INTERNATIONAL SPOTLIGHT

Teacher Preparation and Special Education in Austria: National Practices and Global Implications

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> Austria's journey toward integrative and inclusive education reflects patterns seen in many countries: policy-driven shifts toward co-teaching, tensions between urban and rural access, and an ongoing need for stronger preservice preparation.

ABSTRACT

The education of students with disabilities varies between countries. Austria has a unique system that begins with the education of their teachers and is influenced by the historical background and demographics of the country. This article provides an overview of Austria's special education policies, teacher preparation systems, and current educational challenges, grounded in the country's historical, legal, and demographic context. Particular attention is given to the evolution of preservice teacher preparation, including Austria's dual-subject training model and the increasing emphasis on inclusive instructional strategies and co-teaching. Despite policy efforts to expand integration, persistent barriers remain, including regional disparities, rigid curriculum expectations, and limited access to secondary education for students with disabilities. Drawing on Austria's national experiences, this article highlights policy developments, institutional structures, and local innovations—such as Vienna's inclusive school centers—that offer practical insights for global audiences preparing special education professionals. By providing readers with an overall understanding of teacher preparation and special education systems in Austria, we aim to shape classrooms, school systems, and teachers through lessons learned from the strengths and weaknesses of the Austrian school system.

KEYWORDS

Austria, Comparative Education, Disability Policy, Inclusive Education, Special Education, Teacher Preparation

Education in Austria has undergone significant reform over the years, particularly in the realm of special education. Since the 1980s, these reforms have been shaped by changing international norms and legal frameworks that emphasize the rights of people with disabilities and special educational needs (SEN). In the past, Austria maintained a very distinct, differentiated educational system in which students with disabilities were educated in separate schools. During the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, international developments prompted Austria to reconsider its segregated approach (Garrouste, 2010). Following global trends toward inclusive education, Austria has made efforts to transition from segregated schooling for students with disabilities to integrated models[1]. These efforts have manifested through policies that enable students with disabilities to attend mainstream schools while receiving additional support. Despite such policies, challenges persist, including underfunding, insufficient teacher training, and the maintenance of special needs education systems, which hinder the full implementation and effectiveness of integrated education.

While grounded in Austria's unique historical and legislative context, the evolution of its teacher preparation practices and integration policies mirrors broader global efforts to balance inclusive ideals with practical challenges. Lessons from Austria may offer relevant models or cautionary insights for countries undergoing similar reforms. Similar issues and discrepancies between active policies and classroom-level realities can be observed in educational systems worldwide, making

1 For consistency with the Austrian system's terminology, this article will use the term integration as opposed to inclusion.

Austria a relevant comparative case in the subject of educational reform. This article examines Austria's approach to special education through its national context, educational structure, teacher preparation, and current implementation challenges. Rather than proposing a universally generalizable model, we present Austria as a comparative case through which teacher preparation practices and constraints related to inclusive education can be examined.

AUSTRIA'S NATIONAL CONTEXT: DEMOGRAPHICS, GOVERNANCE, AND ECONOMY

Austria, located in south-central Europe and bordered by eight countries, had a population of 9,052,856 in 2022, reflecting both natural growth and migration (Weiß-Wallner & Krobath, 2024). While German is the official language, Austria formally recognizes several minority languages—Burgenland-Croatian, Slovene, Hungarian, Czech, Slovak, and Romansh—protected under Part II of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. English is also widely taught in schools (Migration.gv.at, n.d.).

Austria is governed as a federal parliamentary republic, with both national and regional authorities sharing responsibility for public services, including education (European Commission, 2024). A central feature of Austria's economy is its dual vocational education and training (VET) system. This model combines classroom-based instruction with hands-on apprenticeships to prepare students for skilled careers. The VET system is credited with reducing youth unemployment and aligning educational outcomes with labor market demands (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, n.d.). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2025) reports that Austria's VET system relies on targeted support measures to enable participation by learners with disabilities, suggesting that mainstream apprenticeships are not fully inclusive.

Public investment in education amounts to approximately 5.4% of Austria's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and includes funding for free primary and secondary schooling as well as subsidized tertiary and vocational education (European Commission, 2021). Despite this robust funding model, regional disparities persist. Urban areas such as Vienna and Graz benefit from greater tax revenues and access to specialized resources, while rural regions often face shortages of trained teachers and limited support services for students with SEN (OECD, 2017). These inequalities hinder the consistent implementation of integrated education across the country.

