



CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING AN INDIVIDUAL APPROACH IN TRADITIONAL EDUCATION: SYSTEMIC BARRIERS, PRACTICAL CONSTRAINTS, AND EVIDENCE-BASED PATHWAYS

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ABSTRACT An individual approach (individualized learning, differentiated instruction, learner-centered support) is widely promoted as a way to improve learning outcomes and reduce inequities, yet its implementation in traditional education systems remains inconsistent and fragile. This article examines the key challenges that hinder individualized approaches in conventional school settings, where curriculum pacing, classroom organization, assessment regimes, and teacher workload are designed for “the average learner.” Using a structured literature-based analysis of global policy reports and large-scale international datasets, the paper synthesizes barriers at five levels: (1) system and policy (standardization pressures, accountability structures, and rigid curricula), (2) school organization (class size, timetabling, and resource allocation), (3) teacher capacity (time constraints, training gaps, and data use skills), (4) classroom realities (heterogeneity, behavior management, language diversity, inclusion needs), and (5) technology and equity (digital divide, privacy, and algorithmic bias). The article’s novelty lies in integrating up-to-date global indicators—teacher workforce shortage estimates, teacher workload patterns, and student reports of limited extra help—into a single explanatory framework for why individualized instruction often remains “aspirational” rather than routine practice. Evidence suggests that teacher shortages and retention pressures reduce the time and energy required for purposeful differentiation, while assessment systems that reward coverage and test performance discourage flexible pacing. International findings highlight persistent constraints: the global need for tens of millions of teachers by 2030, teachers’ workload distribution and administrative burden, and students’ self-reports that extra help is not consistently available. The results section presents an evidence-informed “implementation bottleneck map” and practical recommendations: protected collaboration time, simplified data cycles, targeted professional development for differentiation, inclusive support services within mainstream settings, and assessment reforms that value growth and formative feedback. The discussion emphasizes that individualized approaches cannot be sustainably



scaled through teacher effort alone; they require structural alignment across curriculum, assessment, staffing, and support services.

KEYWORDS: individual approach; differentiated instruction; traditional education; teacher workload; class size; inclusive education; assessment policy; learning support; implementation barriers; equity

INTRODUCTION Traditional education systems historically evolved to deliver schooling efficiently at scale: fixed curricula, age-graded classrooms, uniform timetables, and standardized examinations. This architecture is effective for delivering a common program to large cohorts, but it also produces a predictable tension: learners are diverse in prior knowledge, learning pace, language background, motivation, health status, and socio-economic conditions, while the system's design assumes comparability and uniform progress. In such conditions, the idea of an "individual approach"—meeting learners where they are, adapting instruction, materials, feedback, and pacing—becomes both ethically appealing and practically difficult.

The urgency of this problem is not merely pedagogical; it is systemic and global. When education systems cannot respond to learner diversity, the cost is visible in low achievement, disengagement, and widening gaps. Global monitoring has increasingly emphasized foundational learning deficits and unequal learning opportunities. For example, the World Bank's "learning poverty" concept highlights the scale of early learning deficits and frames them as a systems-level crisis in learning quality, not only access. In parallel, inclusion agendas emphasize that mainstream schools must provide meaningful learning opportunities for all children, including those with disabilities and minority-language backgrounds—an objective that demands individualized accommodations and support.

However, a central contradiction emerges: individualized approaches require time, diagnostic assessment, flexible grouping, tailored materials, and continuous feedback, while many traditional schooling environments operate under constraints of large classes, strict pacing guides, and high-stakes accountability. Even where policy documents advocate personalization, the daily mechanics of schools (period length, subject silos, exam schedules) may prevent teachers from acting on that vision. Teacher capacity is a particularly critical bottleneck. UNESCO and partner organizations have underscored a major global challenge: the need for a very large expansion and replacement of the teaching workforce by 2030, indicating that staffing constraints will likely intensify rather than ease in many settings.

At the same time, international surveys provide a clearer picture of what teachers' working lives look like. The OECD's Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) 2024 sampled hundreds of thousands of teachers across many systems, and its reporting on workload composition and task distribution matters directly for individualized instruction: if teachers' work time is fragmented by administrative requirements and non-instructional tasks, the chance



of consistent differentiation decreases. Student-side data also signals limits of individualized support: in OECD reporting related to PISA 2022, students' access to extra help and teacher support is not universal, and a notable share of students report receiving extra help only in some lessons rather than regularly.

Against this background, the article addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the most common barriers to implementing an individual approach in traditional education?
2. Which barriers are structural (system-level) and which are pedagogical (classroom-level)?
3. How do global indicators on staffing, workload, and student support help explain why individualized instruction remains difficult?
4. What policy and school-level changes are most likely to make individualized approaches feasible without overburdening teachers?

Scientific novelty This paper's novelty is threefold. First, it integrates up-to-date global evidence on teacher shortages and teacher workload into the analysis of individualized instruction, arguing that "implementation capacity" is the missing link between pedagogical ideals and classroom reality. Second, it triangulates teacher-side constraints (time, workload) with student-side experiences (teacher support, extra help patterns) to show that personalization challenges are not merely teacher training issues but system design problems. Third, it proposes an applied framework—the Implementation Bottleneck Map—that schools can use to diagnose where their individualized learning efforts are most likely to fail (assessment pressure, timetable rigidity, lack of support services, or data-use gaps).

METHODS

Design and approach The study uses a structured, evidence-informed literature synthesis (a scoping review with analytic categorization). The aim is not to test a single intervention but to map the ecosystem of constraints that shape implementation outcomes. The method combines (a) policy and monitoring reports, (b) large-scale international survey data summaries, and (c) research reviews on differentiation and inclusion.

