BRITISH COUNCIL

Research

Leading Inclusion and Belonging in Schools

March 2025

www.britishcouncil.org/research-policy-insight

Contents

Foreword

Marina Gautier

Inclusion and belonging are fundamental human needs, and education systems worldwide are tasked with the challenge of fostering environments where all learners can thrive, irrespective of their abilities, gender, or linguistic background. It is imperative that the schools within those systems serve as vital spaces where these principles are embodied and nurtured. This publication explores the critical role of leadership in achieving inclusion and belonging, offering new perspectives, research, and practical case studies that address some of the most pressing issues in education today.

The British Council has long been committed to advancing inclusion and equity in education, recognising that these principles are not only moral imperatives but also essential for building resilient, cohesive societies. Through our work, we have seen how inclusive practices in schools can transform lives, create opportunities, and break cycles of exclusion. However, this transformation is not automatic; it requires intentional leadership, innovative thinking, and a willingness to confront systemic barriers. This publication seeks to support that effort by focusing on three critical themes:

1. The education and inclusion of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).
2. Gender equality, with a particular emphasis on the education and inclusion of girls.
3. The role of the language of instruction as both a barrier to, and an enabler of, inclusion and belonging.

Leadership: the heart of inclusion

The leadership of inclusion and belonging requires a shift in mindset. School leaders, policy makers, and educators must move beyond traditional frameworks to adopt approaches that prioritise equity and belonging for all learners. Leadership, in this context, is not merely about policy implementation; it is about inspiring and sustaining a vision for inclusion that permeates every aspect of a school system.

Professor Kathryn Riley's chapter, *The school belonging lottery*, underscores this imperative. She articulates how school leaders can set the tone for inclusion by fostering a culture where every student feels valued and respected. By emphasising the importance of relationships, empathy, and shared responsibility, Riley offers practical strategies for cultivating inclusive environments that inspire trust and engagement.

Addressing special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

The inclusion of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities remains a global challenge. Too often, systemic barriers, limited resources, and societal stigma prevent learners with disabilities from accessing equitable education. This publication highlights innovative approaches to addressing these barriers, showcasing examples of effective policy reform and practice.

Mohamed Hassan Al-Sibai's chapter, *Inclusion in Egypt*, provides insights into integrating pupils with special needs into mainstream classrooms in Egypt, emphasising the importance of collaboration, teacher training, and community engagement.

Through case studies such as *Widening access to education and participation in society for disabled children in Iraq* by Emma Sarton in Iraq, and eKitabu's work on supportive technology, this publication illustrates how different regions are addressing the inclusion of learners with disabilities. These contributions serve as valuable resources for policy makers and practitioners seeking to implement effective, sustainable strategies for SEND inclusion.

Advancing gender equality in education

Despite significant progress, gender inequality continues to limit educational opportunities for millions of girls worldwide. Cultural norms, early marriage, teen pregnancy, and gender-based violence remain pervasive barriers to girls' education. This publication examines how leadership and targeted interventions can break down these barriers and create more equitable learning environments.

Doctor Aisha Abdul's chapter on *Creating gender responsive pedagogy* offers a powerful lens through which to view gender equality in education. By addressing the specific needs of girls and challenging traditional pedagogical approaches in Nigeria, this chapter provides actionable insights for educators and policy makers.

One of the most poignant contributions comes from the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), whose analysis of the Imarisha Msichana project during and post-Covid demonstrates the urgent need to address teen pregnancies and their impact on girls' education. This case study exemplifies how innovative, context-specific solutions can make a tangible difference to the lives of girls and their communities.

The language of instruction: a double-edged sword

Language is a powerful tool that can either bridge or widen gaps in education. For many learners, the language of instruction is not their first language, creating significant barriers to understanding, engagement, and achievement. At the same time, language can also serve as a unifying force, fostering a sense of belonging and identity.

John Simpson's chapter on the role of the language of instruction explores this complex dynamic. By examining how language policies and practices can either hinder or enhance inclusion, Simpson provides a compelling argument for multilingual education and culturally responsive teaching. His insights are complemented by Deborah Kimathi's case study from the Learning Generation Initiative, which demonstrates how the Learning Teams approach supports inclusive classrooms through effective language strategies.

A global perspective on inclusion

One of the strengths of this publication is its global perspective. By featuring contributions from diverse contexts, including India, Nigeria, South Africa, Iraq, and Kenya, it highlights the universal relevance of inclusion while acknowledging the unique challenges and opportunities within different regions.

Professor Vinay Kumar Singh's analysis of policy guidelines for equitable education in India, for example, provides a comprehensive framework for addressing systemic barriers. Similarly, Fred Haga's examination of Kenya's National Special Needs Education Policy offers valuable lessons on policy implementation and its impact on learners with disabilities.

These global insights underscore the interconnectedness of education systems and the shared responsibility of leaders to ensure that no learner is left behind.

An invitation to reflect and act

This publication is more than a collection of case studies and research findings; it is an invitation to reflect on the values and practices that shape our education systems. It challenges policy makers, school leaders, and educators to question the status quo and embrace bold, innovative approaches to inclusion and belonging.

As you engage with the chapters and case studies, we encourage you to consider how the insights and strategies presented here can be applied in your own context. What does it mean to lead for inclusion in your school or education system? How can you create a culture of belonging where every learner feels valued and supported? What barriers must be dismantled to ensure that all children, regardless of their abilities, gender, or linguistic background, can access quality education?

The path to inclusion and belonging is not easy, but it is essential. By working together, sharing knowledge, and learning from each other's experiences, we can create education systems that are not only equitable but also transformative.

On behalf of the British Council and all the contributors to this publication, I invite you to join us on this journey. Let us lead with courage, compassion, and conviction as we strive to build a future where every learner belongs.

The school belonging lottery

Kathryn Riley, Emeritus Professor of Urban Education at the Institute of Education, University College London's Faculty of Education

Why 'belonging' matters

Belonging – or the lack of it – is not a new problem. Ever since the advent of compulsory schooling, institutions have developed ways to exclude some children (temporarily or permanently), and alienate, ignore or discard others. In an era which for all too many is one of fear, anxiety and isolation, belonging matters, and a sense of belonging matters deeply to the children and young people in our schools.[1]

Today's young people are not sheltered from reality, they absorb news from families and friends, and from traditional and social media. They encode social tensions about global conflicts, imbibing the stress and anger of the adults around them.[2] In a global context which, as one school principal observed, is increasingly one of 'alienation and disengagement, and the possibilities of radicalisation', schools need to offer a 'safe and secure environment for young people' in which 'they can feel they belong'.[3]

However, the dawn of each new school day brings anxiety, dread or a sense of overwhelming weariness for too many children and young people.[4] Exclusions and suspensions are rising in many countries and contexts, and young people with the greatest needs find themselves sidelined by mainstream schooling or handed the ultimate red card of exclusion.

Perhaps you are one of the people who are asking the uncomfortable but important questions about what is happening, such as:

- Why are children from disadvantaged communities more likely to feel they don't belong in school than their more advantaged peers?
- Why are children with special needs more likely to be out of school than other young people?
- Why do so many children come to feel that their mother tongue is peripheral or irrelevant?
- Why are neurodiverse students three times more likely to drop out of school than other young people?
- Why do so many young people abandon the public school system?

These reoccurring patterns of exclusion, opting-out, disaffection, and alienation not only have an impact on young people and their families but also on societies. We are haemorrhaging the human potential of many young people.[5]

A school is just a building

Schools stand centre stage in the lives of young people, but a school is just a building, and what really matters is what goes on inside, as this image indicates.[6] A school of 'belonging' is one to which young people are drawn, with joy and enthusiasm (the left-hand drawing). Compare this to the right-hand drawing. Here obviously reluctant young people are making their way to a school where they do not feel they belong, and where their spirits are crushed.

Belonging

Not belonging

Research tells us that schools' practices and expectations influence young people's sense of belonging.[7,8] We also know that a school becomes a meaningful place for young people and adults when the physical and social spaces within it are transformed into places of belonging and learning.[9,10]

I don't belong here[11]

I don't belong here

This image emerged from research carried out two decades ago, with young people who had been excluded from school.

The distraught child has drawn himself centre-stage, surrounded by a maelstrom of pointing fingers:

You're thick… You're stupid…
You don't belong here.

Over the years, this drawing has both haunted and galvanised me into action. It reminds me of the arbitrary nature of school life. One phrase in particular stands out for me: 'Get out of my school', spoken by the school principal.

Today's reality is that some young people find themselves in schools which set out to build connections and a sense of belonging. Others don't. It's all a bit of a lottery.

But does it matter? My answer is a resounding *YES.*

'Belonging' is that sense of being somewhere where you can be confident that you will fit in and be safe in your identity,[12] a feeling of being valued[13] and at home in a place,[14] such as school. A sense of school belonging is formed by what each child and adult brings with them as they reach the school gates (their histories, their day-to-day lived realities, their sense of identity), as well as what they encounter once they pass through those gates.

We know that in schools where belonging is the guiding principle, more young people experience a sense of connectedness and friendship, perform better academically and come to believe in themselves. Their teachers feel more professionally fulfilled and their families more accepted.[15] Addressing a sense of school belonging has been found to close the achievement gap by between 50 to 60 per cent and has many benefits that stretch into adulthood.[16, 17]

For a young person, a sense of school belonging is about feeling rooted: safe, both physically and emotionally, and feeling that the staff who work with you are attentive to the experiences you bring with you.[18]

I belong here

I belong here

Meet Mariana. She stands at the threshold of school life, eagerly awaiting what is to come. Her sense of joyful anticipation reaches to the very tips of her fingers.

'I belong here' she writes, vividly depicting how she sees her school as a place of welcome and belonging.[19, 20]

In schools where belonging works, the children fizz with the excitement of learning. They tell you:

> *I love my school.*
>
> *I feel I belong everywhere around this school.*
>
> *They know that I like it here and want to take part in things.*

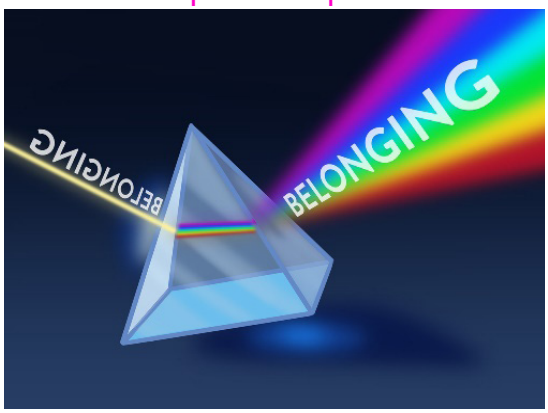
In schools where belonging works, staff feel professionally recognised. They stay in the school which gives a consistency in approach and helps innovation. They tell you:

> *I can be the professional that I want to be in this school and I can have a home life too.*[21,22]

Looking at schools afresh

Ending 'the school belonging lottery' is a long-term goal. A good starting point is to look afresh at the schools you know. In this section, I offer two tools to help you do this: the 'prism of place and belonging',[23] and a guide to the five principles of school belonging.[24]

Tool 1: The prism of place and belonging



A prism refracts the light, or breaks it into different parts. As the beam is dispersed, the big picture becomes separated and the different elements within it can be seen.

This experience is akin to taking all those aspects of school life which are connected to relationships and emotional encounters – inclusion, exclusion, well-being, physical and mental health, cyber-bullying and bringing those experiences together in one shared narrative: that of belonging.

When you look through the prism of place and belonging at the schools you know, what do you see? Who are the insiders and outsiders? Whose voices are heard, and whose are not listened to?

Looking at schools through this prism helps you understand the different aspects of belonging from a child's perspective, and see how they experience school life.

- Are they allowed in the school?
- Do they feel they belong?
- Do others accept their right to be there?

It's also helpful to look at schools from two different vantage points: from the inside-out and the outside-in. Bring colleagues into the conversation. Ask the questions that matter.

From the inside-out

- Do young people understand what is expected of them, believe that what they say matters, think their teachers listen to them?
- Do they feel connected and safe, physically and emotionally?
- Do staff feel respected and have a voice?

From the outside-in

- Do families feel accepted and heard?
- Whose voices are heard?
- How does the school respond to what's going on, locally, nationally and internationally?

Tool 2: First principles

Principles are the fundamental and underpinning truths which guide school life. They frame intentions, guide behaviour, and influence actions. When enacted, they shape young people's experience of school life and have an impact on the degree to which they feel they belong there.

Let me introduce you to what I have come to view as the five principles of school belonging. These are drawn from research and practice and encapsulate the sets of beliefs, aspirations and assumptions which form the foundations of understanding, policy and practice.

A sense of school belonging is an experience we would want all young people to encounter, which means that these principles apply to all schools.

The five principles of school belonging

1. **Safety:** the school is a safe space, physically and emotionally, for all concerned.
2. **Presence:** adults are attentive to the experiences that each child brings with them. Everyone is known and seen for who they are.
3. **Voice:** staff and young people know what is expected of them and have a voice. Families experience a sense of being heard.
4. **Connectivity:** young people and staff feel connected to the school. Social and professional relationships are respectful and enabling.
5. **Agency:** staff and young people have a sense of agency, believing that what they do and say makes a difference. The school helps develop their skills and provides them with the opportunities to enact their agency.

Having reflected on these principles, I would encourage you to consider these questions:

- Do these principles underpin the work of the school/s I know?
- Are there some that might need strengthening?
- What do each of these five principles look like in practice?
- How can these principles be developed and enacted?
- How do we know that these principles are present in a school, and that they are working?

And finally, what about the leaders?

The final section of this article takes us to the leaders of both schools and systems. At a school level, the process of belonging is enabled or constrained by those who lead our schools. How leaders think, decide, act and reflect, and draw on their knowledge to create a roadmap of possibilities is critical to the well-being of children and adults.[25]

In schools where belonging works, you will find leaders who lead in unique and often highly personal ways. Nevertheless, their leadership DNA is infused with some common features. They are leaders of place: their leadership is contextual and community orientated, finely tuned to the needs of the neighbourhood**.** Some examples of this are given below.

- A Brooklyn school principal invited an ex-gangland leader who had been in a federal prison for ten years, to work with students. 'He had currency with the kids… He could talk their language… they talked about how to deal with gangs,' she explained.[26]
- A school in London's East End, with a predominantly Muslim population, set up a political forum, a safe social space where students could talk about controversial issues and find their voice. The headteacher reflected 'Young people have a right to express themselves about how they feel. If you feel as a person that society is against you, your race, your language, or your culture, it creates resentment'.[27]

- A principal in South Africa's Eastern Cape linked with local communities to ensure that a shebeen – notorious for drugs – was moved from outside the school gates. Motivated by a determination to build skills, confidence and self-reliance, a neighbouring principal helped set up a small handicraft workers' co-operative.[28]

Leaders of place and belonging are authentic; they know who they are and they understand about agency, recognising their own agency and their role in working to activate the agency of young people, staff and communities. They are learning-centred, highly relational and compassionate.[29,30]

During the Covid19 pandemic, Manuela Mendoza and I tracked the experiences of sixteen principals, all leading schools in challenging contexts.[31,32] This experience gave us the opportunity to witness the importance of compassion in practice. We came to understand that:

- A sense of school/organisational belonging doesn't happen by accident. It is dependent on intentionality and a compassionate approach.
- Compassion binds us together and helps build trust.
- Compassionate cultures are nurtured by leaders who behave with compassion, beginning with themselves.
- Compassionate leaders are present and attend to what is going on.
- They take purposeful and intentional actions to create belonging and a sense of agency for staff and young people, and to bring families on board.

Postscript

One of the many joys of being an educator is the opportunity to open a world of possibilities for children and young people. I hope you have enjoyed this article and that the ideas presented here lead you to have some rich 'belonging' conversations. Wherever you work and whatever your role, you can make a difference. It's about compassion, connectivity and communication.

> Governments: through the messages they send about who and what is important, governments set the tone about what is expected, and what is possible. By dint of financial directives, rewards and sanctions, and what they talk about, they shape what is to happen in schools. The challenge is to develop a mind-set of possibilities; an aspiration to make a sense of belonging the norm. This will have a deep impact on thinking throughout the school system; on how schools are led, and on classroom practice.[33]
>
> Local systems: local school systems come into their own when they develop interventions which are agreed on by all (including schools and communities) and targeted at identified needs. One area often ripe for development is leadership. School leaders – driven by deep wells of compassion and supported by system leaders with the same convictions – can help cultivate positive and inclusive school climates. Relational and place-based forms of leadership which recognise the distinctiveness of localities will help bring staff, young people and communities on board.
>
> Schools: young people and staff thrive when school leaders show their wisdom and compassion. Joe Murphy suggests that the first goal of a school leader needs to be making sure that there is an invisible cord between a caring adult and each child. If the child begins to distance themselves, the adult will see the change, and work out how to draw them back in.[34]

Every child who enters our school gates brings with them their unique qualities and their distinctive identities. My aspiration for school belonging and inclusion is this:

> Whoever young people are, wherever they are from, whatever languages they speak, however they learn, and however their beautiful minds and bodies work, all our children and young people deserve the opportunity to be in a school where they feel safe (physically and emotionally), connected and have a sense of belonging.

While this aspiration cannot be achieved overnight, there are many actions available to ensure that school belonging becomes much less of a lottery. Stepping into belonging is professionally rewarding for staff, joyful and creative for young people, and welcomed by families and communities.

Equitable and inclusive education in India: a summary

Vinay Kumar Singh, Professor and Head, Department of Education of Groups with Special Needs (DEGSN), National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), Ministry of Education, Government of India

The Indian education system is guided by the principles of equality, inclusivity, and diversity as outlined in the Constitution. The National Education Policy 2020 aims to transform India by providing high-quality, equitable education, ensuring that all students, regardless of their learning needs, have equal opportunities to succeed and reach their full potential in an inclusive environment.

Over the years, there has been a shift from a segregated approach to one focused on equity, equality, and inclusion, rooted in human rights and values. This article reviews that journey towards equitable education, highlighting the importance of contextualising curricula and pedagogy for socio-economically disadvantaged groups (SEDGs) and children with disabilities. It also identifies gaps in planning, administration, and teacher education, calling for systemic reforms to ensure inclusivity and improve the quality of education.

Equitable and inclusive education in India: policy guidelines and frameworks

In India, the educational concerns of children from diverse socio-cultural identities, particularly Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and children with disabilities, were first addressed in 2006 through separate National Focus Groups.[35] However, other socio-economically disadvantaged groups (SEDGs) such as children in rural areas, migrant communities, orphans, and the urban poor were largely overlooked. Over the past two decades, significant efforts by both the government and civil society have focused on universalising education and ensuring equitable access for all children, in line with the principles of SDG 4. These efforts culminated in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which emphasises providing quality education for all students – particularly those from marginalised groups – to foster social mobility and inclusion. The policy stresses recognising students' unique abilities, promoting diversity, using technology, and ensuring full equity and inclusion in educational decisions, while also addressing the systemic barriers these children face.

Equitable and inclusive education

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 envisions transforming India through high-quality, equitable, and inclusive education, emphasising the distinction between equity and equality. While equality ensures equal rights and opportunities, equity focuses on addressing individual needs based on their specific circumstances, such as language barriers in the classroom. Inclusive education, as defined in the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016, advocates for students with and without disabilities learning together in adapted environments to meet diverse learning needs. The NEP 2020 positions inclusive education as a human rights issue, promoting a common educational platform for all learners, regardless of their backgrounds or challenges. The policy highlights the importance of creating an inclusive education system by improving infrastructure, curricula, and teacher training, and addresses the gaps in planning, delivery, and teacher education to ensure equal participation and success for all students.