Overall, Austria's strong economy enables substantial investment in education, but geographic and systemic disparities continue to challenge the equitable distribution of services. The national and economic context directly influences how Austria structures and funds its educational system. These contextual features shape how special education services are implemented across regions and, in turn, influence the preparation demands placed on teachers working with students with SEN.

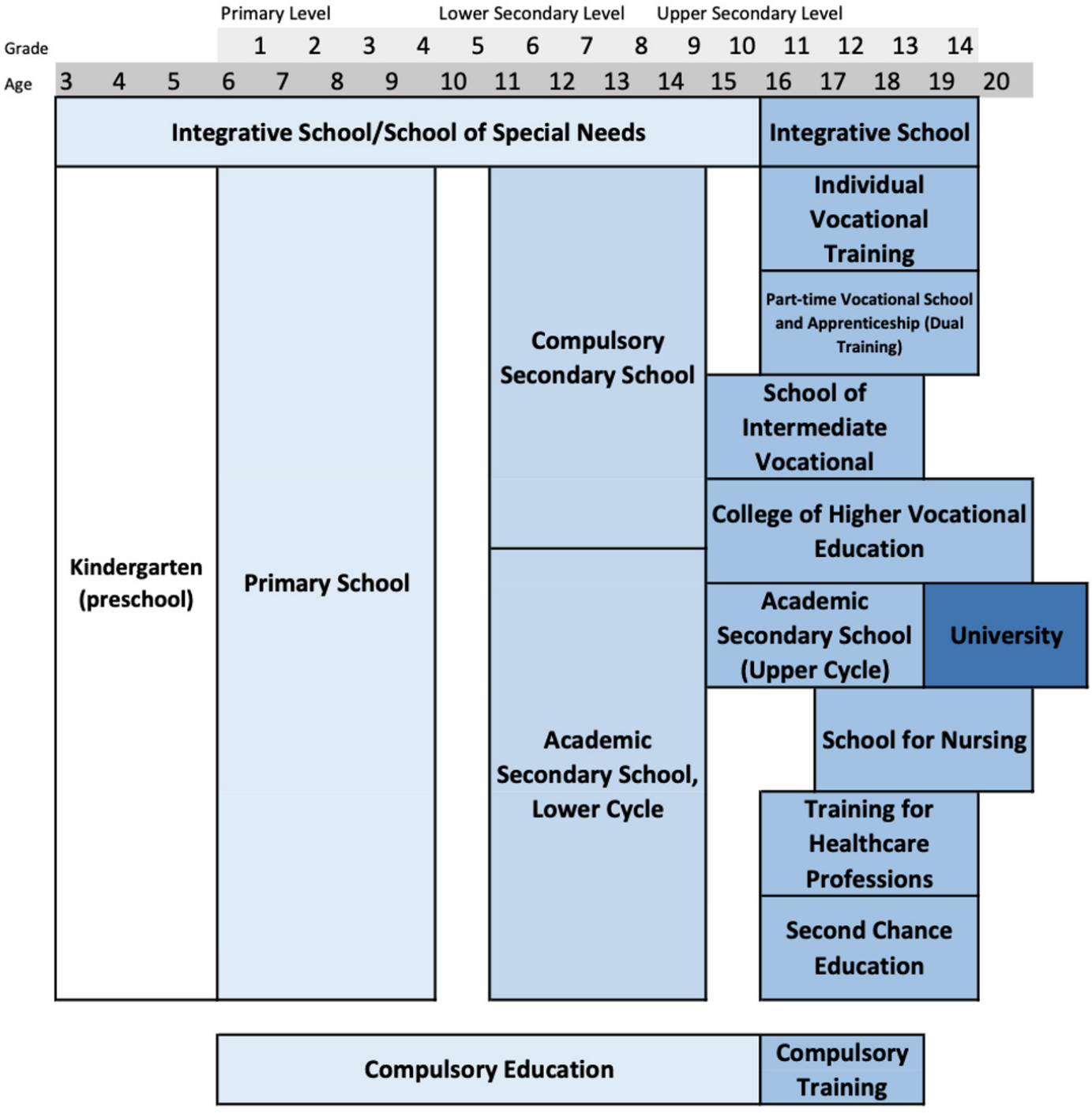
AUSTRIA'S EDUCATION SYSTEM

Today, Austria's public education system is divided into four stages: primary, lower secondary, upper secondary, and tertiary education. Parents or legal guardians are responsible for registering their children for school (Innviertel, n.d.). *Volksschule*, or primary school, serves children between the ages of six and ten. Although school is mandatory beginning at age six, some students begin with an optional preparatory year called *Vorschule*, designed for children not yet considered "school-ready." This year helps facilitate a smoother transition into formal education.