Data sources Three categories of sources were prioritized:

1. Global workforce and policy context: UNESCO's global reporting on teacher shortages and the future of the profession. These sources provide quantified estimates of teacher demand and highlight systemic pressures that affect instructional quality.
2. Teacher working conditions and workload: OECD TALIS 2024 reporting on teachers' work composition, task distribution, and the scale of the survey sample. These provide direct evidence on time constraints relevant to differentiation.



3. Student experiences and class organization indicators: OECD reporting linked to PISA 2022 (teacher support and class size trends), as well as OECD topic pages on class size and student-teacher ratios. These contextualize structural constraints and student access to support.

Additionally, inclusion-focused resources (UNICEF) were used to capture the practical requirements of inclusive education, which inherently demands individualized accommodations and support.

Analytic procedure The analysis proceeded in four steps:

Step 1: Extraction of recurring “constraint themes” from each source category (policy/workforce; teacher workload; student support/class structure; inclusion requirements).

Step 2: Grouping constraints into five levels: system/policy, school organization, teacher capacity, classroom realities, and technology/equity.

Step 3: Identification of “implementation mechanisms” (how each constraint blocks individualized practice).

Step 4: Construction of an Implementation Bottleneck Map to link barriers to feasible interventions.

Operational definition For this paper, “individual approach” refers to any systematic adaptation of instruction to learner differences, including differentiated instruction, flexible grouping, individualized feedback, formative assessment cycles, and reasonable accommodations for learners with disabilities or language needs.

Limitations Because this is a synthesis, causal claims about specific interventions are not tested experimentally here. Also, international reports provide averages and may mask variation within countries, regions, and school types. Still, the approach is appropriate for explaining why individualized instruction often fails to scale in traditional systems.

RESULTS

Overview The synthesis found that barriers cluster into a small number of high-impact bottlenecks. Importantly, many barriers are mutually reinforcing: teacher shortages increase class sizes and workload; workload reduces planning and assessment time; reduced time leads to reliance on whole-class instruction; whole-class instruction increases disengagement and behavior issues; behavior issues further consume time, leaving even less capacity for individual support.

Below are the five barrier levels and their main results.

1. System and policy barriers: standardization vs. personalization The most consistent system barrier is misalignment between personalization goals and accountability structures. Traditional systems often emphasize curriculum coverage and standardized exam performance. When school success is measured primarily by test outcomes, teachers have incentives to “teach to the test,” accelerate pacing, and minimize deviations that



could slow coverage. Individualized pacing becomes risky: if slower learners require more time, teachers may fear falling behind mandated schedules. Conversely, advanced learners may not receive enrichment because enrichment is not rewarded by standard metrics.

This misalignment is intensified in contexts where teacher shortages and turnover pressures reduce instructional stability. UNESCO's reporting signals a major staffing challenge—tens of millions of additional teachers needed by 2030—implying that many systems will struggle to maintain smaller classes, mentoring, and specialist support, all of which are crucial for individualization.

Mechanism: Policy-driven uniformity makes flexible pacing costly; staffing shortages reduce the capacity to compensate through additional support.

2. School organization barriers: class size, timetables, and resource allocation Even when teachers believe in individualized instruction, school structures can block it. Three organizational constraints were repeatedly identified:

a) Class size and student-teacher ratios Individualization requires frequent diagnosis and feedback, which becomes harder as class size increases. OECD materials on class size and student-teacher ratios show that these indicators change slowly, and while some reductions exist over time, they remain a structural reality for many systems. OECD reporting linked to PISA 2022 indicates that average class size across OECD countries decreased only modestly over a decade, about one student from 2012 to 2022, suggesting that the “structural relief” is limited.

b) Timetables and lesson duration Fixed period lengths and subject silos limit flexible grouping and project-based differentiation. Individualized support often requires extended time blocks for conferencing, reteaching, or guided practice, but many schools operate with short periods optimized for whole-class delivery.

c) Resource allocation and support services Traditional schools often lack sufficient specialist staff (special educators, speech therapists, counselors) to support inclusion. UNICEF's inclusion guidance emphasizes that teachers require training and guidance and that students need services to overcome barriers—services that are often insufficiently resourced.

Mechanism: Organizational design favors uniform delivery; limited support services push all needs onto the classroom teacher, making individualization unrealistic.

3. Teacher capacity barriers: time, workload, and professional learning gaps The most powerful bottleneck across sources is time. Individualized instruction requires: diagnosing needs, planning multiple pathways, preparing materials, managing flexible groups, and giving timely feedback.

CONCLUSION Implementing an individual approach in traditional education is challenging not because the idea is flawed, but because it is capacity-intensive and often misaligned with system design. Traditional schooling prioritizes uniformity—standard curricula, fixed pacing,



standardized assessments—while individualization requires flexibility, diagnostic teaching, and sustained feedback. Up-to-date global evidence strengthens the argument that structural constraints are central: teacher workforce shortages threaten class sizes and support services, teacher workload limits planning and feedback time, and students' reported access to extra help remains uneven.

The article's core implication is practical: individualized approaches cannot be scaled through teacher effort alone. They require alignment across curriculum, assessment, staffing, school organization, and inclusive support services. If systems invest in protected collaboration time, reduce unnecessary workload, strengthen inclusion supports, and reform assessment incentives, individualized instruction becomes realistic rather than rhetorical. Conversely, if schools demand personalization without structural support, implementation will remain fragmented and will risk increasing inequity—helping only those students whose families can compensate outside school. Sustainable individualization is therefore a systems reform agenda, not merely a classroom technique.

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