Diversity and the diverse identities

Diversity encompasses a wide range of differences, including geographical location, gender identity, age, socio-economic status, cultural background, and abilities, and is about respecting individual uniqueness while celebrating the richness it brings. Supporting diversity fosters an inclusive society grounded in equity, mutual respect, and co-operation. The NEP 2020 stresses the importance of addressing the diverse needs of children from socio-economically disadvantaged groups who face disparities in education despite efforts to reduce gaps. These groups, which include children from marginalised communities or low socio-economic backgrounds, or those with disabilities, have historically been underrepresented in education. The policy advocates for an inclusive educational culture that leverages the resources of all learners to overcome challenges such as low enrolment, particularly in secondary education.

The educational profile of SEDGs

India's literacy rate increased from 14 per cent at independence to 73 per cent by 2011, largely due to efforts such as the District Primary Education Programme, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, and the Right to Education Act 2009. Despite progress, an estimated 62 million children were still out of school as of 2013. The education system, one of the largest globally, serves around 248 million students across 1.472 million schools, with gender parity and significant minority representation. However, challenges persist, especially in secondary education, where dropout rates are high, particularly among Scheduled Tribes and students with disabilities. Various initiatives, including the National Education Policy 2020 and the Samagra Shiksha Scheme, aim to address gaps in access and retention, with a focus on aspirational districts and socio-economically disadvantaged groups.

The journey towards equitable and inclusive education

Policy and legislative frameworks have greatly advanced inclusive education, particularly for children from socio-economically disadvantaged groups, ensuring equal rights and opportunities. Rooted in human rights and social justice, inclusive education aims to support all children regardless of their identities or conditions. Influenced by international agreements like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, India's educational policies, including the Right to Education Act (2009), Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016), and the National Education Policy (2020), focus on equity and inclusion. These frameworks address challenges such as gender disparities, disabilities, and the inclusion of marginalised groups in mainstream education, aiming for quality education in inclusive environments.

Chronology of legal and policy frameworks

Year of Launch	Legal and policy frameworks	Educational initiatives recommended for implementation
2009	Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009	The RTE Act 2009 provides free and compulsory elementary education to all children, including children with disabilities and children belonging to disadvantaged groups.
2009	National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education	Teachers need to be made aware of the philosophy of inclusive education, and oriented to, and equipped with, the different kinds of adjustments that schools have to make in terms of infrastructure, curriculum, teaching methods and other practices to develop professional capacities to address the diverse learning needs of all learners.
2012	The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2012	This is an amendment to the RTE Act 2009 that recognised children with disabilities as belonging to a disadvantaged group.
2015	Transforming our World. 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development	By 2030, to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all (SDG 4) and eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous people and children in vulnerable situations (SDG 4.5).
2016	The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016	The RPwD Act is based on the principles of respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy and independence of persons; non-discrimination; full and effective participation and inclusion in society; respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity; equality of opportunity; accessibility; equality between men and women; respect for the evolving capacities of children with disabilities and respect for the right of children with disabilities to preserve their identities.
2017	National Institution for Transforming India	NITI Aayog indicates measures for ensuring health, education, safety, security and welfare of different sections of society through empowering their competencies, enhancing employability and strengthening the implementation of various schemes and policies towards building an inclusive society.
2018	Samagra Shiksha Scheme	Chapter 3 addresses gender and equity issues in school education. Chapter 4 tackles the inclusion of children with special needs in education to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education from pre-school to senior secondary stage.
2020	National Education Policy	The NEP aims to achieve an inclusive and equitable education system so that all children have equal opportunities to learn and thrive, and so participation and learning outcomes are equalised across all genders and social categories by 2030.
2022	Samagra Shiksha Scheme	Chapter 8 on gender and equity: to ensure an equitable and inclusive learning environment for all disadvantaged and marginalised groups. Chapter 9 on inclusive education: learning for all with a focus on children with disabilities, to look at education of all children in a continuum from foundational to secondary stage. The scheme will cover all children with disabilities as per the schedule of disabilities in the Right of the Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 studying in Government, Government-aided and local body schools.

2022	National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage	The NCF-FS is addressing issues related to identification, enrolment, equal learning opportunities and appropriate interventions for children with developmental delay and disability in the foundational stage of learning.
2022	The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2022	This is another amendment to the RTE Act 2009 that prescribes a pupil-special education teacher ratio of 10:1 up to grade V and 15:1 for upper grades in schools.
2023	National Curriculum Framework for School Education	The NCF-SE is promoting inclusion in schools through inclusive practices for children with disabilities and children belonging to disadvantaged groups.
2024	National Guidelines and Implementation Frameworks on Equitable and Inclusive Education	The NGIF-EIE is providing five comprehensive guidelines for foundation stage schooling, creating inclusive schools, home based education, teacher education and collaboration with different organisations.

Determinants of equitable and inclusive education: major issues and challenges

The implementation of equitable and inclusive education faces significant challenges, particularly for children from socio-educationally disadvantaged groups, who often experience exploitation, discrimination and exclusion, and children with disabilities, especially from marginalised groups, face compounded discrimination. Despite legal frameworks, barriers persist due to societal attitudes, inadequate infrastructure, and curriculum limitations. Key issues include promoting human rights values, addressing diversity, and ensuring equal participation. Barriers to education include discriminatory attitudes, inaccessible physical infrastructure, curriculum gaps, and lack of differentiated teaching approaches. Effective inclusion requires reasonable accommodations, accessible assessments, support services, and a focus on quality education for all, with an emphasis on overcoming systemic inequalities and promoting equity.

Early identification and intervention

Early identification of children with disabilities and those from disadvantaged backgrounds is crucial for their later development, as emphasised by the 2022 National Curriculum Framework for School Education and previous policy papers. Research highlights gaps in pre-school facilities for children with disabilities, with low enrolment in Anganwadi Centres due to a lack of awareness about available services. The Government's 2013 National Early Childhood Care and Education Policy calls for addressing discrimination based on gender, social identity, and disability to ensure equitable access to education. Evaluations of the Integrated Child Development Services Scheme show the need for sensitisation and training of Anganwadi workers in the early detection and addressing of disabilities. Meanwhile, the 2013 Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram is a significant initiative focusing on early identification and intervention. However, there is a gap in awareness among Anganwadi Centre workers regarding government welfare schemes, which could be bridged through local bodies and community involvement. A strong partnership between parents, caregivers, and professionals is critical for effective intervention, and early learning environments should adopt a multisensory approach to foster inclusive education. These efforts will help reduce societal exclusion and promote a more tolerant and inclusive global community.

The gender issue

Gender related issues, including those affecting vulnerable groups and LGBTIQA+ individuals, must be prioritised in the school education system to create a healthy, dignified environment. Studies show that discrimination based on gender and disability leads to psycho-social problems, particularly among women and girls with disabilities, who are often invisible and undervalued. Gender and disability stereotypes, deeply ingrained in culture, contribute to the marginalisation of these groups. To address this, the needs of girls, especially those with disabilities and from disadvantaged backgrounds, must be central in educational policies and practices.

Life skills

Life skills are essential for successful and independent functioning in adult life, and should be integrated into the curriculum from primary to secondary school. Skill development should extend beyond the classroom into home and community contexts. For children from socio-economically disadvantaged groups, life skills training should be implemented from the beginning of schooling, with a focus on smooth transitions to higher education, work, or independent living. This includes preparing students for specific paths, such as higher education, vocational training, or home living, with appropriate support from community systems.

Harnessing of the natural talent and unique potential

Harnessing the natural talent and unique potential of students, including those with disabilities, is crucial for their development. The National Education Policy 2020 emphasises identifying and nurturing the capabilities of gifted learners, including those with disabilities, early on. These learners may exhibit extraordinary talents in areas like sports, arts, or academica, while also having disabilities that may obscure their abilities. To support such students, teachers must be trained to recognise and foster their talents, with opportunities for specialised learning beyond the standard curriculum. Collaboration with expert institutions and government ministries can ensure these students receive equal opportunities to compete and contribute to various fields, ultimately pushing the frontiers of knowledge and culture.

Teacher education

Teachers are crucial to inclusive education, but inadequate training often limits their ability to meet diverse student needs. Pre-service education neglects classroom diversity, and in-service training lacks co-ordination, but positive teacher attitudes are essential for embedding inclusive practices and attitudes. Effective teaching should be learner-centric, promoting collaboration and addressing varied learning needs. Teacher training must include inclusive pedagogy, strategies for teaching students with disabilities or special talents, and educational technology. Specialised programmes for teachers focusing on inclusion, along with sensitisation for all stakeholders, are needed to foster an inclusive and respectful environment.

Involvement of parents and the community

Inclusive education requires strong teamwork, with parents playing a vital role in supporting their child's education. They can advocate for special needs, assist teachers with innovative methods, and create a supportive home environment for learning. Family involvement in nurturing a child's growth at their own pace is crucial, and parents must be equipped to provide appropriate learning experiences. The community also plays a significant role, from identifying out-of-school children to supporting enrolment, retention, and attendance. Collaboration between schools, communities, and health professionals ensures that children with disabilities and other special needs receive the necessary services and interventions, while dispelling misconceptions and fostering inclusive education practices.

Reformative measures

Inclusive education requires systemic reforms in structures and institutions that support the inclusion of all children in schools. Key reforms include changes to curricula, pedagogy, assessment systems, teacher training, and support services. These should aim to adapt the curriculum to individualised learning needs while maintaining high expectations for all children. Strengthening schools, including residential and alternative forms of education, and improving governance and resources across school complexes can help ensure better support for children with disabilities and those from socio-economically disadvantaged groups.

Collaborations

Collaboration is essential in creating an equitable and inclusive education system. Effective use of existing resources, including human resources, equipment, and services, should be co-ordinated across ministries, teachers, parents, and service providers such as therapists and social workers. Partnerships with NGOs, the private sector, and communities are key to improving access to resources and services, ensuring equitable treatment for all children, and enhancing the overall quality of education.

The emerging nature of research

Research trends in equitable and inclusive education are shaped by societal needs, policies, and legislation. These trends focus on various categories of socio-economically disadvantaged groups, including children with high abilities, and cover all stages of education from foundational to secondary. Research methodologies and tools evolve over time, with a growing emphasis on the quality and scientific evidence behind research to inform effective practices for children belonging to socio-economically disadvantaged groups.

In conclusion, the National Education Policy 2020 emphasises creating an inclusive educational structure and culture in schools by providing infrastructural support and integrating values such as respect, empathy, human rights, gender equality, and inclusion into the curriculum.

This article highlights the transition from a deficit-based model to a human rights-based model in education, promoting respect for diversity. It offers a framework for implementing recommendations from various policies, acts, and research, guiding the inclusion of children from socio-economically disadvantaged groups. Empowering stakeholders, improving governance, and developing action-oriented strategies are crucial to overcoming barriers and ensuring quality education for all children. Collaboration among various stakeholders, including school management, teachers, parents, and local communities, is key to realising these goals.

Creating gender responsive pedagogy in the delivery of basic education in Nigeria

Dr (Mrs) Aisha Abiola Abdul, Director, Special Programmes, Universal Basic Education Commission and Jatau Vincent John, Programme Manager, English and School Education, British Council, Nigeria

Abstract

This article explores the concept of gender responsive pedagogy and its application in basic education schools in Nigeria. It gives a general overview of gender responsive pedagogy and why it should be emphasised. It will examine the application of gender responsive pedagogy in our schools, strategies and workability, policy implementation, and the way forward. It shows that effective gender responsive pedagogy requires a multi-faceted approach, involving policy changes, curriculum reforms, teacher training and consistent monitoring of schools and teachers.

Introduction

Nigeria cannot afford to be in a situation where half of the population is not exposed to education – a fundamental human right – and has been clear in its ambition to improve inclusive education for all children, having introduced laws and policies to enable robust service delivery in the education sector. Nigeria is a signatory to several international educational agreements on this subject and relevant legal policy frameworks and laws in Nigeria seek to ensure that all children, irrespective of their circumstances, have access to good-quality education. In 2000, the United Nations began promoting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), with the ambition to establish free universal primary education for all, regardless of gender, by 2015. The MDGs were later replaced by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with goal four focused on 'ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all'. The government of Nigeria continues to create policies and frameworks to create an enabling policy environment that focuses on gender inclusion. Such policies include the National Policy on Education (2013) and the National Policy on Gender in Education (2013, updated in 2021), which aim to achieve gender equality in basic education to support Nigeria's attainment of SDGs 4 and 5, and the National Policy on Inclusive Education in Nigeria (2016, updated in 2024), developed to address the challenges associated with inclusion.

The Nigerian education system is guided by a constitutional obligation to create equitable, inclusive and high-quality education.

There is an emphasis on ensuring learners with diverse needs can thrive in an education system which offers equal learning opportunities in a friendly and inclusive environment, so that children can realise their full potential irrespective of their circumstances. The Federal Government of Nigeria introduced the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme in September 1999, followed by the UBE Act (2004) and the Child Rights Act (2003), with the aim of providing universal basic education that is free, universal and compulsory. The emphasis is on the provision of equal and adequate basic education opportunities in terms of facilities, curriculum, syllabus and other necessary instructional materials. These laws, along with policies like the National Gender Policy in Basic Education (2006), emphasise inclusive education and gender equality, aiming to empower both girls and boys. The policies align with national and international attempts to reduce the number of out-of-school children and eliminate gender disparities. They also complement initiatives such as the National Policy on Education and Early Childcare Policy, which focus on equitable access to quality education and equipping stakeholders with skills to promote gender mainstreaming and full participation in education. Overall, Nigeria prioritises inclusive education through legislation and policies aimed at improving educational access and gender equality.

Despite the progress made by various countries in promoting inclusion and belonging in schools, significant challenges persist, even with the substantial resources invested. Issues such as gender discrimination, rights violations, and restricted access to resources and opportunities continue to hinder progress. These barriers are often perpetuated through outdated laws, policies, norms, and traditional practices, which disproportionately affect girls, women, and other marginalised groups, limiting their progress. The global target is to achieve equality, inclusion, and the elimination of gender disparities in education by 2030, ensuring equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for vulnerable groups, including people with disabilities. Gender responsive pedagogy (GRP) is a key strategy aimed at contributing to and achieving these goals, especially SDG 5 which emphasises gender equality and human rights and, by extension, SDG 10.

Definition and meaning of gender responsive pedagogy

Gender responsive pedagogy takes into account the varied and differing learning needs of boys and girls, with teachers thinking differently and teaching differently to ensure equitable opportunities for both sexes. Gender responsive pedagogy focuses on teaching and learning processes and how they can be tailored to address the specific needs of both girls and boys. It involves a comprehensive approach to planning, teaching, classroom management, methodology, and assessment, ensuring that educators create an inclusive environment. It encourages the equal participation of boys and girls and fosters transformative learning by raising awareness of gender related issues. It also emphasises considering the diverse cultural, economic, and situational backgrounds of learners to create a more equitable and effective educational experience.

Why gender responsive pedagogy?

Gender responsive pedagogy helps ensure that teaching and learning reflects the real-life experiences of both sexes. Emphasis should be on what is being taught, how it is being taught, and effective learning approaches. Inclusive pedagogy promotes teaching in a way that addresses the needs of all learners: boys, girls, children with disabilities, and takes into account ethno-religious diversity and socio-economic diversity.

Gender responsive pedagogy supports transformative learning by helping students to become aware of assumptions relating to gender, and serves as a strategy to reduce poverty, discrimination, and stereotyping, while improving health, living standards, and reducing vulnerability to cultural and societal challenges. It also aims to decrease school dropout rates and address the issue of out-of-school children. Empirical evidence, such as the National Personnel Audit conducted by UBEC in 2018 and 2022, highlights gender disparities in enrolment, retention, and completion rates at the basic education level across the country. Promoting gender equality is essential for ensuring the active participation of both boys and girls in their learning processes, as promoted by the Forum for African Women Educationalists.[36] Some of the resulting benefits are:

- gender based violence is challenged
- learners are prepared for a diverse world
- teacher professional development is supported.

How can a school be considered inclusive and gender responsive?

A gender responsive and inclusive school is one where the academic, social, and physical environments, as well as the local community, actively recognise and address the needs of all learners, including boys and girls, and those with special needs or who are otherwise vulnerable or marginalised. It is a school that raises awareness among all staff about the importance of promoting and practicing gender equality.

What are the benefits of gender responsive pedagogy?

- It promotes equity and inclusivity, and enhances learner engagement and motivation.
- It fosters critical thinking and empathy and prepares learners for a diverse and global society.

- It supports social justice and gender equality, recognising and respecting cultural, economic, and situational backgrounds.[37]
- It supports transformative learning by helping learners to become aware of gender related issues.
- Gender responsive teaching improves learning outcomes and makes learners feel valued, respected, and supported.
- It ensures the provision of a convenient learning approach for all and improves teacher-learner communication and the quality of teaching.

Strategies for implementing gender responsive pedagogies in the school and classroom

1. **Clear policies and procedures**: schools should establish and enforce policies for things like behaviour, anti-bullying, and a staff code of conduct, which promote fairness, equity, and zero tolerance for discrimination or harmful language. These policies should explicitly address gender equality and inclusion.[38,39]
2. **Support mechanisms**: implement strategies to encourage reporting of violations of equality, diversity, and inclusion, ensuring safe and accessible channels for students and staff to voice concerns.
3. **Student engagement and leadership:** empower learners to take active roles in promoting gender equality through campaigns, peer activities, and leadership opportunities.[40]
4. **Inclusive curriculum and instruction**: develop a curriculum that reflects diverse perspectives, challenges gender stereotypes, and integrates gender equality. Use learner-centred approaches that respect developmental needs, promote positive relationships, and protect students from violence and harassment.[41]
5. **Innovative teaching methods**: encourage teachers to use varied pedagogical approaches, such as role plays, group discussions, case studies, and excursions to make learning engaging and relevant to real-world situations.[42]
6. **Teacher training and resources**: provide teachers with access to resources, mentorship, and coaching to support the implementation of gender responsive practices. Train all staff on inclusion, equality, and diversity.[43]
7. **Activity-based learning**: promote active involvement in learning through activities that foster inclusion, address gender biases, and ensure understanding of diverse perspectives.[44]
8. **Monitoring and evaluation:** regularly assess gender responsive practices through feedback, student performance tracking, and progress reviews to identify areas for improvement.[45]
9. **Career exploration**: expose students to a wide range of professions, challenging gender stereotypes and encouraging equal opportunities for boys and girls.
10. **Whistleblowing procedures:** establish community and school-based mechanisms to protect rights and encourage reporting of gender related concerns, such as bullying or unethical behaviour.[46]

Efforts made towards gender responsive pedagogy policy implementation in basic schools

The Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), a federal government agency tasked with co-ordinating, funding, and ensuring quality assurance in basic education, has implemented strategic interventions to promote access, equity, and inclusiveness for all school-age children across Nigeria's 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory. Since the launch of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme, significant progress has been made in delivering quality basic education. UBEC has addressed issues of access, quality, equity, and inclusiveness through various programmes and projects, disbursing funds equitably to states to reduce disparities in educational development. These efforts have improved access to education for all school-age children, including those with special needs, through collaborative initiatives between the federal and state governments.

The 2022/2023 National Personnel Audit provides an updated overview of basic education institutions in Nigeria, revealing a total enrolment of 46,920,422 students in public and private schools. The gender distribution – 23,858,390 males and 23,062,032 females – indicates that enrolment is balanced in terms of gender. UBEC has also introduced targeted programmes to address specific challenges in education, such as the All Girls Schools Initiative (AGSI), the Integrated Quranic and Tsangaya Education Programme (IQTE), and the Boy Child Vocational Education Programme. Additionally, special intervention projects like Second Chance Schools aim to re-enroll female dropouts, while Early Childcare Development Education Projects, Model Smart Schools, and vocational schools for boys focus on reducing dropout rates and equipping learners with skills for self-reliance. These initiatives aim to reach marginalised groups and remove barriers that prevent access to conventional education systems.