After completing four years of primary school, students advance to the lower secondary level. They can choose between attending a compulsory secondary school (i.e., *Mittelschule*) or the lower level of an academic secondary school (i.e., *Unterstufe)*. Compulsory secondary school lasts four years and provides a fundamental general education. In contrast, academic secondary school is designed to prepare students for higher education and offers a more comprehensive general education (Stadt Wien, n.d.-b). To be admitted to either lower secondary education placement, students cannot fail any compulsory subject area in their fourth grade year. If students wish to attend lower academic secondary school, they must complete an aptitude exam and achieve good or excellent marks in math and German. However, students may enter lower academic secondary school with marks of satisfactory provided that a class conference indicates the student's ability to succeed. Finally, students can take an entrance exam if none of these criteria are met (European Commission, 2025b).

In the ninth school year, students must choose between two distinct pathways: a vocational or a general academic track. The vocational path typically begins with a one-year pre-vocational school and is part of Austria's dual education system, combining classroom-based learning with practical, real-world training through apprenticeships. This model prepares students to enter the workforce with specialized skills. The time spent in pre-vocational school creates a one-year gap between secondary school and vocational training, as shown in Figure 1. Alternatively, students who pursue the academic track enter the upper cycle of secondary education, which

FIGURE 1: Austrian Education System



lasts four years and prepares them for university-level study. Upon completion, students may apply to a university to continue their academic pursuits.

This structured system also provides the foundation for Austria's integrated education policies. The structural transition points are especially consequential for students with SEN, as placement options and pathway decisions directly shape access to integrated settings and the competencies teachers must be prepared to support (see Figure 1).

Austria has nine different boards of education, each covering a different part of the country. Vienna, Austria's largest city, has its own school board. The next-largest city is Graz, which is roughly seven times smaller in population than Vienna. Unlike Vienna, Graz does not have its own board of education; instead, it falls under the Styria Board of Education (Federal Ministry Education, n.d.). The Styria Board of Education covers

the entire province of Styria, accounting for much of southeastern Austria. Because primary and secondary education are standardized across Austria, they look similar across all boards of education. However, when compared to students in Vienna, students living in rural areas are more likely to be integrated into vocational training in secondary school within 24 months of the reference date (Pessl & Steiner, 2022).

Special Education System

To fully understand the current integrative education system in Austria, it is helpful to first examine the historical development of special education in the country. More specifically, there have been four major phases. Prior to the end of World War II, students with severe disabilities were considered unfit for schooling. Between the 1960s and 1980s, students with disabilities were educated in special schools—separate environments from general education. These schools were disability-specific, with different schools for students with learning disabilities, physical impairments, and intellectual or multiple disabilities (Buchner & Proyer, 2020). Later, advocacy by the Disabled People's Movement and parents led to greater demand for inclusive options. Austria's ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in 2007 further accelerated the movement toward integrating students with disabilities into mainstream schools (Buchner & Proyer, 2020).

Today, Austria's school system emphasizes integrative classrooms, in which students with and without SEN learn together. This model began developing in the 1990s, following significant legislative changes. In 1993, the 15th School Organization Act Amendment gave parents of primary students with SEN the right to choose between general or special schooling, and this right was extended to secondary education in 1996. Integrative classrooms typically feature a general education teacher and a special education teacher co-teaching in the same space. The intent of this structure is to support SEN students while maintaining academic standards for all learners. If, after an observation period and consultation with teachers and parents, it is determined that mainstream interventions have failed, a student with a disability can be referred to special education. After this referral, an application is submitted to the board of education and the team then decides which setting (e.g., integrative school, special school) would be most appropriate for that student (Subasi Singh et al., 2021).

