAP, AG, and experiential knowledge; contextual convertibility includes time, class size, accessibility, coordination, and school support; enactment conversion is carried by opportunity to act, monitoring-calibration, coordination continuity, and situational adaptation; and student-agency preservation is a quality criterion for the resulting inclusive practice. IEC is not a tested causal chain. It organizes the mixed-method meta-inferences into mechanisms for future longitudinal and repeated-observation research.

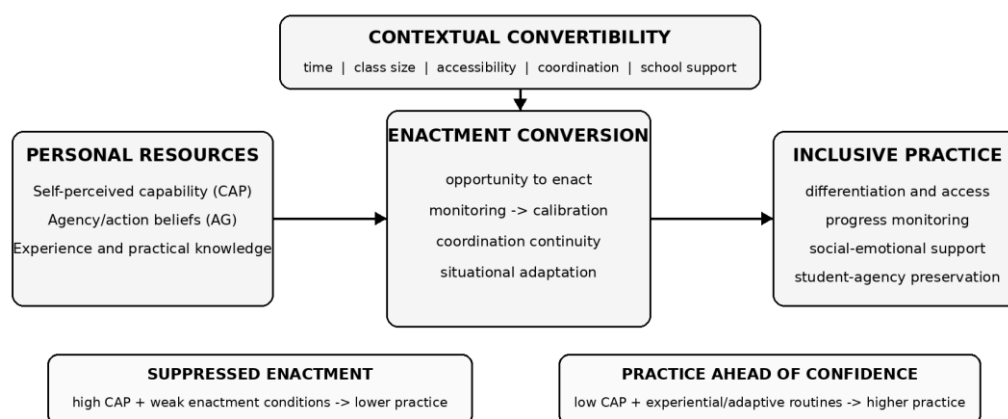


Figure 2. Inclusive Enactment Conversion (IEC): a middle-range lens developed from Social Cognitive Theory and mixed-method integration

The mismatch pathways are intentionally asymmetrical. High CAP may meet weak enactment conditions and produce suppressed enactment, whereas low CAP may coexist with adaptive routines and enabling conditions to produce practice ahead of confidence. These pathways help explain why the overall CAP-practice correlation remains positive but modest.

4. Discussion

4.1. Capability matters, but it is not a surrogate for practice

The central result is not that self-perceived capability is unimportant, but that it is not a surrogate for practice. CAP was positively associated with practice, consistent with the broader self-efficacy literature (Wray et al., 2022; Yada et al., 2022), yet 35% of teachers occupied mismatched profiles. This extends recent work on competence and preparedness (Alazemi & Larkins, 2025; Prosen & Smrtnik Vitulić, 2025) by showing that the knowledge-action problem is bidirectional. In suppressed enactment, capability is available but its convertibility is weakened by time, class size, monitoring opportunities, or discontinuous coordination. In practice-ahead-of-confidence, situated routines may develop through experience before teachers rate their capability highly. The latter should not be romanticized as modesty; it is a testable temporal asymmetry between confidence and procedural enactment, compatible with evidence that practice-based problem solving and support strengthen the theory-practice connection (Rasmitadila et al., 2024).

4.2. Extending SCT through enactment conversion

SCT already explains reciprocal influence among personal, behavioral, and environmental factors (Bandura, 1986). IEC does not replace that account; it specifies a narrower conversion space between personal resources and classroom action. Capability availability asks whether a teacher possesses knowledge, beliefs, or strategies. Capability convertibility asks whether those resources can become a responsive sequence in a particular lesson. This distinction

helps explain why contextual support correlated more strongly with practice than CAP and why high-low teachers could still produce strong individual episodes. Organizational support and classroom infrastructure are therefore not merely background variables but part of the conditions under which professional capability becomes usable (Abduh et al., 2025).

4.3. Monitoring, agency, and coordination as functional criteria

Three functional criteria refine this conversion. First, monitoring becomes consequential when learner evidence changes the next instructional move; otherwise it is documentation rather than calibration (Jungjohann & Gebhardt, 2023). Second, support quality is visible in agency after support. A teacher or peer may increase task completion while weakening inclusion if assistance removes the learner's meaningful next move. Student voice therefore changes the evaluative question from 'Was help provided?' to 'What capacity to act remained after help?' Third, coordination requires continuity. Contact alone is insufficient when responsibility stops at information exchange; coordination becomes an enactment mechanism when someone acts next and the case is revisited. This interpretation converges with research on task delegation and teacher collaboration in inclusive classrooms (Rasmitadila et al., 2021).

4.4. Methodological and practical implications

Methodologically, profile-driven explanatory mixed methods make mismatch analytically productive. Means and correlations would have hidden the high-low and low-high trajectories, while interviews alone could not show how structurally informative those cases were within the sample. Profile sampling converted discordance into a case-selection logic, and bounded quantification made mechanism coverage visible without treating qualitative counts as prevalence (Fetters et al., 2013; Maxwell, 2010; Sandelowski, 2001). Observation and student voice then checked the functional quality of self-reported practices.

For professional development, the implication is to target the bottleneck rather than assume that more knowledge is always the answer. High-low teachers may need protected coordination time, rapid monitoring routines, accessibility supports, and explicit follow-up structures. Low-high teachers may benefit from making the conceptual logic of effective routines explicit so that practical knowledge becomes more portable. Low-low

teachers likely need capability development and organizational support together, although the absence of low-low observations requires caution. These profile-sensitive implications align with evidence favoring practical adaptation, coursework linked to specific inclusive tasks, and problem-based professional learning (Alazemi & Larkins, 2025; Ng'andu, 2023; Rasmitadila et al., 2024).

Table 6. Profile-sensitive implications for professional development

Profile	Priority diagnosis	Potential support
High-high	Sustain calibration; avoid over-support	Peer observation, reflective cases, student-agency checks
High-low	Conversion bottleneck	Reduce implementation friction; monitoring routines; coordination time/responsibility; accessibility supports
Low-high	Practice ahead of confidence	Case-based coaching; make the conceptual logic of effective routines explicit
Low-low	Capability and context both constrained	Capability development combined with mentoring and organizational support

Note. Profiles are sample-relative analytic heuristics, not fixed teacher types.

4.5. Limitations and future research

Several limitations constrain interpretation. The cross-sectional design cannot establish causal direction, and profiles based on sample medians require replication or person-centered modeling in independent samples. Only 12 classroom episodes were observed and none represented the low-low profile. IEP and ADA had alpha coefficients below .70 and remain contextual indicators. Student data were not designed for direct linkage to individual teachers, so student-agency inferences operate at the mechanism level. Exact questionnaire item wording and item-level descriptive statistics were not available in the source materials; these should be supplied in supplementary materials before submission. Future work should use repeated observations and longitudinal designs to test the stability and temporal ordering of IEC mechanisms.

5. Conclusion

This study reframes the question from whether teachers possess inclusive capability to when

capability becomes practice. Among 120 lower-secondary teachers, CAP was positively but modestly related to practice, and 35% occupied one of two mismatch profiles. Mixed-method integration identified suppressed enactment and practice-ahead-of-confidence, and showed that monitoring-calibration, coordination continuity, contextual convertibility, and student-agency preservation help explain why similar capability levels can yield different classroom action. IEC is offered as a provisional middle-range extension of SCT rather than a validated causal model. Its practical implication is that capability development is necessary but insufficient: inclusive systems must also create conditions in which capability can be enacted, recalibrated in response to learner evidence, and carried forward through clear responsibility without displacing student agency.

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