A key innovation is the UBEC Smart School initiative, which leverages technology to provide Nigerian children with a high-quality education comparable to that available in other countries. These smart schools use digital tools to enhance learning, foster entrepreneurship, and prepare students for the digital job market, ensuring a prosperous future for all, regardless of gender. Furthermore, UBEC has prioritised the training and retraining of teachers on gender issues and improved pedagogies, ensuring that educators are equipped to deliver inclusive and effective education. Through these comprehensive efforts, UBEC continues to advance its mission of providing equitable, inclusive, and high-quality basic education for all Nigerian children.

Challenges preventing gender responsive pedagogy and policy implementation

1. **Teacher knowledge and practices**: many teachers lack the necessary skills to deliver gender responsive instruction, often allowing one gender to dominate the classroom. They may also use negative gender attitudes, such as biased language, and fail to create inclusive lesson plans that address the specific needs of both boys and girls.[47,48]
2. **Gender stereotypes in learning materials:** textbooks and learning materials often reinforce traditional gender roles, portraying girls and women as weak or passive, which limits students' understanding of diverse perspectives.
3. **Classroom dynamics and activities:** classroom activities, such as group work and assessments, may unintentionally favour one gender, leading to unequal participation. Additionally, seating arrangements and infrastructure, such as high stools in labs, can hinder comfort and inclusivity, particularly for girls.[49]
4. **Teacher-student interactions:** teachers may exhibit authoritarian behaviours which make it difficult for pupils to approach them. Classroom interactions, including student-teacher and student-student dynamics, often fail to consider gender, affecting the learning experience.[50]
5. **Gender-based violence (GBV)**: GBV, rooted in structural inequalities and power imbalances, significantly impacts learning outcomes. It includes sexual abuse, harassment, early marriage, and harmful traditional practices, disproportionately affecting women and girls but also harming boys and men. GBV creates a hostile environment that undermines teaching and learning processes.[51]
6. **School management and policies:** many schools lack gender responsive management systems, with rules and regulations that create undue inconvenience. There is also a lack of regular communication on gender related classroom issues, further hindering inclusivity.[52]
7. **Curriculum bias:** the curriculum often perpetuates gender stereotypes, reinforcing traditional roles and limiting opportunities for students to explore diverse perspectives.

The way forward for the improvement of gender responsive pedagogy in basic schools

1. **Gender responsive pedagogy and teacher training:** educators must develop the skills required to create gender responsive lesson plans, using innovative approaches like role play, group discussions, and excursions. Ongoing training and capacity building are essential for teachers to foster inclusive participation and reduce gender inequality.[53]
2. **Support from parents, families, and communities**: parents, families, and communities should promote gender equitable transitions from infancy to adulthood through capacity building and active engagement in equitable practices.
3. **Inter-sector collaboration for inclusive education**: collaboration with professionals like community health workers can enhance educational outcomes, including student health and well-being.[54]
4. **Leadership and school environment**: school leaders should develop the capacity to create supportive environments that reduce barriers and ensure meaningful learning for all students.[55]
5. **Career opportunities and exploration**: society should provide equitable career opportunities and expose girls and boys to diverse professions, challenging stereotypes and fostering identity development.[56]
6. **Access to resources and safe spaces**: teachers should have access to resources like textbooks and online tools, while schools must establish safe, inclusive environments free from discrimination and stigmatisation.[57]
7. **Monitoring, evaluation, and whistle-blowing**: regular monitoring and evaluation of gender responsive practices, including feedback and performance tracking, should be implemented. Whistle-blowing procedures should protect against gender-based concerns like bullying or unethical behaviour.[58]
8. **Equitable teacher recruitment and collaboration**: gender disparity in teacher recruitment should be eliminated, and teachers should collaborate with colleagues and students to create gender responsive learning environments.[59]
9. **Prioritising inclusive education**: school leaders and teachers must prioritise inclusive education to ensure equitable learning opportunities for all students.[60]

Conclusion and recommendations

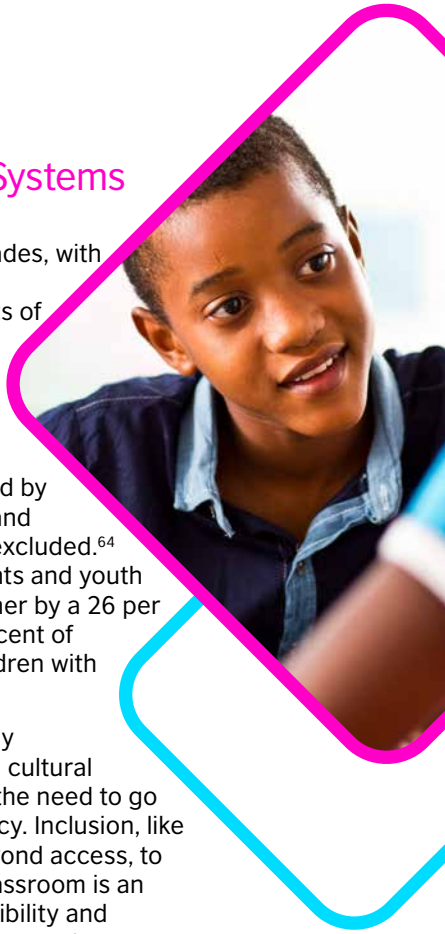
There is no doubt that implementing true gender responsive pedagogy, including all the strategies and mechanisms mentioned here, will significantly reduce all forms of discrimination and biases among boys and girls, ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education.

Creating gender responsive pedagogy requires a multi-faceted approach, involving policy changes, curriculum reform, teacher training, and ongoing monitoring and evaluation. It is essential to prioritise the needs of all students and ensure they have equal opportunities to learn, grow, and reach their full potential. Inclusion benefits everyone, with peer-to-peer learning playing a key role.

Education systems must take explicit action to eliminate gender bias and discrimination, with governments and partners establishing gender sensitive policies, planning, and learning environments. Achieving a society where all individuals feel valued and empowered, and where every child feels important, cannot be delayed if Sustainable Development Goal 4 is to be achieved by 2030. By raising awareness and implementing strategic interventions, we can promote gender responsive pedagogy in our schools and classrooms, harnessing students' strengths and overcoming obstacles to make learners feel safe, valued, recognised, and celebrated for who they are.

How can Learning Teams promote more inclusive classrooms?

Deborah Kimathi, Education Workforce Initiative and Systems Delivery Lead, The Learning Generation Initiative



Equity and inclusion have been a priority for education ecosystem actors for decades, with significant milestones for particular excluded groups, including the Salamanca statement of 1994[61] signed by 92 governments, the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child which makes provision for education as a basic human right, and the 1951 Refugee Convention which set an agenda for the inclusion of refugee children.[62] Yet there is a persistent lack of scalable, affordable, systemic approaches to inclusion. Children across low- and middle-income countries continue to be marginalised by multiple factors of exclusion – of the 251 million[63] children out of school globally, children from low-income families, children affected by conflict and/or natural disasters, girls, children with disabilities, working children and children from minority ethnic, religious, or language groups are most likely to be excluded.[64] In fact, 20 per cent of children (and a disproportionate number of girls), adolescents and youth are entirely excluded from education, with enrolment and retention hindered further by a 26 per cent increase of migrant and refugee children globally since 2000. Nearly 40 per cent of children do not have access to education in a language they understand, and children with disabilities continue to be disproportionally excluded from school.[65]

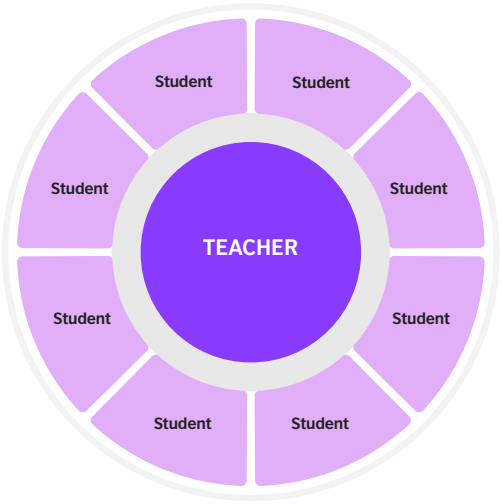
Education systems globally grapple with the complexities of inclusion, and its many contextual nuances such as language, poverty, rurality, and a myriad of social and cultural norms. System actors and decision makers considering inclusion must recognise the need to go beyond *access* and consider belonging, safety (emotional and physical), and agency. Inclusion, like every other education intervention that intends to be transformative, must go beyond access, to quality. Inclusion is not just ensuring children are in the classroom, but that the classroom is an environment designed and managed to enable all children to learn and thrive. 'Visibility and representation at the table does not necessarily translate to power or influence. For too long, oppressed peoples have asked, demanded, and even pleaded for a seat at the table. The reality, however, is the table was designed by a select few, for a select few. In order for the table to function it requires that the oppressed peoples assimilate, concede some of their humanity, and suffer ongoing indignities.'[66] This will only be achieved with a critical, reflective shift in mindsets, beliefs and practices that goes beyond any simple exercise in compliance. Education systems globally need to meet their obligation to ensure all children are learning by actively designing for and delivering on every child's opportunity to aspire, dream for the future, and imagine the wildest possibilities for themselves and their communities.

It is important to acknowledge that inclusion offers educational gains for all children. This is not to justify inclusion as a worthy investment, but to demonstrate the far-reaching effects and potential economic gains of inclusion. Many sources point to inclusive education as a way to promote empathy, soft skills, and cognitive skills.[67] Inclusive systems provide better quality education for all children and are instrumental in changing discriminatory attitudes, and enabling the development of social relationships and interactions.[68] Inclusive systems value the unique contributions students of all backgrounds bring to the classroom and allow diverse groups to grow side by side, to the benefit of all.[69] As per the guidance in CAST's Universal Design for Learning Guidelines, 'When environments are intentionally designed to reduce barriers, all learners can engage in rigorous, meaningful learning.'[70] Finally, 'Many of the most effective interventions to improve access for girls are household-based (such as cash transfer programs), and many of the most effective interventions to improve learning for girls involve improving the pedagogy of teachers.'[71] These interventions are not necessarily targeted at gender, but rather support the learning of children of all genders. Inclusion is good for all children, and bolsters educational outcomes.

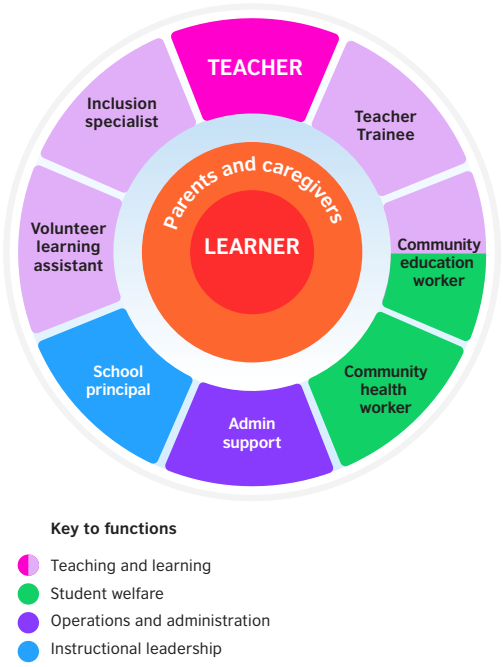
Achieving inclusion

The 2019 *Transforming the Education Workforce*[72] report called for a paradigm shift in how countries design and support their education workforce that would allow for a renewed focus on learning and equity.

Current class design



Learning team design



A learning team approach is a shift from a class design with teachers at the centre undertaking many different roles, to a design where the learners are at the centre supported by collaborative team of professionals, collectively better equipped to ensure every child is able to learn and thrive. This represents a significant shift in how the education workforce is conceptualised and implemented. It ensures that teams of professionals collectively focus on improving the learning and inclusion of all students while the diverse needs of children can be met. It also means that teachers can focus on teaching and have greater support; a learning teams' approach is about investing in the social capital, that is, intentional collaboration mechanisms, as well as the human capital of the workforce.

'Emerging innovations suggest that the education workforce could respond to individual student needs more effectively with different learning configurations. Depending on the learning configuration and class size needed for a lesson, learning teams overseen by a qualified teacher could be created from different role combinations. Students would experience different learning configurations, and the school would maximise its available resources... Although evidence is limited, effective examples of new learning configurations (often small-scale) do exist around the world and even in low-capacity contexts.'[73]

For example, in Rwanda, specialist teachers were used in a school-based mentor role to act as pedagogic advisers working within or across schools to mentor teachers with the aim of improving teachers' knowledge of English and pedagogical classroom practices. In addition to improving the English proficiency of teachers, the learner-based approaches these mentors introduced also contributed to the improvement of students' literacy and proficiency levels, with parents noting changes in the literacy skills of their children.[74]

Leveraging a learning team approach allows education workforce design to centre on learning outcomes, ensuring explicit integration of equity and inclusion into the design and composition of the workforce roles at all levels, making equitable resource management and practices central to role design and competencies. It therefore allows for optimisation of workforce capacity, with roles better aligned towards learning, equity and inclusion.

Specialist and complementary teaching and education support roles can scaffold the improvement of education outcomes for children with a range of needs by offering individualised attention in the classroom and providing practical advice to classroom teachers on educational inclusion strategies.[75] Learning support staff can also have a positive impact on inclusion and student achievement.[76] Specialist teachers can be school or cluster-based, such as Sightsavers' itinerant specialist teachers for children with disabilities in Uganda and the Inclusive Education Resource Teachers in India. Evidence on the effectiveness of such models is mixed[77,78] due to frequent shortages of these roles,[79] their heavy workloads, the breadth of expertise covered, distance they have to travel, and relationships with teachers.[80] However, many experts have highlighted the need for specialist support for classroom teachers as well as more effective models and arrangements to address inclusion.[81,82] A study undertaken on an inclusive education programme for children with disabilities in Zimbabwe showed that one of the key factors in the project's progress was the engagement and retention of classroom assistants in schools. Classroom assistants were seen as an additional resource for schools in supporting children with disabilities and for helping teachers with the extra needs of the class. Results showed a positive trend of teachers and headteachers gaining confidence in their knowledge, attitudes, and practices around inclusion of students with disabilities.[83]

Consideration of learning teams includes the integration of other professionals alongside teachers, such as learning support staff or specialist teachers, who play an important role in ensuring that all students – especially those further behind – are able to participate in school with equal opportunities. It could also extend to the integration of professionals from other sectors, such as community health workers, who could promote inclusion and support a broader range of education outcomes, like student health and well-being.

Further, volunteers from the community, national service programmes and families can effectively support foundational learning, mother-tongue language instruction, and blended models of learning. Roles from the local community can supplement class lessons with applied and project-based learning, helping connect what students learn to real-world issues and supporting the transition to work. Camfed's Learner Guides – young women mentors from the community – deliver specialised curricula and help girls and boys build their confidence, learn more effectively, and set goals. Unlike teachers from outside the area, Learner Guides are local volunteers with experience in poverty challenges. They act as the missing link between school and community, especially on health and welfare issues. In schools, Learner Guides facilitate an extracurricular pastoral curriculum covering self-esteem, financial literacy, relationships, and barriers beyond school. Evaluations show increased confidence, retention and engagement for marginalised girls, and questioning of gender norms for boys and girls. Pupils in participating schools demonstrated increases in their maths and English scores.[84]

The Learning Generation Initiative, in Learning Teams for Foundational Learning, points to the important benefits of a learning teams approach,[85] which include more effective teaching, more instructional time, greater access to specialist expertise, better support for inclusion, and improved workforce motivation.

A learning teams approach can bolster efforts to address multiple factors of exclusion, and should not only be focused on the inclusion of children with disabilities. In the MGCubed project in Ghana, lessons delivered by expert teachers via video to rural populations led to improved English and mathematics scores and reduced out-of-school rates.[86] The Media Center initiative in Amazonas state in Brazil uses video conferencing to broadcast lessons delivered by subject experts to over 1,000 rural schools.[87] Lower to upper secondary school progression rates increased, dropout rates nearly halved between 2008 and 2011, and children's learning steadily improved.[88]

In conclusion, perhaps it is time to take a radical approach to learning and inclusion by reimagining and transforming the education workforce. It is time to go beyond a programmatic approach, and consider a systemic solution, namely a learning teams approach to bolster learning and inclusion for all children.

Language of learning and teaching: a barrier or enabler to learning?

Dr John Simpson, British Council Senior Adviser on Language and Education

Some language paradoxes

It may seem something of a cliché to state that language is central to who we are and what we think and do, yet its vital importance in understanding and self-expression is often concealed by a focus on the content of talk and writing, whether in the home, school or workplace. Language, as a means by which we engage with ideas, is key to learning and personal growth. It is also critical to our ability to access a high-quality and inclusive education; children cannot learn in a language they do not understand. Despite this, it is estimated that globally around four out of ten students are taught in languages they do not know.[89] In some countries, over 90 per cent of students are not taught in a language they speak and understand, with more than a quarter of a billion students affected. The 53 per cent of children in low- and middle-income countries (LMIC) unable to read with understanding by age ten, very likely includes a large proportion not taught in their first language, or L1.[90]

Language then is at the heart of major fault lines in the education and development process,[91] yet its profound impact in this regard may not always be recognised or acknowledged. Those most often left behind are language minorities, both in OECD contexts and LMICs, who are mandated to learn in a language that is not their own. Language majorities too can be hindered in their learning and development where an exogenous language – mainly English, French or Portuguese in sub-Saharan Africa – is chosen as the main language of learning and teaching (LoLT) rather than an indigenous one.

A related paradox is that, although it is central to education, language, or the language of learning and teaching, is often not considered a priority or even included in basic analyses of the education system. System alignment studies, for example, tend to focus on components of education such as curriculum, materials, pedagogy and assessment, even in contexts where almost all children are tasked to learn across the curriculum in a language not their own. Since the LoLT in these contexts is not seen as a key element of the system, the issue of whether or how well other system components cohere with it remains largely unaddressed, as does the problem of it being a major barrier to accessing education.

A critical understanding of the role of language in education, and it being potentially a barrier as well as an enabler to learning, is essential. Making its role in teaching and learning processes more visible affords us the opportunity to create a language responsive approach to education,[92] that addresses a number of important issues arising from the relationship between the LoLT and learning outcomes, and helps meet the learning needs of children (and teachers) for whom the LoLT is unfamiliar. Placing language at the centre of education and development also means we can close the gaps in helping to meet SDG targets and other global agendas such as Education for All (EFA).

In many education systems, the prioritisation of languages of European origin, such as English, French or Spanish, led to the exclusion of indigenous languages from formal education. In the United States, Canada and Australia, for example, indigenous children were for decades forbidden from using their own language and forced to learn in English, resulting in a loss of indigenous languages and cultural practices. Indigenous students in Canada were subjected to an Indian residential school system experience in which English or French was the LoLT and their native languages were eroded.[93] The suppression of indigenous languages in formal education was part of a broader colonial effort to assimilate indigenous peoples and erase their cultural identities.