However, access to integrative schools varies across the country. Urban areas, such as Vienna, offer more integrative school centers, while rural regions often rely more heavily on traditional special schools. Although families technically have school choice, geographic disparities may limit access to integrative options. As a result, special schools still play a significant role in Austria's education system (Buchner & Proyer, 2020). There are nine different types of special schools, separated by disability type: (1) physically disabled, (2) speech impaired, (3) hearing impaired, (4) deaf, (5) visually impaired, (6) blind, (7) behavioral disabilities, (8) special educational needs, and (9) learning impaired. Students with disabilities typically attend special schools for nine years but can attend an additional three years with approval from their school department. The last year of education includes career studies where students explore different career options and learn the necessary skills for prospective careers. Education usually stops after this point, and students enter a career path. (European Commission, 2025a).

From the mid-1980s through the early 2000s, Austria employed three primary models of integration: integrative classes, single integration, and cooperative classes (Feyerer, 2009). Integrative classes featured co-teaching between a general and a special educator. Single integration referred to placing one SEN student in a general classroom with part-time support from a special educator. Cooperative classes consisted of eight to ten SEN students taught in a separate classroom, with opportunities to join general education peers for select subjects like arts or physical education (Buchner & Proyer, 2020).

The use of these models contributed to advances in integrative education. However, they are no longer widely implemented in their original form. Today, Austria employs a mix of integrative and segregated arrangements. This variety reflects a complex and evolving education system that is not uniformly inclusive. Understanding how students with disabilities are distributed across settings is essential for interpreting the preparation requirements of teachers working in integrative and segregated environments. Table 1 displays the distribution of students with special education needs across primary and secondary schools in Austria, categorized by disability type. These data illustrate both the prevalence of specific disabilities and the placement of students within various school settings.

Despite progress, integrative education in Austria has evolved slowly. In 2000, approximately 50% of SEN students were educated in mainstream classrooms. This proportion remained stagnant for over a decade due to limited national policy developments (Buchner & Gebhardt, 2011). By the 2016-2017 school year, the number had increased only modestly to 61%, leaving about one-third of SEN students still being educated in segregated settings (Buchner & Proyer, 2020). Although some special schools have closed, Austria's path toward a fully inclusive system remains gradual and uneven.

Table 1: Special Education Enrollment in Austria (2021-2022)

School Level	Type of SEN	Male	Female	Total	% of Total Student Population*
Primary	Learning	3,524	2,876	6,400	1.10%
	Vision	218	176	394	.07%
	Hearing	482	392	874	0.15%
	Language	1,950	1,640	3,590	0.62%
	Physical/Motor Development	764	612	1,376	0.24%
	Emotional/Social Development	2,105	1,789	3,894	0.67%
Secondary	Learning	1,978	1,521	3,499	0.60%
	Vision	136	98	234	0.04%
	Hearing	278	225	503	0.09%
	Language	812	689	1,501	0.26%
	Physical/Motor Development	312	248	560	0.10%
	Emotional/Social Development	1,093	876	1,969	0.34%
	Total (All Students)	13,652	11,142	24,794	4.28%

** Percentages are calculated using an estimated total compulsory school population of 582,969 students in Austria during the 2021-2022 school year.Source: Austrian Ministry of Education, 2022*

Vienna offers a noteworthy example of Austria's integration efforts. Across Vienna's schools serving students with SEN, 54 are inclusive school centers and seven are public or private special schools. The inclusive school centers blend special and general education models under one roof. These schools provide a variety of services, including aquatic, speech, and equestrian therapy, and maintain small class sizes with specially trained staff. This hybrid approach is designed to meet the needs of a diverse student body and may serve as a model for other metropolitan areas. The city also supports about 800 integrative classes, serving approximately 5,600 students with SEN. Alternatively, the special schools offer concentrated therapy services—including occupational, physical, speech, and music therapy—delivered onsite or through nearby providers as well as smaller class sizes and highly specialized teachers (Expositur Opfermanngasse, n.d.).

Current Status of Integration

Some notable resource limitations constrain access to integrative services in Austria. Specifically, the Austrian government has capped the proportion of students for whom additional federal special education funding is guaranteed, rather than allocating resources flexibly based on actual school or regional prevalence of disability (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2020). While schools may identify more students as having SEN, federal funding is only guaranteed to up to 2.7% of the total student population. This requires regional governments and individual schools to absorb costs for students identified beyond this cap.

Between 1994 and 2003, the percentage of students identified as having SEN increased from approximately 3.5% to 4.3% (Friedle et al., 2006), indicating that the prevalence of disability had already exceeded the funding cap decades ago. As shown in Table 1, this trend has continued. In the 2021-2022 school year, approximately 24,794 students were enrolled in special education programs, representing about 4.3% of Austria's total compulsory school population. This exceeds the national funding cap by more than 1.5%, meaning that a substantial proportion of students with disabilities are educated without guaranteed federal resources.

Table 1 further demonstrates the limitation of the funding cap. Percentages per disability type show that learning disabilities and emotional/social development needs account for the largest shares of SEN enrollment, with combined totals from these two categories alone already exceeding the 2.7% funding threshold. This pattern appears consistently across both primary and secondary school levels, indicating a systemic misalignment between identified educational need and amount of funding available. Taken together, these data highlight a structural gap in Austria's special education framework that limits schools' ability to provide equitable and consistent support to students with SEN.

TEACHING AND TEACHER PREPARATION IN AUSTRIA

Working Conditions and Benefits

In Austria, teachers are required to teach for 17–21 hours per week. This number fluctuates depending on the school, additional administrative or extracurricular responsibilities, and

subject. For example, core subjects such as German and mathematics are allotted more instructional time than subjects like physical education (Nusche et al., 2016). If a teacher spends 20 hours per week providing direct instruction, they can use the remainder of their full-time schedule for grading, paperwork, and lesson planning. Teachers are permitted to complete this preparatory work from home, offering additional flexibility. Class sizes vary depending on the type of classroom but typically average around 20 students in general education settings (Austrian Business Agency, n.d.). In special education or classrooms serving students with severe disabilities, legal regulations limit class sizes to a maximum of eight students to ensure adequate support.

Most teachers in Austria co-teach, meaning they share instruction and grading responsibilities with another teacher. This collaborative model allows for extensive planning time and helps improve instructional quality. In addition to flexible working conditions and receiving summers off, teachers are paid 14 times per year, with the two additional salary installments distributed in June and November to coincide with summer and winter breaks (Oyster, n.d.).

Austria also provides generous family leave policies that support work-life balance and long-term career sustainability. Teachers are entitled to a minimum of four months of fully paid maternity leave, during which they are not permitted to work. After this period, they may take additional, partially-paid, maternity or paternity leave for up to two years, depending on the duration and job type (Yale School of Public Health, 2018). Parents also have the legal right to part-time work arrangements until their child turns seven. Employees are protected from dismissal during maternity/paternity leave or part-time childcare-related arrangements. These policies contribute to job satisfaction and high teacher retention.

Historical Overview of Special Education Training

The development of special education in Austria has resulted in significant changes in how teachers are trained to meet the needs of students with SEN. These changes primarily focus on improving teacher quality. Without well-prepared educators, achieving inclusive classroom goals is highly challenging. Understanding Austria's current teacher preparation system requires a look at its historical evolution.

Before 1968, teacher training in Austria was highly standardized, with general education teachers receiving broad instruction but no specialization in disability-related education. Special education was not yet recognized as a formal field of study, and teachers who worked with students with disabilities often learned through mentorship or on-the-job experience (Buchner & Proyer, 2020). In 1968, Austria introduced a structured teacher training system through specialized colleges rather than universities. Prospective teachers completed four semesters of general education coursework, while those pursuing special education undertook additional training focused on specific disabilities and subject-area expertise (Buchner & Proyer, 2020). Despite these reforms, a severe shortage of trained professionals persisted. In the 1973-74 school year, 41.5% of teachers in special schools lacked formal teaching certification (Engelbrecht, 1988).

By the 1980s, Austria began expanding its teacher training curricula to include individualized education planning, adaptive instruction, and classroom management strategies for students with disabilities (Feyerer, 2007). In response to the increasing emphasis on integration, some institutions, such as the College of Upper Austria, introduced training programs like the "Integration Teacher" course to prepare educators for co-teaching environments. The late 1990s were marked by the shift toward an integrative model of education, leading to significant modifications in teacher preparation. Training programs increasingly emphasized individualized instruction, differentiated learning strategies, and adaptive teaching techniques to accommodate diverse classroom needs (Buchner & Proyer, 2020). However, despite these reforms, elements of the traditional medical model of disability—emphasizing deficits rather than strengths—remain deeply embedded in policies and practices across the country.