Many newly independent African countries inherited colonial education systems that privileged the language of the coloniser, mostly English, French or Portuguese, thereby marginalising indigenous languages. The maintenance of former colonial languages as the LoLT for much of basic education, and the continuing exclusion of indigenous languages from this role, has created barriers to accessing quality education for non-native speakers. In Kenya, for instance, the official policy has

long been to use English and Swahili as the LoLT, even though many students speak languages such as Kikuyu, Luo or Luhya at home. This has led to language exclusion, as students often face significant difficulties in understanding lessons in languages not their own.[94]

South Africa's post-apartheid education system initially adopted a policy promoting multilingual education, but in practice the use of African languages in instruction has been limited. The legacy of apartheid education, with English and Afrikaans as the primary LoLT, continues to affect the participation of students who speak African languages. Research has shown that while African languages are now officially recognised in South Africa, the dominance of English as the LoLT continues to exclude many learners who are not fluent in it, leading to educational inequality and social exclusion.[95]

Drawing on the observation that Africa is the only continent where the majority of children start school using a foreign language, Eddie Williams argues that a 'straight for English' (or French or Portuguese) language policy, where English is the compulsory LoLT from the early primary years onwards, is not only a barrier to learning but also a significant contributory factor to the lack of development on the continent.[96]

In Europe, LoLT policies have marginalised minority language speakers, particularly in countries like Spain and France, where regional languages such as Catalan and Basque have historically been excluded from the formal education system. In Spain, the imposition of Castilian Spanish as the dominant language in schools, especially in the Francoist period, led to the suppression of regional languages such as Catalan, Galician, and Basque. The exclusion of these languages in education not only undermined the linguistic rights of regional communities but also contributed to the loss of cultural heritage.[97]

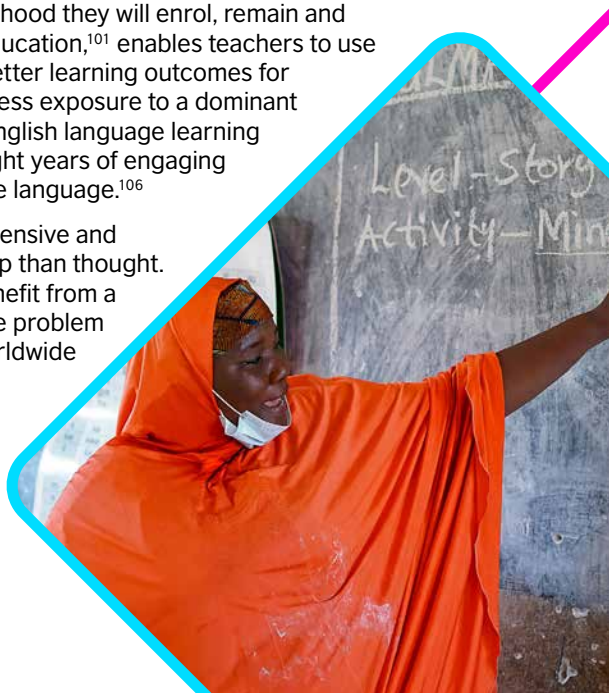
These examples show how LoLT policies can contribute to the marginalisation and exclusion of certain language communities, exacerbating inequalities and hindering access to quality education. Addressing these issues requires a more inclusive approach that respects linguistic diversity and ensures equitable educational opportunities for all students.

A language responsive approach to education offers a framework for achieving greater inclusion. It provides means to align core parts of the system – curriculum, textbooks, pedagogy, and assessment – with learners' emergent skills in an unfamiliar language. It helps increase the alignment of research evidence on LoLT, which supports mother tongue based multilingual education (MTB-MLE), and can also resolve dilemmas arising from monolingual policies that are frequently imposed on language diverse classrooms, as well as strengthening teaching, learning and assessment. Support to effect a gradual transition between a known LoLT and an unfamiliar one such as English can also be developed within this framework. In addition, a language responsive approach to education promotes linguistically and culturally appropriate pedagogies that respect local languages and mores.

Mother tongue teaching (MTT) as part of a language responsive approach to education

In low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), the British Council advocates for approaches to education which support the teaching of young learners in their own or a familiar language, as these are evidenced to be the most inclusive and impactful. Learning and teaching in the mother tongue in the early years builds on children's L1 foundations and increases the likelihood they will enrol, remain and succeed in school.[98,99,100] It also engages parents in their children's education,[101] enables teachers to use active learning strategies which foster inclusion,[102,103] and achieves better learning outcomes for marginalised children and girls, including those in rural areas having less exposure to a dominant language.[104,105] Fluency in English is best developed through quality English language learning experiences that are accessible to all. Children need at least six to eight years of engaging English as a subject before they can learn effectively in or through the language.[106]

Contrary to the assumption that mother tongue teaching (MTT) is expensive and difficult to implement, MTT is more cost-effective and simpler to set up than thought. Most students currently learning in a second language (L2) would benefit from a modest expansion of the number of LoLTs used. Three-quarters of the problem could be reduced by offering teaching in a further 220 languages worldwide – about one new language per country. These potential additional languages are already written ones with established orthographies, and each is spoken by at least 1.5 million people.[107]



Support for EAL (English as additional language) students transitioning to English medium education

In contexts where EAL students have historically been in a minority, for example the UK, USA or Canada, and where they may have immersive language experiences in an English-speaking country, they are often given language support to help them meet the demands of formal education, rather than the system adapting itself in fundamental ways to their LoLT needs.

However, in settings where the scale of challenge is greater, with the majority of students obliged to learn across the curriculum in a language other than their own, for example, in Kenya, Nigeria, Namibia or Rwanda, and where there is a large gap between students' ability in English and the demands of the curriculum, textbooks, pedagogy and assessment, the question arises as to whether and how basic adaptations can be made to these core components of the education system to better correspond with students' limited English and provide a more inclusive educational experience.[108]

What does system adaptation look like to achieve coherence between curriculum, textbooks, pedagogy and assessment on the one hand and learners' emergent English on the other?

Curriculum – integrating language and content in curriculum frameworks and subject syllabuses:

- Linking content and language in the curriculum framework and subject syllabus to jointly progress language ability and subject competencies.
- Identifying and outlining the main language features of topics in the subject syllabus, including vocabulary, sounds and spellings.
- Helping students to learn and use appropriate forms of academic English while engaging subject themes and topics in the language.

Textbooks and other learning materials – making the language and content accessible:

- Texts are shortened.
- Textual organisation is made clear by using headings, numbering, bold, bullets, and short paragraphs.
- Sentences are shortened, made grammatically simple, and key terms repeated.
- Vocabulary: limited number of low-frequency terms and academic words, especially in early grades.
- Vocabulary: definitions, second language (L2) or bilingual (L1 and L2) glossaries.
- Wide range of visuals used to convey meanings of key concepts.
- Language support activities: content-related reading, listening, talking and writing tasks in EAL.[109]

Pedagogy – adjusting teacher talk to make the language comprehensible to learners:

- Speaking clearly and slowly.
- Grading the language used, for example, in instructions or explanations or questions, to reduce its complexity – including use of simple vocabulary.
- Making the language concise by using short sentences and omitting needless words.
- Chunking the language, for example, instructions, by dividing it into small units of speech.
- Using gestures and images (non-verbal communication) to back up oral language.
- Avoiding idiomatic language – EAL learners are less familiar with figures of speech.
- Checking understanding of the language used with some closed questions.[110]

Assessment – ensuring it is accessible and equitable, and considering possible accommodations:

- Giving test instructions in mother tongue (MT) or the option of being assessed in MT.
- Varying accommodations in tandem with language progression across grade levels.
- Quality assuring the language used to draft questions in subject examinations.

The British Council stance on inclusion in relation to the language of learning and teaching

As an organisation with expertise in the field of language and education gained over the last 90 years, the British Council's stance on LoLT and inclusion can be summarised in the following statement of general principles, which we believe should be applied to language-in-education policies and practices across Africa.[111] These principles are aligned with the policy guide on the integration of African languages and cultures into education systems, adopted by ministers of education from 18 African countries following a conference in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso in January 2010 and subsequent exchanges.

- We believe in linguistic equity: all languages must be protected, respected and developed.
- We value the multilingual nature of African society. It is a resource to be celebrated and used.
- African languages should be used in partnership with international languages such as English, French, Portuguese, Spanish and Arabic, both through strong models of mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) and throughout African society.
- Parents, the state and civil society must be informed of the educational, social, cultural, economic and political benefits of the use of African languages alongside European languages, and included in discussions concerning multilingual education.
- Learners should be taught in basic education through the language they know best. This gives them the best basis for developing the academic language proficiency which is required in all subjects. Unfamiliar languages should be taught through second language teaching methodologies.
- Other languages, including further African or European ones, should only be used as a medium of instruction after learners have developed academic reading and writing competency in the language they are familiar with, and after they have gained a sufficient level of academic proficiency in the second language through studying that language as a subject. This principle applies to all languages that are not a learner's mother tongue. When the language education model chosen requires transition from one language of instruction to another, that transition should be gradual and not sudden.

Policies for inclusive education: analysing the impact of Kenya's national special needs education policy

Frederick Haga, Director, Special Needs Education, Ministry of Education, Kenya

Introduction

Over the years, Kenya has developed and adopted various legislation and policy instruments that incorporate education service provision for learners with disabilities and other special needs. These include the Constitution of Kenya (2010),[112] Basic Education Act (2013),[113] Persons with Disability Act (2003),[114] Basic Education Curriculum Framework (2017)[115] and Sessional Paper No. 1 of 2019,[116] among others. All these frameworks are mainstream legislation, and the policies apply to the entire education sector, not just to the practice of inclusive education (IE), with its focus on learners with special educational needs. This chapter, however, will focus on the Sector Policy for Learners and Trainees with Disability, 2018.[117]

Background to the Sector Policy for Learners and Trainees with Disability

Kenya's first attempt at developing a standalone policy targeting learners with special educational needs resulted in the National Special Needs Education Policy Framework of 2009.[118] After its implementation, it was soon recognised that it had several limitations, with concerns raised about inadequate implementation guidelines, a rather broad interpretation of the target group which limited its focus, and the need to align all policies to the new legal dispensation brought about by the Constitution of Kenya, promulgated in August 2010, and impacting on most aspects of life in the country. The language used did not align to the position adopted by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which advocates for a 'person first language' when referring to individuals with disability.[119] The Ministry resolved to review the policy, leading to the release of a sector policy for learners and trainees with disability in 2018. The resultant policy document was launched by the President of the Republic of Kenya himself, a rare event that was well received by all stakeholders, and is currently guiding the provision of disability education services in the sector.

Analysis of the policy

The policy's objectives address:

- Aligning education and training services for learners and trainees with disabilities with the relevant national policy frameworks.
- Developing a clear policy framework for the provision of inclusive education and training.
- Addressing the existing policy and implementation gaps in the provision of education.
- Training for learners and trainees with disabilities.
- Providing guidelines for the implementation of the policy.

The overarching goal of the policy is to ensure disability inclusive education is implemented at all levels of education, from pre-primary to university level. It takes a thematic approach in the organisation of the policy areas, with the overall intent focusing on inclusive education; a concept allocated, and explained, in a whole chapter to help users understand the context of the themes that follow, where the concept is applied. The thematic focus is on such areas as assessment and early intervention, access to quality and relevant education and training, quality learning environments,

health and safety, specialised learning resources, assistive devices and technology, curriculum, capacity building, financing and sustainability, advocacy and awareness creation, and research and data management.

The policy recognises inclusive education as a journey and allows for the progressive implementation of disability inclusive education with a consideration of the diverse landscapes and contexts found in the country.

In the accompanying implementation guidelines, there is deliberate effort to facilitate engagement by breaking down targets into components that can be implemented and monitored within the period of the education sector plan.

Implementation of the policy

As stated, the policy is accompanied by implementation guidelines, which makes it possible to track progress. The Ministry began by including the indicators provided in the implementation guidelines in the Education Sector Plan of 2018/23.[120]

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs), which had been part of the policy's development, played an important role in dissemination and creation of awareness. Such organisations as Action on Children with Disability, Humanity and Inclusion, Sense International, UNICEF, Leonard Cheshire, The Action Foundation, Special Olympics Kenya, Sightsavers, Ekitabu, United Disabled Persons of Kenya, Voluntary Services Overseas and CBM International, among others, worked closely with the Ministry of Education in implementing components that were in line with their core functions. The NGOs further played the role of holding the Ministry to account and reminding it of its obligations and responsibilities as the duty bearer, as stipulated in the policy.

Large-scale multi-lateral projects being implemented in the Kenyan education sector, such as the Secondary Education Quality Improvement Programme and the Kenya Primary Education Equity in Learning Programme, funded by the World Bank, Global Partnership for Education and the Lego Foundation, ensured they incorporated provisions of the policy into their designs and results areas.

Key successes and gaps in the policy's execution

Because of the policy's high-profile launch in 2018, mainstream media ran the event as a newsworthy item. This generated interest from many stakeholders, some of whom committed to being part of its implementation. The Ministry incorporated the policy's aspirations and provisions into the National Education Sector Plan of 2018/2023,[121] facilitating its rapid implementation through budgetary allocation by the Exchequer. When the planning and implementation period ended, its progress was evaluated and areas requiring more attention were included in the subsequent education sector plan.[122]

The Ministry created the Directorate of Special Needs Education in 2017, with the core function of co-ordinating the provision of education services to learners with special educational needs. This Directorate was greatly enhanced after the policy was launched and provided a focal point for implementation and co-ordination. School enrolment of learners with disability at both primary and secondary levels increased from 112,947 in 2017 to 152,313 in 2023.

Implementation of the policy has ensured a relatively high level of awareness among stakeholders. The report of the Presidential Working Party on Education Reforms outlines some of the policy's provisions, especially with regard to functional assessment and financing of education services for learners with disability.[123]

Unfortunately, while the policy defines inclusive education as an approach where learners and trainees with disabilities are provided with appropriate educational interventions within regular institutions of learning with reasonable accommodations and support, the reality is that inclusive education is a journey, and not all parts of the country are at the same level of readiness in implementing the policy. There are regions that have long distances between schools that make them inaccessible to learners with disability. Segregated special schools, given they are mainly boarding facilities, therefore still form a critical placement option across the country, despite the policy's intention to reduce them. It therefore remains a work in progress, and certain provisions are

largely aspirational. In addition, the policy anticipates a more equitable and differentiated approach towards financing learners with disability and special educational needs, an accomplishment that is yet to be fully realised. Indeed, one of the implementation gaps of the policy has been limited resource allocation towards its roll out. This has affected steady and prompt implementation as envisioned by the implementation guidelines. One such area is the adoption of differentiated funding to promote equitable resourcing based on individual differences and needs.

Further to this, the spirit of the policy gets lost in the semantics of inclusive education, which is a broader concept compared to 'disability-inclusive education'. The intention of the developers was to focus on learners with a disability, which is a clearly defined population, as opposed to learners with special needs in education, which is an elastic concept that ends up incorporating several groups such as children with disability, street children, orphans and refugees, among others. The focus might appear restricted, but this becomes the strength of the policy during implementation because the group is well-defined. Indeed, not having this strict definition is what hindered the complete implementation of the National Special Needs Education Policy Framework.[124]

The lack of accurate data and reliable information about learners with disability hampers the effective application and utilisation of evidence-based interventions. Currently, the Ministry is working on strengthening the Kenya Education Management Information System, to respond to the different parameters required when collecting data on this population.

While the policy encompasses the entire education sector, its application is more manifested in the basic education level compared to higher education and technical vocational training.

Conclusion

During the period of the policy's implementation, more gains, rather than losses, have been made in Kenya regarding education services for learners with disability.

One key lesson learned is that all critical stakeholders should be part of policy development and implementation. The policy under discussion is due for review but a comprehensive evaluation must be undertaken to establish its efficacy and impact in the education sector. No doubt this will also be conducted jointly with non-state actors who have been part of the policy's existence since 2018.

The Kenyan experience regarding the realisation of disability inclusive education is that indeed, inclusive education is a journey, not an event. Sound and clear policies and adequate resources are critical to the journey, but bringing on board all stakeholders is the fuel that powers the vehicle.

Inclusion in Egypt

Mohamed Hassan Al-Sibai, Head of the Technical Office at the Central Administration for General Education, Ministry of Education, Egypt

What is inclusion and why is it important?

Inclusion is the provision of equitable learning, teaching, and support opportunities for all students, male and female, with and without disabilities, including gifted learners, migrant students, and refugees, within mainstream education. Inclusive education ensures that students are placed in age-appropriate settings, with access to quality education that meets their individual needs. This process is guided by assessments from medical professionals, specialists, and educators to create an environment where every learner can thrive.

Driven by a global commitment to equitable education – one that has gained significant momentum since the launch of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 – countries have intensified efforts to cultivate learning environments that equip all students with the knowledge and skills necessary to navigate an increasingly interconnected world. These efforts underscore the transformative potential of inclusive policies in expanding opportunities for all.

The multifaceted benefits of inclusion

Social impact: inclusion lays the foundation for a more just and cohesive society by providing equal access to education, employment, and essential services. It promotes fairness, empowers individuals with disabilities, and actively reduces discrimination by fostering tolerance, challenging stereotypes, and bridging societal divides. When individuals of all abilities contribute meaningfully, communities become more diverse, respectful, and supportive, cultivating an environment where mutual understanding and respect can prosper.

Economic impact: inclusive policies create opportunities that drive both individual empowerment and broader economic growth. By facilitating workforce participation, they enable individuals with disabilities to contribute their skills, reducing unemployment rates and fostering economic self-sufficiency. Moreover, inclusive societies incur lower long-term costs for healthcare and social support, as greater independence reduces reliance on public assistance. The active engagement of individuals with disabilities across sectors also fuels innovation, enriches workplace diversity, and enhances overall productivity.

Health impact: inclusion profoundly enhances well-being by ensuring individuals with disabilities have access to quality healthcare, leading to improved physical and mental health outcomes. Social integration further mitigates isolation, loneliness, and the risk of depression by cultivating meaningful connections and community engagement. Ultimately, an inclusive society upholds dignity, support, and the opportunity for every individual to lead a fulfilling life.

Educational impact: inclusion opens pathways for academic and personal growth by integrating students with disabilities into mainstream schools and establishing an environment where diverse learners can develop their skills and maximise their potential. Beyond enhancing academic achievement, inclusive education nurtures essential social skills, equipping students with the tools for success in both their professional and personal lives.

Political impact: inclusion reinforces democratic values and strengthens human rights protections. To enact and enforce policies that safeguard the rights of individuals with disabilities, governments inevitably establish legal frameworks that promote fairness and equality. Additionally, increased political participation among people with disabilities ensures that their voices are heard, their needs are addressed, and they are actively involved in shaping the policies that impact their lives.

Cultural impact: an inclusive society embraces diversity as a source of enrichment. By promoting acceptance and challenging prejudices, inclusion dismantles misconceptions about disabilities, fostering greater respect and appreciation for individual differences. The contributions of people with disabilities to the arts, literature, and cultural expression underscore their creativity, talents, and unique perspectives, adding depth and vibrancy to cultural landscapes.

Egypt has embraced the global vision of inclusivity and its far-reaching benefits. In recent years, the country has shown a strong commitment to advancing inclusivity in its education system, setting clear goals to build a more inclusive society:

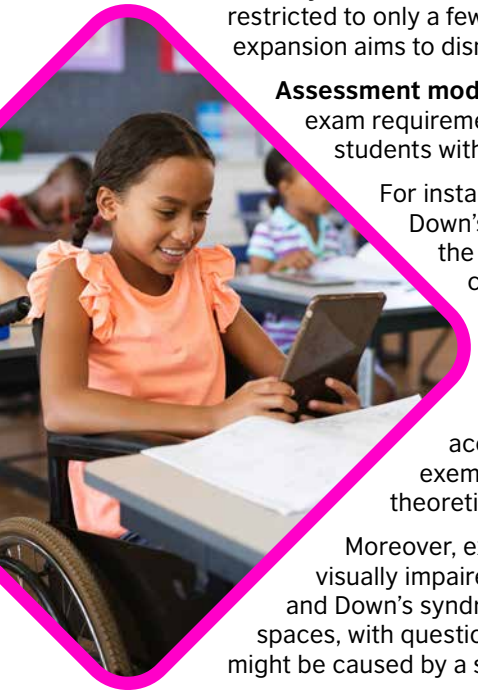
1. **Ensure equal educational opportunities:** guarantee equitable access to education for all children with disabilities, leaving no one behind.
2. **Promote social interaction:** encourage the development of positive communication skills in children with disabilities to foster social inclusion.
3. **Address mobility challenges:** provide educational services at schools near students' residences.
4. **Increase enrolment rates:** expand the inclusion of students with disabilities in the formal education system.
5. **Shift community attitudes:** raise awareness about the importance of inclusion and acceptance of differences, fostering a more inclusive society.
6. **Boost self-confidence:** develop students' academic and life skills to empower them and build their self-esteem.
7. **Encourage understanding and tolerance:** support non-disabled students in embracing diversity and taking responsibility for maintaining an inclusive environment.
8. **Support expatriate families:** extend the inclusive education system to Egyptian expatriate children, ensuring they have access to necessary services and facilities abroad.