During this time, Austria also restructured its teacher education system. Special education training evolved from being an extension of general education into a distinct, professionalized field requiring advanced study. This restructuring aimed to ensure that special education teachers possessed both the theoretical knowledge and practical skills necessary to effectively support students with disabilities (Buchner & Proyer, 2020).

Modern Structure and Training Pathways

Austria continues to refine its teacher education system. Recent reforms have aligned teacher training institutions with universities, standardizing both coursework and qualifications. Today, prospective teachers must complete either a bachelor's (BA) or a master's (MA) degree in education. A BA qualifies teachers for lower secondary schools, while an MA allows teachers to work at higher secondary levels and pursue specialization in inclusive or special education settings. Teacher training institutions have also merged to provide more cohesive and integrated certification pathways.

A key feature of Austria's system is its dual-subject specialization requirement. Teachers must specialize in two subjects, such as mathematics, English, sports, or arts, while completing coursework at both universities and teacher training colleges (Buchner & Proyer, 2020). In 2016, Austrian policy officially recognized "inclusive education" as one of the possible specialization areas, allowing preservice teachers to pair it with another academic subject such as math or reading. These changes were made in response to increased inclusion goals, especially following the 2015 policy shift that ended traditional secondary-level special education tracks. However, not all teachers receive sufficient training in inclusive practices, and many are underprepared to meet the needs of students with SEN due to a limited focus on disability-specific pedagogy within their specialization areas.

Modern teacher preparation programs in Austria emphasize both theoretical knowledge and practical experience. A central focus is preparing teachers to create inclusive, supportive learning environments for students with disabilities. Coursework emphasizes evidence-based practices such as differentiated instruction, the use of assistive technology, and behavioral intervention strategies (Buchner & Proyer, 2020). Collaboration is another priority of current training. Teachers are encouraged to work alongside general educators, therapists, and school support staff to provide well-rounded services for students with SEN. Field placements and internships in both integrative and specialized settings allow future educators to gain hands-on experience. These practical elements ensure that Austrian teachers are well-equipped to serve all students, regardless of ability (Feyerer, 2007). Together, these evolving policies and practices form the foundation of Austria's current approach to preparing educators for inclusive classrooms.

CURRENT ISSUES

Special education in Austria faces several current issues, including the limitation that integration programs only apply to children with an official SEN diagnosis, insufficient training for teachers, language barriers stemming from increased migration, and restricted educational opportunities beyond the age of fifteen. Together, these ongoing challenges reveal the gaps that remain between inclusive education policy and practice in Austria, underscoring the need for sustained reform.

First, the integration program in public schools only applies to children with an official SEN diagnosis. This can be problematic because there are many students at risk of experiencing discrimination due to the structure of the Austrian school system. Students who would benefit from being part of the integration program often do not receive the same amount of individualized, targeted support. They may come from low-income families, have recently migrated to Austria, or may not speak the language. In many cases, these students do not receive the resources and accommodations that would help them succeed in school (Bešic, 2020).

The second issue is the lack of training for teachers, with two specific areas in which teachers need more support. First, special education teachers, known as integration teachers, are required to teach a wide range of subjects and grade levels. However, they are not provided adequate training to meet these expectations. For instance, students pursuing a degree in special education at the University of Vienna select two subject areas to specialize in and focus their training only on those subjects (Buchner & Proyer, 2020). If a teacher chooses to study Sports and Arts, they are likely unprepared to teach core academic subjects. Integration teachers likewise need more training in collaboration—specifically, how to co-teach with general education teachers. The integration model includes both a general education teacher and a special education teacher working in the same classroom. However, because neither teacher typically receives formal training in co-teaching strategies, the special education teacher may be marginalized in practice (Schwab et al., 2015). In many classrooms, the special education teacher supports only students with SEN, while the general education teacher works with students without SEN. This separation can result in students with SEN remaining socially and instructionally isolated from their peers. Additionally, special education teachers may be viewed as aides or paraprofessionals rather than equal collaborators (Schwab et al., 2015).