The current landscape of Egypt's inclusive education system

Accessibility and growth: over the past 14 years, Egypt has made remarkable progress in expanding inclusive education and improving accessibility for students with disabilities.

The nationwide inclusion initiative, launched in 2011, initially recognised four categories of disability: visual, auditory, intellectual, and physical. By 2017, its scope had broadened to eleven, incorporating conditions such as mild intellectual disability, autism spectrum disorder, Down's syndrome, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

Similarly, the number of inclusive schools has surged from 400 in 2011 – when implementation was restricted to only a few institutions under stringent conditions – to over 21,000 by 2024. This expansion aims to dismantle enrolment barriers, ensuring broader access to inclusive education.



Assessment modifications: a range of adjustments have been implemented to the courses and exam requirements, format, and philosophy to accommodate the diverse expectations of students with varying abilities.

For instance, students with specific disabilities, including mild intellectual disability, Down's syndrome, cerebral palsy, and autism spectrum disorder, are exempt from the second foreign language requirement. Parents may also provide educational companions for students with autism, cerebral palsy, Down's syndrome, and physical disabilities throughout their studies and during exams.

Additionally, students with severe visual impairment, physical disabilities affecting writing, epilepsy, learning difficulties, hyperactivity, or cerebral palsy may be assisted by a legal companion during exams, with parental accompaniment permitted in special cases. Those requiring a companion are exempt from spelling, geometry, and practical exams, with marks reallocated to theoretical components.

Moreover, exam papers are tailored to students' needs with customised font sizes: 24 for visually impaired students, 18 for those with intellectual disabilities, autism, cerebral palsy, and Down's syndrome, and 16 for other integrated disabilities. The format also includes blank spaces, with questions and answers presented on a single sheet, eliminating the confusion that might be caused by a separate answer sheet.

Furthermore, the exam questions are designed to align with the diverse needs of students with disabilities. For students with intellectual disabilities, slower learning, autism, cerebral palsy, and Down's syndrome, assessments rely entirely on objective questions, including true/false, multiple choice, completion, ordering, and pairing. For students with visual, hearing, and motor impairments,

exams consist of 85 per cent objective questions and 15 per cent short-answer responses, ensuring clarity and accessibility without unnecessary extraneous content.

Inclusive services: inclusive educational services span general, technical, and private institutions nationwide, with resource rooms offering tailored support for all students, particularly those with disabilities.

A wide variety of educational activities are structured across multiple levels to accommodate varying abilities, including sports, cultural, artistic, and recreational programmes. These initiatives ensure the active participation of students with disabilities from both special education and inclusive schools across all governorates. Egypt also commemorates international observances such as World Autism Day to raise public awareness and promote inclusivity.

Complementing these efforts, rehabilitation services are provided through specialised centres, including the Riyada Center in Sharqia and Sensory Integration Centers in Cairo and North Sinai, offering targeted support for students with minor disabilities.

Success indicators: the integration of students with disabilities into the education system has seen remarkable growth, increasing from 3,697 individuals in the 2012/2013 academic year to 159,825 in 2023/2024. Projections for 2025 anticipate that the number of integrated learners will surpass 200,000, marking a significant milestone in the country's ongoing efforts towards inclusive education.

Obstacles to inclusive education in Egypt

However, this promising progress has not been achieved without significant challenges, including:

1. **Population pressures**: as the most populous country in the Middle East and North Africa, Egypt faces mounting pressures on its public services, further exacerbated by the influx of refugees and migrants.
2. **Shortage of specialised staff**: the significant scarcity of qualified educators continues to be a major barrier to providing effective support for students with disabilities.
3. **Infrastructure deficiencies**: the lack of fully equipped resource rooms is a critical impediment to comprehensive inclusive education.
4. **Lack of awareness**: the pervasive lack of awareness regarding the rights of individuals with disabilities continues to hinder progress toward full inclusion.

Strategic efforts to overcome challenges

Nonetheless, Egypt has made concerted efforts to address these barriers. Through strategic partnerships, curriculum innovation, extensive awareness campaigns, and continuous legislative updates, the country is actively working to overcome obstacles and create a more supportive environment for all students, as described below.

Community partnerships: through strategic collaborations with both governmental and non-governmental organisations, Egypt's Ministry of Education has made notable progress in addressing the ongoing challenges of specialised staff shortages, inadequate infrastructure, and limited public awareness.

Key partnerships, notably with UNICEF, have been pivotal in enhancing the country's pool of trained educators. This collaboration has facilitated the training of over 37,000 educators, equipping them with specialised skills to better support students with disabilities. The training covers a broad range of areas, including inclusion awareness, educational leadership, understanding disability characteristics, diagnostic tools, the development and use of educational aids, modern teaching strategies, the Montessori method, managing high-density classrooms, preparing individualised education plans, behaviour modification, and optimising the use of resource rooms. Additionally, more than 15,000 teachers and educational staff have received training on life skills and citizenship education, and refugee and irregular migration awareness.

In parallel with the increase in numbers of qualified personnel, UNICEF's partnership has driven improvements in inclusion-supportive infrastructure. More than 780 resource

rooms have been established across 11 Egyptian governorates in general education schools, with plans to expand to 1,000 resource rooms in the coming year. Additionally, physical accessibility has been enhanced in over 200 public schools. This fruitful collaboration will continue through the 2024–2026 academic years, aiming to integrate 1,000 more schools into the inclusion programme.

Similarly, collaborations with the Egyptian Ministry of Communications and Information Technology have facilitated the training of over 45,000 teachers, enhancing their technical expertise and equipping them with necessary skills to effectively support students with disabilities.

Additionally, the British Council has played a significant role in supporting the implementation of the inclusion system across directorates and educational departments. Through specialised training, the British Council has strengthened institutional awareness of inclusion among teachers, mentors, and administrative cadres. They have also facilitated the launch of the *School is a Place for All of Us* initiative, which aims to raise public awareness about the fundamental importance of inclusive education.

Curriculum development: the Ministry has developed specialised curricula for special education institutions, seamlessly integrating life skills with academic competencies. This approach is designed to facilitate the smooth transition of students from special education to general education schools within the inclusive education framework.

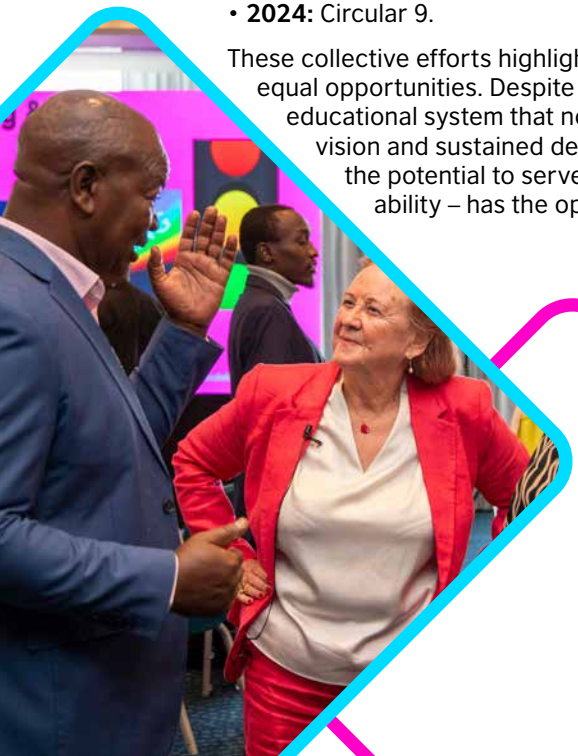
Awareness campaigns: in addition, the Ministry has organised extensive awareness campaigns, reaching 150,000 teachers and educational leaders this year. Led by trained technical cadres, these campaigns were conducted across schools, educational departments, directorates, places of worship, and parent gatherings, fostering greater societal engagement and broadening the reach of inclusive education awareness.

Expanding the acceptance of medical reports: in a continued effort to facilitate the integration of students with disabilities, the ministry has broadened the range of authorised institutions that can issue the required medical reports. Initially, in 2011, only hospitals under the General Authority for Health Insurance and the Ministry of Health and Population were permitted to do so. However, in 2017, this scope was expanded to include Ministry of Health affiliates, university hospitals, and hospitals operated by the armed forces and police.

Reviewing and updating legislation: the legislative framework supporting the inclusion system is consistently reassessed in order to remain responsive to emerging needs. This dynamic approach demonstrates the country's dedication to continuously optimising the system for the benefit of a diverse student population. Key updates include:

- **2015:** Ministerial Decision 42 and Circular 19.
- **2016:** Ministerial Decision 229 and Circular 60.
- **2017:** Ministerial Decision 252.
- **2019:** Circular 3.
- **2023:** Decision 27.
- **2024:** Circular 9.

These collective efforts highlight Egypt's unwavering commitment to providing all students with equal opportunities. Despite facing challenges, the country is steadily advancing toward an educational system that not only accommodates, but actively embraces diversity. With a clear vision and sustained dedication, Egypt is shaping an inclusive education framework that has the potential to serve as a regional model, ensuring that every student – regardless of ability – has the opportunity to thrive.



Leading learning for gender equality: a reflection on the Ethiopian experience

Fekede Tuli, Kotebe University of Education, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Background

Education is a transformative force for individual and societal development, extending beyond knowledge acquisition to promote human rights, dignity, and sustainable development. As former UNESCO Director General Irina Bokova emphasised, education is essential for building a future grounded in equal rights, social justice, and respect for cultural diversity.[125] Kemmis et al. further argue that education has a dual purpose: to prepare individuals to live well, and to create a world worth living in, which requires education to embody the principles of equity, justice, and inclusivity, while fostering personal growth and shaping societies where all can thrive.[126]

Education is both a fundamental human right and a catalyst for gender equality and economic growth, and while it can perpetuate inequalities, it also holds the power to address them.[127] In Ethiopia, where gender gaps in learning outcomes persist, prioritising inclusive and quality education is critical. Good learning, as Harpaz, conceptualises, involves active engagement and deep understanding, which must be accessible to all learners, regardless of gender.[128]

Today's educational landscape is characterised by increasingly diverse student populations, necessitating teachers and leaders to create inclusive and supportive learning environments. This chapter examines 'leading learning' for gender equality within the Ethiopian education system. It explores the gender dimensions of education, the challenges to gender equality, the progress made so far, and the strategies in place to ensure gender equality in the Ethiopian education system.

Ethiopian contexts

Ethiopia is Africa's second-most populous nation, with over 109.5 million people, and has a rapidly growing economy, achieving an estimated 7.2 per cent growth in 2022/23.[129] However, despite this progress, the country remains one of the poorest, with a per capita gross national income of $1,020. Ethiopia's population is almost exactly split between males and females, with about 54.9 million males and 54.6 million females.

The significance of gender equality in Ethiopia is paramount, as it serves as a cornerstone for poverty reduction, sustainable development, and improved community livelihoods.[130] Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right but also a critical driver of social stability, economic growth, and societal well-being.[131,132] It enhances women's participation in political decision-making, improves health outcomes, and fosters robust economic development. Ethiopia has made notable strides in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment through the adoption of international declarations and the enactment of national laws and policies.[133] As a prerequisite for sustainable development, gender equality is essential for creating a fair and prosperous society. Excluding women from equal participation impedes societal progress and overlooks the immense potential of half the population.[134] Empowering women enables them to influence consumption and production patterns, participate in decision-making, and control resource distribution, both within societies and across generations.[135] Ethiopia can harness education as a means to foster gender equality, empower marginalised groups, and build a more just and equitable society.

Policy, legal, and institutional framework for gender equality in Ethiopia

Ethiopia has established a robust policy, legal, and institutional framework to promote gender equality, reflecting its commitment through both international agreements and national initiatives. Internationally, Ethiopia has ratified key instruments such as CEDAW (1981), the Beijing Platform for Action (1995), the Maputo Protocol (2004) with reservations, the Maya Declaration (2011), and aligned its development plans with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5 on gender equality. Nationally, Ethiopia has enacted comprehensive laws and policies, including the

National Policy on Women (1993), the Ethiopian Constitution (1994), the Revised Family Code (2000), and the Revised Criminal Code (2005), which address issues like gender-based violence, marriage equality, and women's rights. Additional measures include Proclamation No. 1064/2017 against sexual harassment, Proclamation No. 970/2016 on gender-responsive budgeting, and the Rural Land Administration Proclamation No. 456/2005 ensuring women's land rights. The Education and Training Policy (2023) further underscores Ethiopia's commitment to equitable access to quality education. Together, these frameworks demonstrate Ethiopia's multifaceted approach to advancing gender equality and women's empowerment.

Gender and education in Ethiopia: analysis of the six ESDP documents

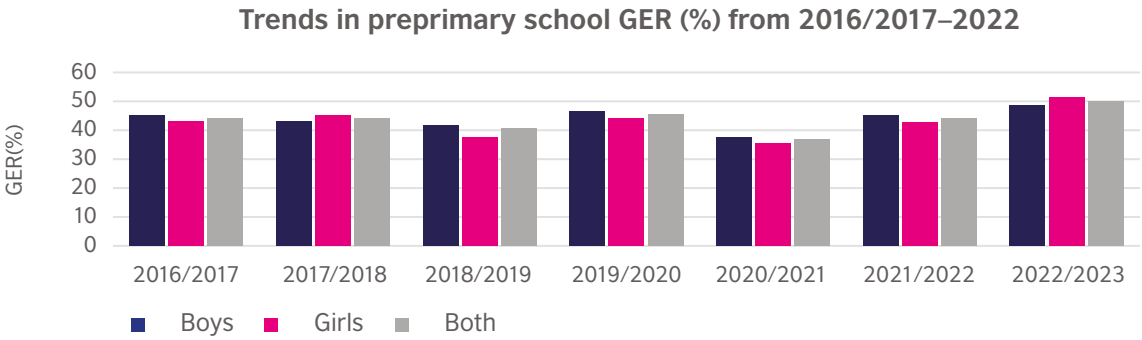
Ethiopia's commitment to gender equality in education is evidenced by its six Education Sector Development Programs (ESDPs).[136,137,138,139,140] These programmes employ a multifaceted approach to improve girls' access and enrolment through affirmative action policies, gender-friendly school environments (separate latrines, female teachers, girls' clubs), scholarships, and expanded access in underserved areas via mobile schools and Alternative Basic Education, community mobilisation aims to raise awareness of the benefits of girls' education. Furthermore, the ESDPs focus on retention and completion through comprehensive support services, student tracking systems, school feeding programmes, safe learning environments, codes of conduct against gender-based violence, and by addressing Harmful Traditional Practices (HTPs) within the curriculum. These strategies are often implemented in combination to tackle the multifaceted challenges.

Beyond access and retention, the ESDPs prioritise improving the quality of education for girls by developing a gender-sensitive curriculum, providing gender-responsive pedagogy (GRP) training for teachers, and offering professional development opportunities for female educators. Moreover, the Ethiopian government promotes female leadership in the education sector through increased representation and support programmes. Achieving these goals involves establishing gender offices, mainstreaming gender equality into policies, fostering partnerships, and strengthening monitoring and evaluation. Despite these high-level commitments and the great advances which have already been made, the Ethiopian education system faces considerable challenges and has not achieved equitable access and learning outcomes for all girls.

Enrolment trends

a) Preprimary school

Chart 1. Trends in preprimary school gross enrolment ration (GER) (per cent) from 2016/2017–2022/2023



	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Boys	45.1	43.1	41.8	46.6	37.7	45.3	48.6
Girls	43.1	45.1	39.7	44.1	35.6	42.7	51.4
Both	44.2	44.2	40.7	45.4	36.7	44.0	50.0

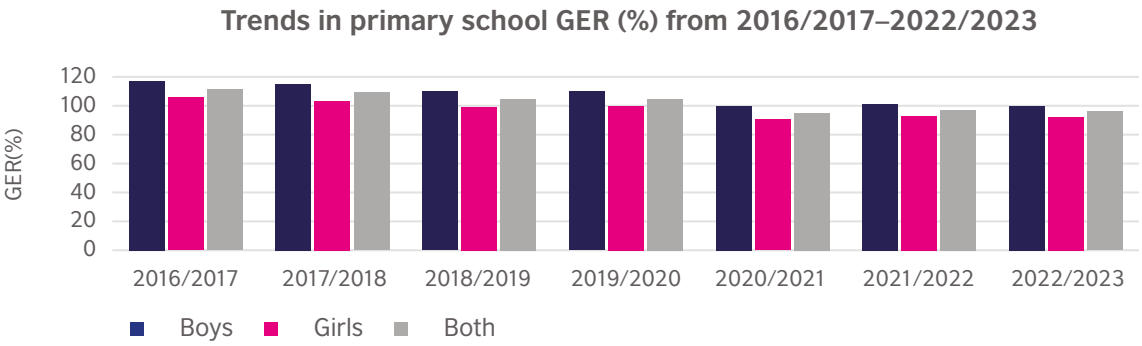
Source: MoE Education Annual Abstract from 2016/2017–2022/2023

Chart 1 shows that boys' gross enrolment ratio (GER) in preprimary school has fluctuated over the years. It started at 45.1 per cent in 2016/2017, decreased to 41.8 per cent in 2018/2019, and then rose to 48.6 per cent in 2022/2023. Girls' GER in preprimary school has also fluctuated, but shows an overall increasing trend. It began at 43.1 per cent in 2016/2017, dipped to 39.7 per cent in 2018/2019, and then increased significantly to 51.4 per cent in 2022/2023.This means that by

2022/2023, more than half of girls of preprimary school age were enrolled in preprimary education. While there have been fluctuations in enrolment for both boys and girls, the overall trend indicates progress in preprimary education enrolment, particularly for girls.

b) Primary school

Chart 2. Trends in primary school GER (per cent) from 2016/2017–2022/2023



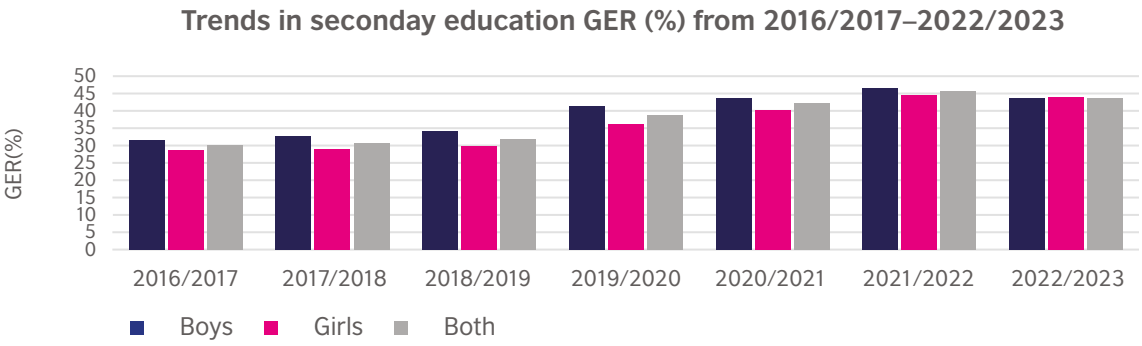
	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Boys	117.0	115.0	109.9	109.9	99.7	101.4	99.8
Girls	105.7	103.5	99.2	99.8	90.6	92.8	92.2
Both	111.4	1.09.3	104.6	104.9	95.1	97.2	96.1

Source: MoE Education Annual Abstract from 2016/2017–2022/2023

Looking at the trends from 2016/2017 to 2022/2023 in Chart 2, both boys and girls experienced a general decrease in primary school GER over this period. Boys started at 117 per cent in 2016/2017 and decreased to 99.8 per cent in 2022/2023. Girls started at 105.7 per cent in 2016/2017 and decreased to 92.2 per cent in 2022/2023. The fact that the GER can be over 100 per cent suggests that some students enrolled in primary school may be outside the official primary school age range. While there was a decrease in GER for both boys and girls, the trend shows that primary school enrolment is becoming more closely aligned with the official primary school age population.

c) Secondary education

Chart 3. Trends in secondary education GER (per cent) from 2016/2017–2022/2023



	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Boys	31.5	32.6	34.2	41.5	43.8	46.6	43.6
Girls	28.7	28.9	29.8	36.2	40.3	44.6	44.0
Both	30.1	30.7	32.0	38.9	42.1	45.6	43.8

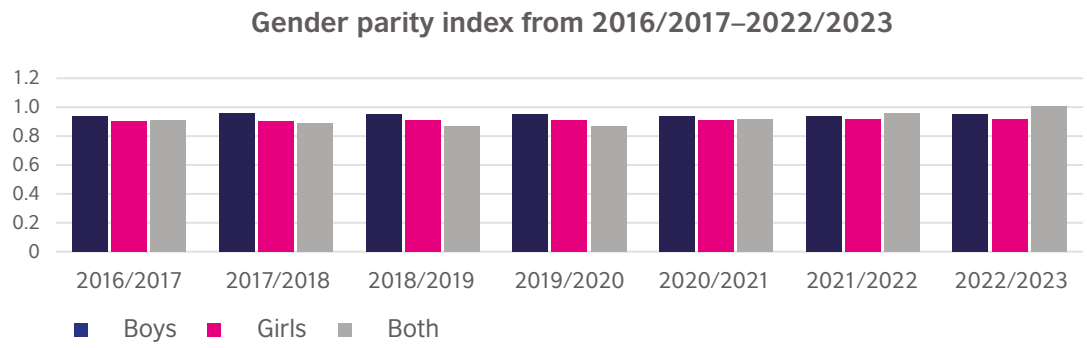
Source: MoE Education Annual Abstract from 2016/2017–2022/2023

According to Chart 3, boys' GER in secondary school has generally increased from 2016/2017 to 2021/2022, but then decreased in 2022/2023. It started at 31.5 per cent in 2016/2017 and climbed to 46.6 per cent in 2021/2022 before falling to 43.6 per cent in 2022/2023. Girls' GER in secondary

school shows a similar trend to that of the boys', with a general increase followed by a decrease in the final year. It began at 28.7 per cent in 2016/2017, peaked at 44.6 per cent in 2021/2022, and then dipped to 44 per cent in 2022/2023. While there was a decrease in GER for both boys and girls in the final year, the overall trend for the period shows notable progress in secondary school enrolment for both sexes.

Gender parity index (GPI)

Chart 4. Gender parity index from 2016/2017–2022/2023



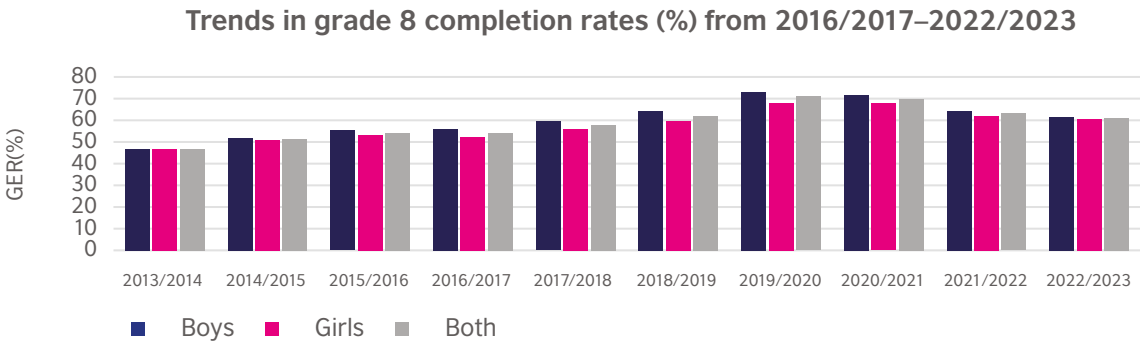
	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Boys	0.94	0.96	0.95	0.95	0.94	0.94	0.95
Girls	0.90	0.90	0.91	0.91	0.91	0.92	0.92
Both	0.91	0.89	0.87	0.87	0.92	0.96	1.01

Source: MoE Education Annual Abstract from 2016/2017–2022/2023

Chart 4 indicates the gender parity index (GPI), which measures the ratio of female to male values of a given indicator, in this case, the gross enrolment ratio (GER). A GPI of 1 indicates parity between the sexes. Preprimary education shows a consistent GPI, ranging from 0.94 to 0.96, meaning there has been a relatively equal number of boys and girls enrolled in preprimary education throughout the years. Primary education also demonstrates a steady trend towards parity, with the GPI rising from 0.9 in 2016/2017 to 0.92 in 2022/2023, indicating that the gap between the enrolment of boys and girls in primary education is narrowing. Secondary education has experienced more fluctuation; while the GPI was below parity from 2016/2017 to 2019/2020, it rose above parity in 2022/2023, reaching 1.01, which means that in 2022/2023, slightly more females than males were enrolled in secondary education.

Trends in completion rate

Chart 5. Trends in completion rate from 2016/2017–2022/2023



	13/20	14/20	15/20	16/20	17/20	18/20	19/20	20/20	21/20	22/20
Boys	46.7	51.8	55.3	56.0	59.4	64.4	73.0	71.7	64.3	61.4
Girls	46.7	50.9	53.3	52.2	55.9	59.7	68.0	67.8	61.9	60.5
Both	46.7	51.3	54.3	54.1	57.7	62.1	71.0	69.8	63.1	61.0

Source: MoE Education Annual Abstract from 2016/2017–2022/2023

According to Chart 5, the Grade 8 completion rate was 56 per cent for boys and 52.2 per cent for girls in 2016/2017. By 2022/2023, the completion rate for boys had increased to 61.4 per cent, while the completion rate for girls had increased to 60.5 per cent. While both boys and girls experienced an increase in completion rates over the period, girls showed a larger gain, closing the gap with boys.

Grade 12 national exam result by gender, 2021/22 and 2022/23

Table 1: National exam result by gender

	Total number of students who sat the exam		Number of students who scored 50 per cent and above			
	2021/22	**2022/23**	**2021/22**	%	**2022/23**	%
Male	485,393	447,567	20,438	4.2	18,383	4.1
Female	411,127	397,532	9,596	2.3	8,884	2.2
Both	896,520	845,099	30,034	3.3	27,267	3.2

According to Table 1 the percentage of students achieving a score of 50 per cent or above is very low, both for the overall group and disaggregated by gender. In both years, a higher percentage of male students (4.2 per cent and 4.1 per cent respectively) achieved 50 per cent or above compared to female students (2.3 per cent and 2.2 per cent respectively).The difference in pass rates between males and females is significant; in both years, the male pass rate was roughly double the female pass rate. This indicates a significant gender disparity in academic performance in the Grade 12 National Examination. The fact that less than 5 per cent of students are achieving 50 per cent or above is alarming, but student performance has improved in 2023/24, with a 5.4 per cent pass rate out of the total 674,823 examinees. Overall, this indicates a persistent learning crisis and systemic issues affecting the educational outcomes for the vast majority of students.

National learning assessment results

National learning assessments conducted by the NEAEA in 2016 and 2017 reveal a persistent and concerning issue of student underachievement in Ethiopia, alongside significant gender disparities.[141,142] These findings underscore the urgent need for interventions to improve learning outcomes and promote equitable access to quality education.

a) 2016 National learning assessment results

The 2016 national learning assessment uncovered significant underachievement among students in Grades 4 and 8. The composite scores for both Grade levels fell well below the 50 per cent minimum benchmark set by the Ethiopian Education and Training Policy. According to the national learning assessment results, the average national score across reading, English, mathematics, and environmental science for Grade 4 was 44.74 per cent. while the average score for Grade 8 was even lower, at 41.14 per cent, across English, mathematics, physics, chemistry, and biology. The assessment also revealed a troubling gender disparity, with male students consistently outperforming their female counterparts. This difference was statistically significant ($p < 0.0001$), indicating a systemic issue that disproportionately affects girls. For instance, in Grade 4, boys scored an average of 46.27 per cent, while girls scored 43.24 per cent. In Grade 8, boys outperformed girls in all subjects except biology, with a gender gap of 1.81 per cent in the average scores. Furthermore, the percentage of students achieving the 50 per cent benchmark was alarmingly low, with only 36.6 per cent of Grade 4 students and 25.2 per cent of Grade 8 students meeting or exceeding this threshold.

b) 2017 national learning assessment results

The 2017 assessment painted an equally concerning picture, particularly for students in Grades 10 and 12. The average Grade 10 national score across the five core subjects –English, mathematics, biology, chemistry, and physics – was 33.3 per cent, far below the 50 per cent benchmark. The composite mean score was slightly higher at 41.7 per cent, but most subjects still failed to meet the required threshold. Gender disparities persisted in both Grade 10 and 12, where boys outperformed girls by statistically significant margins, with boys scoring an average of 34.72 per cent, compared to the girls' 31.65 per cent in Grade 10, and 42.73 per cent against 38.41 per cent in Grade 12.

These NEAEA findings highlight the underachievement and gender disparity in the Ethiopian education system, and show the urgent need for intervention. Policy makers and educators must

prioritise strategies to improve learning outcomes, particularly for girls, and ensure that all students have the opportunity to meet national educational standards.

Challenges to ensuring gender equality in Ethiopian education

Despite progress in enrolment, achieving gender equality in Ethiopian education faces multifaceted challenges rooted in socio-cultural norms, economic constraints, and systemic issues. Deeply ingrained societal norms, particularly in rural areas, often prioritise boys' education due to their perceived future economic contributions, while girls are burdened with household responsibilities.[143] This is compounded by harmful traditional practices like early marriage and abduction, which directly remove girls from schooling. Limited economic opportunities for women, poverty, and the perceived opportunity cost of educating girls further exacerbate these disparities.[144]

Systemic problems within the education system also hinder progress. 'Policy evaporation' as termed by Pauline Rose, occurs when well-intentioned gender-equitable policies are not effectively implemented due to resource limitations and monitoring issues.[145] Inadequate infrastructure, such as a lack of gender-sensitive facilities, and unsafe school environments marked by violence and bias, further disadvantage girls.[146,147] Furthermore, the pervasive learning crisis, with a vast majority of children unable to comprehend basic texts, disproportionately impacts girls, who often lack adequate instruction and support.[148] These interconnected challenges require targeted interventions addressing social norms, economic empowerment, and systemic reforms, to ensure true gender equality in Ethiopian education.

Conclusion

This reflection on gender equality in Ethiopian education reveals a complex landscape characterised by both significant progress and persistent challenges. While Ethiopia has demonstrated a strong commitment to gender equality through policy frameworks, international agreements, and targeted initiatives, the lived reality for many girls and women within the education system falls short of achieving equity. The analysis of ESDP documents, enrolment trends, completion rates, national examination results, and learning assessments, paints a picture of an education system striving for gender parity, yet still grappling with deeply entrenched barriers that disproportionately affect girls' educational opportunities and outcomes. The overarching theme emerging from this exploration is the critical need to move beyond a focus solely on access to education and embrace a more holistic and transformative approach that prioritises leading learning for gender equality. The evidence clearly demonstrates that simply getting girls into school is not enough. The multifaceted challenges that hinder girls' ability to thrive academically, complete their education, and reach their full potential, must be addressed.

Recommendations for promoting gender equality in education

To promote gender equality in educational settings, a multi-faceted approach is essential, addressing various levels of the educational ecosystem, from teacher training to policy reforms. Firstly, teacher education must be re-envisioned through a gender lens by integrating gender-responsive pedagogy, raising awareness of gender bias, promoting positive role models, and reforming curricula to reflect gender equality principles. Enhancing leadership capacity is equally critical, requiring school leaders to champion gender equity, implement inclusive policies, and engage communities in supporting gender-responsive initiatives.

Additionally, implementing inclusive pedagogical practices can create respectful and empowering learning environments by actively challenging stereotypes, adopting differentiated instruction, and ensuring culturally responsive teaching. Addressing socio-cultural barriers through community awareness campaigns, empowering girls, and challenging harmful norms is vital. Economic support for girls' education, improving school infrastructure, and addressing systemic policy gaps – such as strengthening implementation, resource allocation, and monitoring – are necessary for sustainable progress. Lastly, fostering strategic partnerships and utilising data-driven strategies will facilitate effective interventions, promote knowledge sharing, and enhance advocacy for gender equality policies.

Equity in action: adapting curriculum and instruction for diverse learners

Cina P. Mosito, Associate Professor of Inclusive Education, Nelson Mandela University, South Africa

Introduction

The situation of children who are excluded from education remains a serious challenge in almost every country.[149] There are many factors that contribute to this pervasive problem, which can be broadly grouped as systemic, pedagogic, societal and even medical in nature. The result is that the phenomenon of educational exclusion entails more than just being physically absent from school, having deep rooted causes and far-reaching consequences. The South African case, with the lingering impact of apartheid policies on many aspects of life, provides a rich background for a nuanced understanding of many causes and manifestations of exclusion. As it is widely known, apartheid promoted the separate and unequal development of people classified via legislation into Black, White, Coloured and Indian racial groups which led to the disenfranchisement of these groups due to the weakening of the quality of education they received.[150] The poor quality of education across all levels was ultimately one of the most potent weapons used by the apartheid government.[151]

With the advent of democratic rule in 1994, South Africa developed a series of policies underpinned by the principles of inclusion, equity, quality education for all, and social justice.[152,153] Given these historical events, the potential impact of any work to circumvent exclusionary practices lies in the extent to which it is driven by an understanding of the contextual rootedness of exclusion. In South Africa, this means such work should target areas of life which have been identified as most central to reversing the hold of apartheid. In this instance, the approach would include acknowledging that teachers and learners alike are affected by the widespread social injustices and inequities of apartheid. Impactful transformation should therefore include educational responses that equip teachers with the tools for meaningful engagement with learner strengths and needs. Teachers, it has been argued, are among the most important agents of change in any society if they have the knowledge, skills and attitudes for inclusion.[154,155]

Despite advances in policies and related interventions, apartheid's legacy on education continues, as demonstrated by the recurring narrative of low performance in international tests of literacy and numeracy, especially in resource constrained schools. This signals a necessity to shift from reliance on the medical model and its suggestion that learning problems are the result of some organic disorder or disease,[156] to a nuanced understanding of factors that contribute to underachievement.[157] The new education agenda has been the promotion of an understanding that even in the absence of disabilities and special needs in education, learners do experience barriers to learning. It is against this background that this article aims to describe how a nuanced approach to education problems has informed the journey of disrupting inequities and social injustices in South African education. Specifically, the paper describes the contribution of the Teaching for All programme in translating policy into impactful actions of equity through the mainstreaming of inclusive education in teacher education. The central argument is that if teachers are equipped with the knowledge, skills and attitudes for inclusion, they will engineer evidence-based strategies that match the needs of diverse learners in their classrooms.

Policy developments in education

Education in South Africa is the responsibility of two Departments: Basic Education (DBE) and Higher Education and Training (DHET). The former is responsible for basic education (early childhood education to high school) while the latter looks after all post school education, usually referred to as higher or further education, and it is here that teacher education and training takes place. Education policy development is co-ordinated between

the two departments, and is bound by the principles of equity and quality education for all. All policies developed from 1994 aimed to redress past inequalities in education, transform the education system and respond to the need to increase the skills and life chances of all South Africans.[158] A review of a selection of these policies (see below) revealed that they aim to promote access, human rights, social justice, equity, transformation, and equality.

1996	The South African Schools Act	Ended the system of separate schooling on the basis of race and created a single system for all learners. Emphasises the right of equal access to basic and quality education for all learners without discrimination of any sort.
2001	DoE: Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education: building an inclusive education and training system	Outlines an inclusive education system in which all learners have equal access to quality educational opportunities. Recognises the importance of developing learners' strengths, and of empowering and enabling learners to participate actively and critically in the learning process.
2005	The South African Children's Act	Protects the rights of children so they are able to grow up safely and develop well. Children are allowed to have their say and participate in decisions that affect their lives. Values and protects families.
2015	DHET: Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications (MRTEQ)	All teachers need to be familiar with what is needed to implement inclusive education practices.
2011	DBE: Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS)	Framework of procedures to identify, assess, and provide programmes for all learners who need additional support to boost their participation and inclusion in school.
2011	DBE: Guidelines for Responding to Learner Diversity in the Classroom	Strategies for differentiated teaching and learning to meet the diversity of learners' needs.
2018	DHET: Standards for Inclusive Teaching	Identifies standards for the development of inclusive teachers in five key areas: valuing and understanding learner diversity; agency for social justice and inclusion; collaborating to enable inclusive teaching and learning; developing professionally as an inclusive teacher; employing classroom practices that promote learning for all.

Years after the implementation of these and other policies, recurring problems in the education system show the need for a deeper understanding of the underlying factors relating to why they remain so persistent. In 2017, a consortium led by the British Council commissioned a study to identify statistics on education exclusions and the nature of inclusive education modules that were offered in initial teacher education (ITE) and continuing professional teacher development programmes (CPTD). Following a country wide survey conducted on the state of inclusive education in South Africa, a technical report[159] with significant findings was released.

First, the study revealed that there were multiple, and at times conflicting, understandings of inclusive education, and these were mostly informed by the limited medical model. Most worrying was the fact that these different understandings existed among teacher educators, as indicated by their responses to questions on how they define inclusion and inclusive education, as well as the wide differences in the content of ITE module offerings. This lack of a shared understanding about inclusion would logically have a ripple effect on the knowledge and skills of graduating teachers. The next phase of the project entailed the development of materials, commonly known as the Teaching for All (T4A) curriculum, that could provide teacher educators with a common script from which to equip teachers with the requisite knowledge, skills and attitudes for effective inclusion.[160]

Promoting teacher agency as equity in action

Typical of many concepts in the social sciences, there are as many meanings of equity as there are professionals who use the concept to frame their work. The definition according to Oxford English Dictionary is 'The quality of being fair and impartial'. When used in education, the term refers to a philosophy underpinning the practices which ensure that every learner can achieve their educational potential regardless of their personal or social circumstances.[161,162] These practices can include policy development and how those policies are translated into observable actions in classrooms and other spaces of education. If equity is prioritised, it goes a long way to ensuring that all children will have equal chances for success in the future.

The T4A programme was developed with the aim of drawing together and standardising several aspects related to inclusive education. First, to provide pre- and in-service teachers with a common tool providing knowledge about inclusion and inclusive education that does not only focus on learners with disabilities. Second, to outline procedures in existing policy, for example, on screening, identification, assessment and support (SIAS), and on the collaborative role expected of teachers and other stakeholders in the support of learners experiencing barriers to learning. Third, T4A describes how differences among children, for example, different home languages, can be used as assets as opposed to being seen through the lens of the dominant deficit thinking around differences in culture and languages. Fourth, T4A consists of a unit that describes the inclusive pedagogies teachers can use when creating equitable opportunities for diverse learners. This unit promotes a deeper understanding of universal design for learning (UDL) and curriculum differentiation. UDL is an approach to teaching diverse learners which advocates for multiple means of representation, multiple means of action and expression, and multiple ways of engagement. T4A contains numerous case studies which reflect South African contextual realities, with accompanying reflection tasks on how ITE and CPD students could deal with the challenges portrayed. The programme supports the notion that teachers will differentiate the curriculum for diverse learners if their own education is underpinned by a strong philosophy of inclusion.

Unique attributes of the T4A programme

The successes and challenges of the T4A programme are captured in evaluation and monitoring reports that reflect developments made during different phases of the programme. The 2020 evaluation report reveals that 'Student teachers, teachers and lecturers found the materials well-designed and easy-to-use, striking an appropriate balance between theory and practice, information and reflection, practical exercises and knowledge dissemination'.[163] Research, monitoring and evaluation are attributes of this programme that make it stand out as empirical, evidence-driven, and responsive to societal challenges.