A third challenge currently facing Austria's schools is the increasing linguistic diversity among students due to migration. In 2022 alone, 49,097 people immigrated to Vienna (Stadt Wien, n.d.-a). Many of these students speak a first language other than German, and as a result, often face difficulties in school not due to academic ability, but because of language barriers. The current procedure for supporting these students involves segregated German Language Support Classes (GLSC), where instruction is provided by German-speaking teachers, sometimes supported by staff who speak the child's first language (Gitschthaler et al., 2025). While enrolled in GLSC, students are typically not allowed to advance to higher grades, which can lead to delayed educational progression, class repetition, and increased dropout rates. Furthermore, GLSC support is generally limited to two years, which may not be sufficient for all learners to acquire the necessary academic language proficiency. The

broader issue is not school overpopulation but rather a shortage of adequately trained teachers and a lack of preparation for working in linguistically diverse classrooms. This shortage affects all students, regardless of background, and puts added pressure on both general education and integration teachers. As the number of students with different first languages continues to grow, addressing the need for language-inclusive teaching strategies becomes increasingly urgent.

Finally, even when students with disabilities succeed within integrative models, their educational trajectories often face abrupt limits. While Austria's education system technically accommodates students of all abilities, support often ends when students reach a certain age or when they can no longer meet the demands of the general curriculum (OeAD, n.d.). Those students who attend special schools typically receive education from ages six to fifteen, with limited opportunities for continuing their education beyond that point. While there are options to attend integrative schools at higher levels, admittance is contingent on the type and severity of disability. Students placed in integrative settings often learn in small, self-contained classrooms with about four other students with disabilities. To remain in these settings, they must follow the same curriculum as their peers in general education. If they struggle to keep up, school authorities assess on a case-by-case basis whether curriculum modifications are warranted or whether the student should exit the integration pathway. Access to *Gymnasium* (i.e., academic secondary school) and university education is rare for students with physical, hearing, or vision impairments and virtually nonexistent for students with cognitive disabilities. These students are most often guided toward vocational or workforce-based transitions rather than academic pathways (Buchner & Proyer, 2020).

COMPARISON TO OTHER COUNTRIES

Teacher preparation looks different in every country. For example, in the United States, a primary school teacher will earn a degree in education while a secondary school teacher will earn a degree in the subject that they plan to specialize in and minor in education. In Australia, primary school and secondary school teachers are both required to study a specialized subject and education. In Japan, teachers earn a bachelor's degree and take teacher preparation courses. In Korea, a teacher can either obtain a bachelor's degree in education or study a different subject and then obtain a teacher certification by taking teacher training courses. In Norway, a five-year master's degree with a subject specialization is required. All the teacher training programs in these countries include a practical component where preservice teachers enter schools to observe and practice teaching (Hall et al., 2024).

LESSONS TO BE LEARNED

Teacher preparation programs in the US can learn valuable lessons from Austria's special education training and system. First, students with all abilities have the right to education, including students who are immigrants or speak a non-native language. Second, co-teaching is more effective when teachers are treated as equals in both training and teaching. Finally, teachers need to be more adequately prepared to teach students with disabilities, which starts with strengthening the teacher preparation courses in universities. For teacher preparation programs, these lessons point to the importance of explicit training in co-teaching and collaborative planning, sufficient depth and disability-specific pedagogy within broad certification pathways, and clinical placements that reflect authentic, inclusive classroom contexts. At the same time, differences in policy structures, resources, and placement options represent conditions that may limit the direct transfer of Austria's approaches to other systems. Nevertheless, learning from other countries can help strengthen and improve teacher preparation and special education programs in the United States.

CONCLUSION

Austria has made significant progress in shifting toward inclusive education, but challenges remain, especially in teacher preparation, policy enforcement, and accessibility of secondary and postsecondary education. Although policies emphasize integration, disparities in implementation across regions create obstacles for students with SEN. Improving teacher training and ensuring adequate support services are critical steps in advancing Austria's inclusive education framework. A more structured approach to special education teacher preparation and resource allocation would help bridge existing gaps and promote equity for all students.