The programme is underpinned by system-wide collaboration between two departments of education (one responsible for teacher education and the other the employer of teachers), the British Council, and teacher education institutions. In this way, T4A serves as an instrument to inform policy dialogue and the implementation of inclusive practices. The programme provides unique opportunities for ongoing research by all the key stakeholders. For example, in 2022 lecturers from eight of the 10 ITE implementers of the programme contributed chapters to the book *Academics and student-teachers champion inclusive education in initial teacher education programmes in South Africa: Experiences, challenges and opportunities*. By participating in the project, lecturers who were early career researchers (ECRs) were given the opportunity to research their practices as a community, before writing and disseminating their findings. Overall, the programme is contributing greatly to the research agenda on educational responses around equitable education, as evidenced by its repeated referencing in research outputs from inclusion scholars and postgraduate students.

Conclusion

Adapting the curriculum and instruction for diverse learners requires a multifaceted approach. First, there is a need to reject deficit views about learners. When differences are celebrated, teachers will find novel ways in which to use such differences to create meaningful engagement for all. In this sense, adaptation of the curriculum entails an understanding of self which includes the questioning of one's attitudes towards learners and even colleagues. Second, the ability to teach and plan for teaching must be supported by a teacher education curriculum that balances content and process approaches. Finally, and equally important, the case of South Africa's Teaching for All programme demonstrates the importance of understanding the contextual rootedness of barriers to learning, and ensuring this is not obscured by a desire to import policies and practices from education systems with entirely different contexts and backgrounds.

Widening access to education and participation in society for disabled children in Iraq

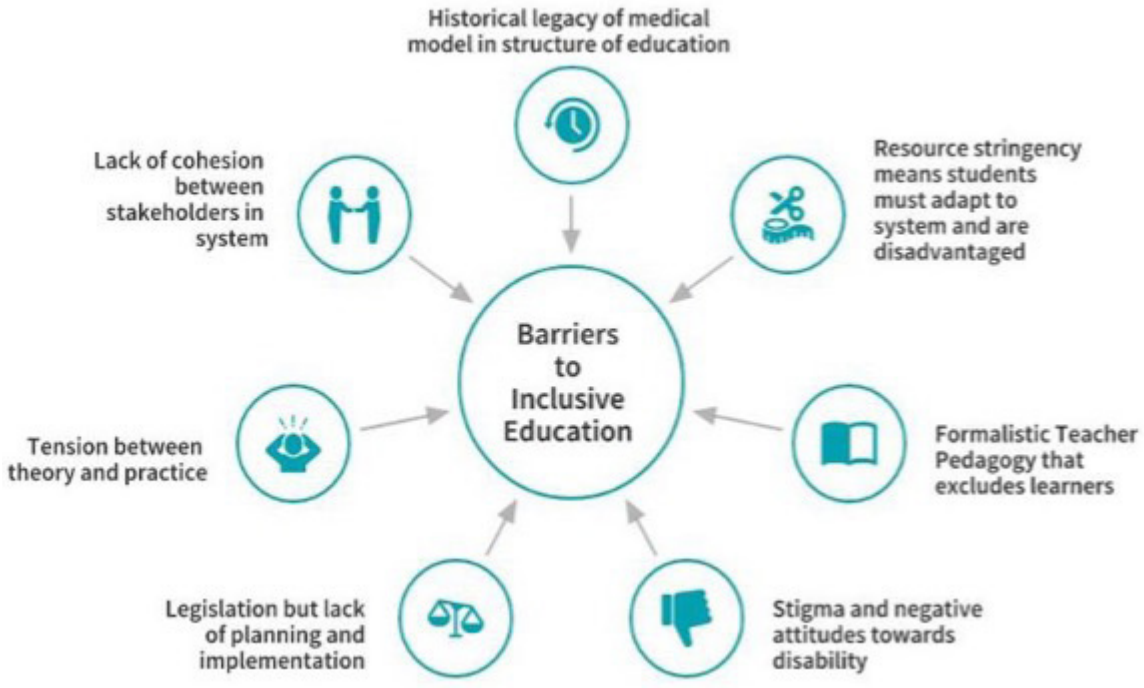
Emma Sarton, Technical Director for the Girls Education Challenge

The current situation

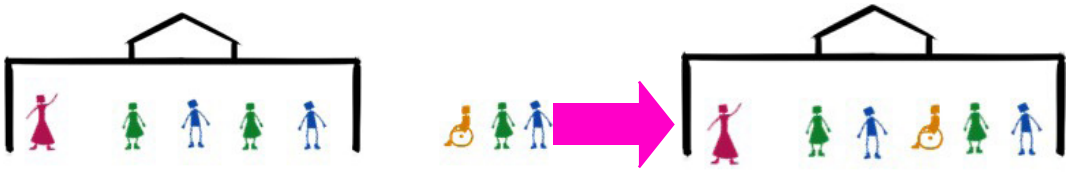
Despite the fact that the right to education for all is enshrined in myriad national and international treaties, there are still challenges for children with disabilities with regard to accessing education, being socially included in education, and experiencing quality education. Moreover, the gap in enrolment widens as boys and girls with disabilities progress through educational phases, highlighting the fact that serious attention is needed to 'ensure learning opportunities for all' as stated in Sustainable Development Goal 4. Many studies point to disabled people being one of the poorest and most marginalised groups in society, and the impact on socio-economic conditions is worsened when households are headed by a person with a disability and their education deficit impacts negatively on their children.

There are 320,702 disabled children aged between 5 and 14 in Iraq. 16,000 of them receive formal education in mainstream or Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA) institutes. This equates to 5 per cent of students with disabilities, indicating the high number of children with disabilities who could be studying alongside their non-disabled peers in mainstream education, or have dropped out of education, or have never been enrolled. Less than 50 per cent of the disabled population over 15 is literate compared to over 75 per cent of non-disabled, and for women with disabilities the situation is even more challenging, with the literacy rate at just over 25 per cent.

The issue remains that disabled children are not adequately accessing, completing, and transitioning through quality education due to a variety of constraints on their capacity to learn.



The rationale



Clearly, schooling which segregates some young people on the basis of disability is inconsistent with creating a society where all children have the opportunity to experience the fullest possible social integration, and is certainly not conducive to promoting broader social values of equity and respect for all. The vision is to have a teaching force trained in and delivering inclusion, a policy that offers a framework to inclusion, special institutes which are centres of excellence in their field of speciality allowing them to better support the population they cater for, and an awareness campaign to encourage the parents of disabled children to make use of the educational provision available.

System level change

For any inclusive education reform or programme to be successful, the British Council recognises the need to move along a continuum of institutional adjustments which enable, permit, support, promote, and normalise inclusive education, ranging from fragmentary, piecemeal adjustments to holistic reform. The interventions detailed below were informed by desk and field research that sought to understand the situation in detail and plan accordingly.

Initiating Inclusive Education

- Work on National laws and legislation and inclusive Education Framework
- Active UN Declarations and equal rights for persons with disability
- Policy guidance and action planning

Advancing Inclusive Education

- Work with communities, families and schools
- Work with Ministries of Health, Education and Labour Social Affairs
- Work on curriculum and teacher guide support
- Work with schools and supervision

Outcomes of Inclusive Education

- National coverage through campaigns
- Empowered individuals
- Increased respect for disabled persons
- Quality Inclusive Education

Adapted from: McConkey and Bradley (2010)

Policy, curriculum and assessment level changes

A National Framework for Inclusive Education with 16 short-, medium- and long-term goals, which includes the relevant policies, barriers, proposals for change and action plans for both Federal Iraq and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, has been developed and approved. This was developed by the British Council Iraq in collaboration with the relevant ministries and NGOs representing people with disabilities, and was approved by the Ministry of Education as the lead ministry.

This document contains proposals to change policies and procedures, and aims to change perceptions about the education of disabled children by introducing the social model in assessing disability, defining equity and inclusion in education, and outlining the roles and responsibilities of the related governmental bodies and individuals. The document sets out the role of the ministry that is responsible for the identification of disability (Ministry of Health) and the ministries in charge of the education of disabled children. The recently appointed MoLSA minister is willing to champion the case of disabled people at multiple levels, most importantly at the legislative level.

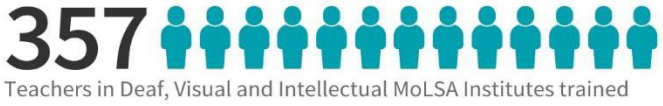
The positive representation of disability in the curriculum was assessed in textbooks and teaching materials from Grades 1 to 12 for all subject areas. Curriculum writers now consider this when developing or editing the coursebooks and developing teachers' guides.

Strategic discussions were held with the Ministry of Education departments of exams and curriculum, the Directorate of Special Needs at governorate level (local authority), the Higher Commission of Disability, and the Institutes of Hearing Impairment. As a result, the decision was made to allow Grade 6 deaf children to sit for the national exams, with some of the institutes achieving a 100 per cent pass rate.

In addition to in-service teacher training, pre-service training has also been targeted through the training of 13 Deans of Teacher Education Colleges across Iraq, further embedding inclusive education.

School/MoLSA level changes

- Highly successful training of teachers, headteachers and supervisors with a focus on building teachers' capacity in terms of modern pedagogy as a method of improving teaching and learning, and raise student achievement.
- The training package on inclusive education was designed to support all teachers to mainstream inclusive education for all children, not just those with disabilities.
- The training changed participants' attitudes towards and practice of:
    - understanding the social and medical models of disability
    - the belief that all children (including disabled children) should be taught in a mainstream inclusive school
    - the belief that it is possible for all children to successfully learn in a mainstream inclusive school.
- Children from five institutes sat for Grade 6 exams (Baghdad, Babil, Basra, Maysan and Diwanya provinces). The results were beyond expectations as some of the institutes achieved a 100 per cent pass rate. This has led to a request from the headteachers of the institutes to be permitted to establish classes for Grade 7 students and above.
- A framework for the evaluation of the inclusive education training was also developed, followed by the training of 60 SEN supervisors on the framework to further develop their role in supervising and monitoring the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schools.



'It was evident that the trainees enjoyed the inclusive education subjects and the trainers created a positive, excellent atmosphere. The trainees were convinced of IE principles, concepts and of the relevance to their work'

Field researcher notes, Babil venue

Community and society level changes

Research into the programme revealed parents, teachers and school administrative staff agreed that the most effective intervention to reduce dropout would be 'focusing on the importance of education'. Further research on communication strategies revealed that over 50 per cent of participants stressed the need for any campaign to address the importance of education as a holistic building block for society and not just a means to gain employment. Nearly 30 per cent described the need to involve parents in training, seminars, school meetings, and overall involvement in decisions relating to their children.

The campaign 'Am not leaving school' ran from July 2018 to May 2022, reaching millions of people. Social media was selected as the prime means of communication, using Facebook and YouTube as the most engaging platforms in Iraq, through which one million people were reached per month. At the local level, the 'Am not leaving school' campaign was embedded using the Active Citizens Model, a social leadership training programme that promotes intercultural dialogue and community led social development.

The British Council has partnered with four local NGOs to deliver the programme strands at community level, focusing on reducing dropout and repetition rates, access to education and inclusion of girls and disabled children, and strengthening the links between schools and parents to improve the school environment. This network then expanded to attract more than twenty NGOs and CBOs, delivering hundreds of social action projects to support the enrolment of all children.

Outcomes				
Access Disabled children's ability to enter the school system	**Transition** Disabled children's ability to pass exams and move on to work and further education	**Participation** Disabled children's ability to stay, participate, and learn well in class	**Quality** Schools have the ability to offer quality inclusive education	
Outputs				
Inclusive systems and policies Inclusive education framework for Iraq, and system actors who can implement it	**Inclusive schools and classrooms** Headteacher and teacher practices are inclusive and welcoming	**Inclusive communities** Parent and community beliefs, actions, and practices are more inclusive	**Disabled children know their rights** And challenge traditional norms to inclusion for them	**Inclusive social norms** Societal values, attitudes and practices support inclusion
Interventions				
System and policy activities Amend and activate applicable laws, regulations and provisions related to the right of education for all and the rights of SEND students	**School and classroom activities** Headteacher, supervisor and teacher training on inclusion cascaded to more than 6,000 participants across Iraq, and 357 in specialist MoLSA settings	**Community activities** SAP with active citizens, community education committees, PTAs and SMCs activated	**Individual knowledge and empowerment activities** Social action projects across Iraq where individuals exercise their right to education	**Social norm and attitude activities** Advocacy campaigns such as #amnotleavingschool and community outreach
Outcomes				
System and policy barriers Policy and system actors are rooted in a medical model of inclusion	**School and classroom barriers** Lack of inclusive education pedagogy, teaching and learning methods. Bullying and inadequate facilities	**Community barriers** Poverty, negative attitudes towards disability, and distances to MoLSA institutes	**Individual barriers** Disabled children lack confidence and knowledge about their rights in and out of school	**All barriers underpinned by deeply embedded social norms** That do not value disabled children and their education

'I feel more accountable after selecting me as the head of PTA, this will make me contribute actively in resolving issues that impede the quality of education in my children's school'

Parent from Maysan

As part of the campaign, the programme supported the Iraqi Alliance of Disability Organisations to organise a celebration of the international day of persons with disabilities. More than 400 people attended the event in Baghdad, and among the guests were many VIPs such as His Exulted Excellency the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs. To mark the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, eight disabled artists from across Iraq made paintings on the education of disabled children, which were presented at the first ever exhibition by disabled artists in Baghdad and Mosul. The exhibition reflected on the importance of education for people with disabilities. Zahraa Al Baghdadi, who is disabled, believes that, 'In this exhibition, we are talking about issues of life and education through creativity not through criticism and complaining. I am so happy to be part of this unique event to raise our voices.'

Examples of work presented at the exhibition.

Individual level changes

There are many instances across Iraq where individuals have worked hard to support children with disabilities to enter school for the first time or prevent them from leaving school. These stories of change are found in all areas of society and bear witness to the fundamental shift that is happening in education in Iraq, and the life changing experiences of students, headteachers, parents and government officials. Here are some examples of how the programme has created the opportunity for disabled children to access, participate in and remain in school.

Al-Rafidain Secondary School for Girls

Fatima in Grade 7 suffers from diabetes and thalassemia. She is an excellent student who works hard, but due to her condition and the location of the classrooms, cannot access her lessons. The school liaised with her parents and the school health consultant, and her class was moved from the second floor to the first, nearer to the bathrooms. Additionally, the school now knows how to deal with seizures, and her parents can be contacted in emergencies.

Al-Balthri Mixed School

'The school was unsafe for students, especially those with disabilities. We renovated and repaired all the toilets in the school in accordance with health regulations to make them disabled-friendly. We now take care of SEND classrooms and supply them with all their needs'

Headteacher

Sumaya Primary School for Girls

'Before the training I didn't accept children with disabilities in my school, because I didn't know how to deal with their needs and circumstances. The training enabled me to receive 12 students with disabilities (eight boys and four girls) in the 2018–2019 school year. We opened a SEND classroom and equipped it with the required technology, such as smart boards, computers, data show, explanation tools, and its own bathroom. We also spread awareness among our staff and students around how to treat students with disabilities naturally and without discrimination, both inside and outside the school. These are just the first steps on our journey to making our school fully inclusive.'

Headteacher

Ensuring inclusion for girls in education: the challenge of teen pregnancies

Carolyne Datche, Lead for the Imarisha Msichana Project at FAWE

Teenage pregnancy remains one of the most pressing challenges affecting girls' education in Kenya. This problem was exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, and there has been a worrying rise in cases across the country, particularly in vulnerable communities. A situational analysis on teenage pregnancies conducted by the Imarisha Msichana project in 20 counties in Kenya, spearheaded by the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), reveals alarming statistics that call for urgent intervention. Their findings are reflected by those of organisations which have carried out similar research in a bid to establish the facts about the status of girls' education and teenage pregnancy.

For instance, data from the Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (KDHS) 2022 indicates that the teenage pregnancy rate in the 20 counties[164] stood at 19.9 per cent during the 2020–21 period, much higher than the national average of 15 per cent.[165] During this period, counties like Narok (43.3 per cent), Kajiado (35.6 per cent), and Turkana (34.2 per cent), recorded very high rates.[166]

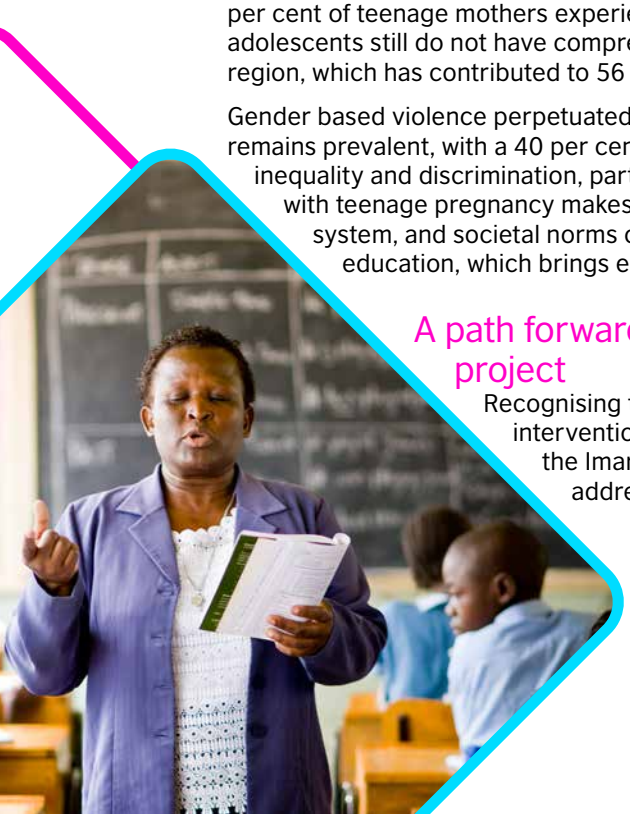
Teenage pregnancy was most prevalent among girls aged 15–18, at 27.4 per cent, with a notable 23.7 per cent occurrence among those aged 19–25. In addition, child marriages, often linked to teen pregnancies, remain rampant, affecting 18.6 per cent of girls aged 15–18. The worst-affected areas include Garissa (43 per cent), Turkana (38 per cent), and Nairobi (22 per cent).[167]

The consequences of teen pregnancies go beyond childbirth. Many teenage mothers face intense stigma, sexual harassment, and violence during and after pregnancy. Despite the existence of policies that support school re-entry for teen mothers, more than half (56 per cent) do not return to school. The awareness of the re-entry guideline policy is significantly low, with only 11 per cent of learners and 64.8 per cent of teachers being informed about its provisions, which is a deeply concerning trend.[168]

Barriers to education for teenage mothers

Several factors contribute to the high dropout rates among pregnant teenagers and young mothers. Economic hardship is cited as a major reason for girls to drop out of school and get pregnant, with 34 per cent of teenage mothers saying they are forced to drop out of school due to financial constraints.[169] While Kenya has a national guideline for school re-entry in early learning and basic education, enforcement remains weak, with poor implementation of the re-entry policies. Nearly 47 per cent of teenage mothers experience health challenges that interfere with their education,[170] and adolescents still do not have comprehensive sexual education, particularly in the sub-Saharan region, which has contributed to 56 per cent of teenage pregnancies.[171]

Gender based violence perpetuated through female genital mutilation (FGM) and early marriage remains prevalent, with a 40 per cent incidence in some communities,[172] and girls often experience inequality and discrimination, particularly when they become pregnant. The stigma associated with teenage pregnancy makes it difficult for young mothers to reintegrate into the education system, and societal norms continue to prioritise boys' education at the expense of girls' education, which brings enormous inequality into their adult lives.



A path forward: interventions by the Imarisha Msichana project

Recognising the urgency of this crisis, FAWE has initiated a series of interventions to support young mothers and reduce teen pregnancies, with the Imarisha Msichana project adopting a multifaceted approach to address the challenges.