Austria's journey toward integrative and inclusive education reflects patterns seen in many countries: policy-driven shifts toward co-teaching, tensions between urban and rural access, and an ongoing need for stronger preservice preparation. By examining Austria's strategies, such as specialized dual-subject teacher training, integrative school centers, and historic models of integration, educators around the world can reflect on their own systems and identify transferable strategies that support more inclusive, equitable classrooms. The transfer of these strategies is most plausible in systems that can support co-teaching preparation, equitable access to inclusive placements, and necessary resources. Without these conditions, similar reforms may reproduce gaps and tensions between policy and classroom-level practice.

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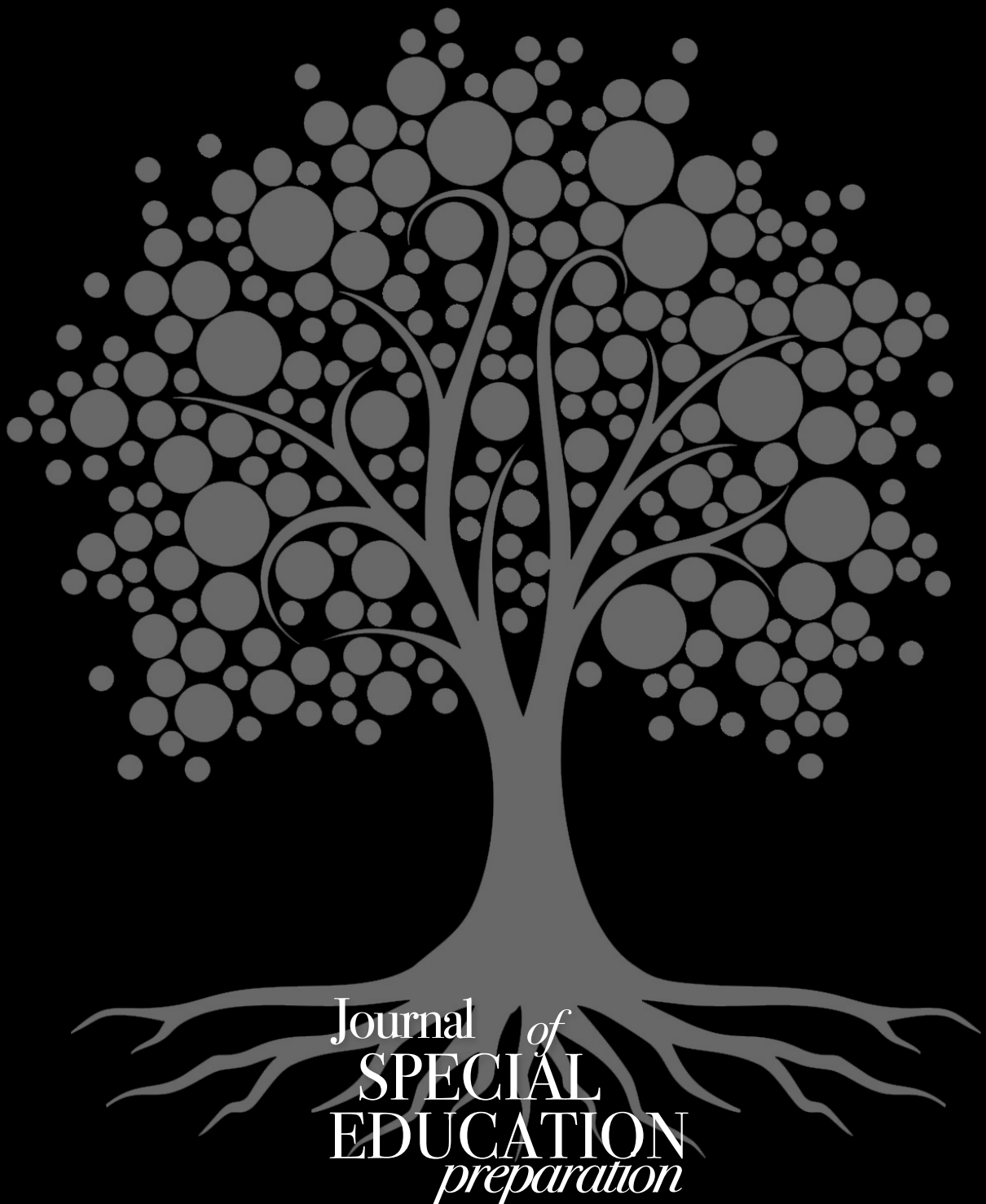

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