1. Training and awareness programmes

The programme conducts sensitisation for girls, boys, educators, and the community on the prevention of teenage pregnancy and the importance of education.

Through FAWE's innovative models, such as Tuseme Clubs and Mothers' Clubs, a lot has been done to improve the situation of girls with regards to education.

The Tuseme model has been established in more than 160 schools in Kenya to empower girls with leadership, self-esteem, and life skills. In addition, the model has been digitised to allow more students to use the platform to increase their learning about life skills and have a safe space where gender-based violence issues and any other problems can be reported, leading to action being taken. The digitisation of Tuseme is currently running as a pilot, with over 15,000 students having so far accessed it.

The Mothers' Clubs model has been introduced in schools to support teenage mothers with psychosocial support and life skills to empower them and help them to advocate for their re-entry to school. The clubs serve as platforms for raising awareness about re-entry policies and offering life skills training, including sewing school uniforms and reusable sanitary towels. As a result, centres to produce menstrual products have been set up to improve menstrual hygiene and dignity for girls. The clubs also serve as referral centers for essential services such as healthcare.

While these two models have mostly targeted students, multi-stakeholder forums at county and national levels have been held to create awareness about girls' re-entry to school after giving birth. Stakeholders in these forums include the Ministry of Education, The Ministry of Health, and The Ministry of Gender, Culture, the Arts and Heritage.

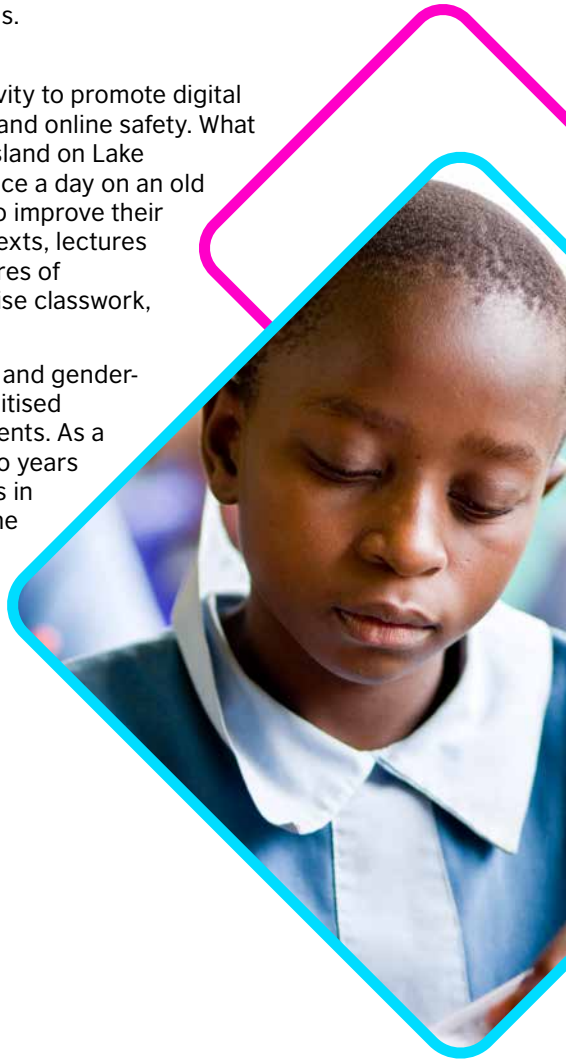
2. Safe spaces and Mothers' Clubs

As well as providing a learning and psychosocial platform to engage with one another, these clubs, or safe spaces, as other girls prefer to call them, provide a secure environment for teenage mothers both in and out of school. They also enable the mothers of the teenagers to encourage one another, learn new skills for economic development, follow school performance, and track girls who might have dropped out of school due to teenage pregnancy. The mothers of teenage mothers play an active role in mentoring and advocating for the re-entry of affected girls.

3. Leveraging technology for sexual education

FAWE has equipped 160 schools with computers and internet connectivity to promote digital literacy, with learners and teachers having been trained in digital skills and online safety. What is amazing is that in the most remote areas, for example, in Mfangano island on Lake Victoria in Kenya, where access is quite difficult, and only by boat or once a day on an old ferry, the girls at Wasamo Secondary school are using the computers to improve their schoolwork. This has been in languages by watching plays of their set texts, lectures and symposiums, and learning about science through videos and pictures of equipment and machines. This technology has enabled students to revise classwork, particularly in STEM subjects, to boost academic performance.

In addition to this, they can learn about sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence and how to report any safeguarding issues, with the digitised Tuseme app, once rolled out, providing an interactive platform for students. As a result of these initiatives to bridge the gap in girls' education, in just two years of the project the school population has grown from 50 to 200 students in an area with no other girls' school, and where girls' education among the fisherfolk community has not traditionally been a priority. In the recently concluded Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education, the school will boast seven entries to Kenyan universities because of the Imarisha Msichana project initiatives, a scenario which has been replicated in other schools where FAWE works.



4. Engaging boys and young men as advocates

In some communities in Kenya, particularly those which are isolated or rural, girls are often looked down upon, and are the most marginalised members of society, being subjected to early sexual practices, teen pregnancies, female genital mutilation, and early marriage. The attitudes and behaviours of boys and young men are central to any change in the treatment of girls, and a series of sensitisation conferences, showing boys they can act as champions for these changes, have been very successful. As part of the programme, boys and young men are being trained on their own sexual and reproductive health rights and responsibilities. They are further taught, using structured dialogue sessions, to discuss challenges affecting girls' participation in education. Male role models mentor young men, encouraging them to become allies in advocating for girls' education, and together they advocate for school re-entry policies and policies that discourage harmful cultural practices, thereby allowing more girls to go back to school. For instance, Narok county, which initially had a teen pregnancy rate of 43 per cent in 2022 had reduced this by 28 per cent in 2024.

A call to action

While these interventions have yielded positive results, more needs to be done to tackle the issue of teenage pregnancy and ensure inclusive education for all girls. FAWE and its partners advocate for:

- Stronger enforcement of school re-entry policies to ensure young mothers can continue their education.[173]
- The expansion of access to sexual and reproductive health education at all levels.[174]
- The provision of economic support for teenage mothers to enable them to afford schooling.[175]
- The engagement of local leaders and community elders in combating harmful cultural practices.[176]
- Scaling up FAWE's digitisation efforts to ensure that more learners benefit from online education and reproductive health information.

Conclusion

Teenage pregnancies continue to be a significant barrier to education for many girls, particularly in marginalised communities. However, through targeted interventions such as education, mentorship, digital literacy, and policy enforcement, there is hope for positive change. The Imarisha Msichana project, in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation, has demonstrated that when communities come together to support young mothers and prevent teenage pregnancies, the future of girls' education can be secured.

Addressing this crisis requires a collaborative effort among governments, educators, parents, and community leaders to create a safe and supportive learning environment for all girls. Ensuring that young mothers are given a second chance at education is not just a policy matter, it is a moral obligation imperative for building a more inclusive and equitable society.

Evidence of the effectiveness of Digital Story Time in improving foundational literacy skills for deaf and hard of hearing children during the Covid-19 pandemic

Amon Bett, Senior Manager, Marketing and Communications, eKitabu

Introduction

In 2020, the global pandemic forced more than one billion children out of school, requiring governments across the world to rapidly develop remote learning solutions. Some students learned using video conferencing software such as Zoom, but in low- and middle-income countries like Kenya, many students accessed state-sponsored television programming. For learners who are deaf or hard of hearing, viewing television content without Kenyan Sign Language (KSL) is a frustrating challenge. To address this gap, eKitabu, with support from All Children Reading: A Grand Challenge for Development (a partnership of USAID, World Vision and the Australian government), implemented Digital Story Time[177] to make learning to read more inclusive and equitable.

Contextual problems for foundational literacy among deaf children

For children who are deaf or hard of hearing, language development is influenced by complex factors such as age of identification, access to quality early childhood education, exposure to sign language, parental involvement, socio-economic status, and professional support. They develop sign language skills in a similar manner as hearing children develop their skills in spoken language, provided they are in a language-rich environment. This occurs naturally for deaf and hard of hearing children of deaf parents, but this is only 5 per cent of the deaf population.[178] In Kenya, deaf children begin pre-primary education at the average age of seven years, meaning that pre-primary *age* and pre-primary *level* are not the same across children who are deaf and their hearing peers. The majority of deaf children, when they join school, have not acquired any formal language of expression and communication except basic gestures. Since most Kenyan schools that offer special needs education are residential, parents are not involved in supporting the child's learning. In general, hearing parents learn barely any sign language[179] to enable them to communicate with their children. This means deaf children depend on whatever they learn from school for their language and literacy development. Further, there are few learning resources that are accessible for deaf children to enable them to learn from home. With minimal or no support from family members, the deaf child's linguistic development suffers, with cascading effects on their literacy development.[180]

Digital Story Time

Studio KSL, from eKitabu, focuses on the development of accessible storybooks in local African Sign Languages to support children who are deaf and hard of hearing in acquiring sign language and building communication skills on the path to literacy. Each episode of Studio KSL's Digital Story Time includes storytelling in Kenyan Sign Language (KSL) with captions in English and audio narration, with each episode featuring an introduction and links to access interactive online learning resources. Digital Story Time currently reaches four million households via EDU Channel TV, operated by the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) under the Kenya Ministry of Education.

Digital Story Time was developed applying the principles of Universal Design for Learning:

To provide multiple means of representation, Digital Story Time gives learners Kenyan Sign Language storytelling performed by fluent and highly expressive deaf signers, with ways to customise how information is displayed. For example, when viewing the videos from YouTube, the learner can control playback and pause the video or replay to practice signing. Digital Story Time also offers auditory information for hearing learners, including narration, and it provides text equivalents using captions, and vivid illustrations.

To provide multiple means of action and expression, Digital Story Time offers learners different ways of constructing knowledge and expressing what they learn. For instance, after each story, comprehension questions are asked, and the glossary facilitates learning by providing clear explanations for key terms used in the story that learners can explore. Captioning helps learners master written words, including those who are hearing and those with learning disabilities.

To provide multiple means of engagement, Digital Story Time offers different ways of stimulating learners' interests and motivation for learning. The stories are short, engaging, colourful, and are based on leveled reading materials, open educational resources that are available as accessible ebooks and printed books, downloadable from the global digital library. They give questions related to the story and glossaries for practice and learning new words. Further, when children watch Digital Story Time together, or when children watch with their parents, they can learn how to engage with each other and practice what they learn together.

Observations from a deaf child's use of Digital Story Time

In this case study of a young deaf child, Mark, his mother relates his progress in sign language acquisition and literacy through the use of Digital Story Time. Other members of Mark's family are hearing, and Mark attends a residential school for the deaf in Kenya's Eastern Province. Mark's mother believes there are distinct advantages in using digital signed stories for a deaf learner to build skills in sign language and literacy. This case study describes Mark's history and family interactions, and his development with respect to language and literacy using Digital Story Time.

Family and Mark's deafness

Mark, aged 10, lives with his mother and two sisters, aged eight and 11 who are all hearing, in a suburban community on the outskirts of Nairobi. Mark became deaf from bacterial meningitis at the age of three, his hearing loss was described as profound in both ears with a PTA of 110 dB (profound unaided loss). When asked about the possibility of a cochlear implant, Mark's mother felt it was beyond the family budget. His mother describes Mark, before he had meningitis, as a, 'normal growing child, meeting typical developmental milestones for sitting up, crawling, saying mama.' However, she notes that Mark was 'sickly from three months old' and was hospitalised for the most part of his first two years.

Communications in the home

Until the age of five, Mark stayed at home with his mother while his sisters attended pre-school, so he had limited interactions with other children his age. He attended church programmes on Sundays and interacted with children there, although his mother observed that Mark would sometimes be irritable during Sunday school. The teacher sometimes had to come get her 'when Mark would not sit still'. The family chose sign language as a mode of communication with Mark. To support this choice, Mark's mother Leah enrolled in sign language classes offered by the Kenya Institute of Special Education (KISE) in Nairobi. After the course she obtained a sign language dictionary to which she refers often when signing with Mark. She also taught Mark's sisters sign language which helps them communicate with their brother.

Mark's literacy history

Mark joined a residential school for the deaf many miles from home at the age of five, where he started pre-school. Prior to this, his mother would read short stories to Mark and his sisters before bed about twice a week. At that time Leah did not know sign language, so read the stories aloud and sometimes added gestures. She noted that whenever she read, her two daughters sat still, listened keenly to the stories, and even asked questions. Mark, on the other hand, would squirm and often hit the book in a forceful manner. He would also pick up books as toys and bang them on things throughout the house, without opening them. 'He even set some story books on fire' his mother said. This made Leah eventually stop reading stories to the children. Once Mark started school his teacher said he had reading problems and was not able to relate the words on the page to signs or pictures. He generally stared at books for a short time before he became bored.

Mark's Digital Story Time reading experience

At the beginning of the year Mark attended an interview in a school for the deaf near Nairobi. The teacher gave him a test which he was supposed to read and then answer questions by himself. Unfortunately, Mark could not read or attempt the test, and so was placed in Grade 1. After the schools were closed due to Covid-19, Mark and his family began to interact with Digital Story Time, Mark showed significant progress in learning Kenyan Sign Language, greater motivation for reading, and development of literacy behaviours, including signing to himself while reading.

A Digital Story Time snapshot

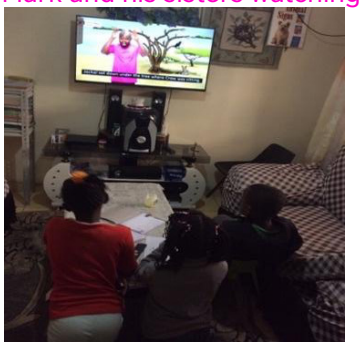
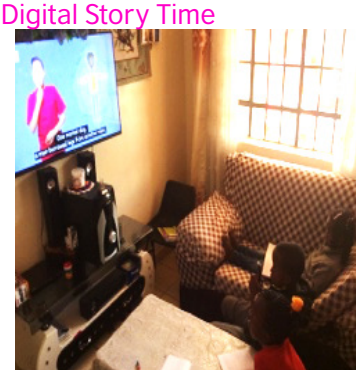
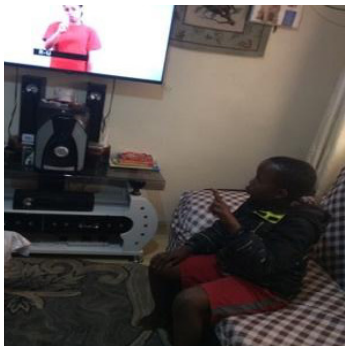
The family home is quiet, it is raining outside, and the children are inside when the session begins. They are watching a signed digital story from YouTube: 'Clever Jackal and a Foolish Crow', an episode of Digital Story Time, and they are mesmerised by the action as expressed by the signer. Mark and his sisters sit on the sofa in the living room, each has a book and a pen. They keenly follow the story and imitate the signing by the narrator, they also pause some sections to copy and sign the words, then continue watching. Mark sometimes stands up to show pictures in the videos during the storytelling. When they do not understand a sign, they replay the video and repeat the signs to each other.

Leah states that Mark's reading habits have improved immensely since he started watching the digital signed stories. She notices Mark taking small story books and trying to sign read (signing the words to himself in sign language as he reads the book, just as a hearing child might read the book aloud). Leah says, 'Whenever Mark and his sisters are taking turns to choose different things to watch on YouTube, Mark will most of the time choose Digital Story Time.' She further notes that Mark has developed an interest in reading printed books, and is currently reading the story titled *Goat Matata* in print format. 'Mark is constantly searching for a signed format of *Goat Matata* on YouTube' Leah notes.

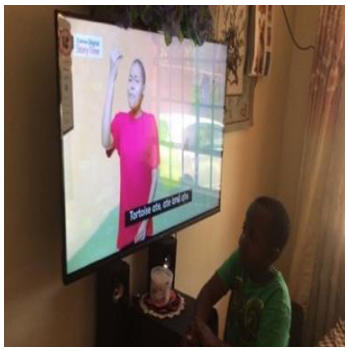
It is evident that Mark enjoys watching the digital signed stories probably because he can understand the signs, and maybe because he can watch them with his sisters. Initially, when his mother narrated the stories, she did not use sign language, and this probably explains why Mark could not sit still when she was reading and why he would abuse books.

Now that Mark is able to imitate the signer, he associates words with signs and has developed an interest in printed books, and his response to Digital Story Time has shown his desire for learning now that it is accessible to him. Mark's signing along with the narrator is evidence of his limited abilities to discuss books with his mother when she initially read the stories without signing. As Leah noted, Mark could not sit still whenever she read a story for the children without signing, and did not engage in conversations about the story or show any interest. Leah's assumption was that he did not understand anything she said and maybe that was the reason he did not engage. Now Mark follows along and sometimes makes comments which Leah finds both encouraging and impressive.

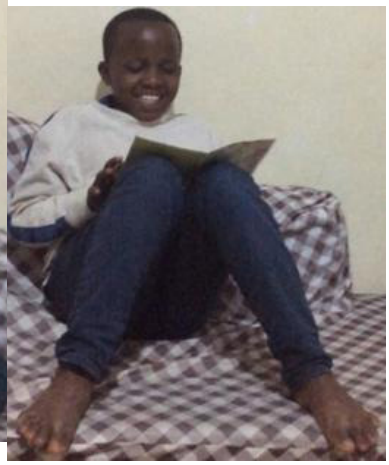
Mark and his sisters watching Digital Story Time

Mark watching Digital Story Time

Mark enjoying reading a printed storybook

Reflections

As a young parent, Leah was not sure how the world would change when her son was diagnosed. With Mark's deafness, Leah listened to the doctors and people who had similar experiences, and waited until Mark was five years old before enabling him to learn any formal language, thus delaying his early language learning, as conditions are optimal for children to acquire language skills naturally between birth and the age of two. Mark's current signing and reading may be limited due to lack of early language acquisition during this critical period.

Mark's literacy behaviors reveal that he struggles as a young reader compared with his hearing peers. Factors limiting Mark's literacy development are his parent's lack of fluency in Kenyan Sign Language while reading and interpreting, unavailability of school-based teachers due to Covid-19 school closures, late exposure to sign language, and lack of accessible learning resources. Mark seems to respond more and attend more to books that are presented in a variety of ways that are accessible for him, for instance, short, printed stories with pictures, and digital signed stories in Digital Story Time, the latter of which seems to have contributed significantly to Mark's progress in language and his interest in reading. In addition, his vocabulary is improving, and he can now associate signs with words he did not know before. Watching Digital Story Time has also helped the family learn and read together, learning Kenyan Sign Language and building their signing vocabulary.

On the basis of these observations, we believe improved language and literacy outcomes are available for more children through access to and use of Digital Story Time. Among other things, this case study helps us to shape a results framework for building evidence of the impact and cost-effectiveness of Digital Story Time.

Activity objective: children who are deaf or hard of hearing benefit from local sign language video storybooks during Covid-19 school closures	
Percentage of children who demonstrate increased language learning (Impact)	
Number of children with increased access to learning materials in sign language (Impact)	
Percentage of families who demonstrate increased ability to communicate in sign language with their household (Impact)	
Percentage of families who demonstrate increased use of accessible learning materials at home during school breaks and Covid-19 related school closures (Impact)	
Goal A: Children have increased access to and engage with learning materials at home in their local sign language	**Goal B:** Parents and caregivers have increased understanding of how to support the language development of children who are deaf and hard of hearing, and have access to the tools to do so
Percentage of children who show improvement in communication skills using the communications assessment tool (baseline versus endline)	Percentage of parents or caregivers who report improved ability to communicate with their child who is deaf or hard of hearing
Number of children who interact with Digital Story Time	Percentage increase in days per week that families use learning tools or materials in sign language during Covid-19 shutdown or school breaks
Number of children who are deaf or hard of hearing who interact with Digital Story Time (disaggregate)	Percentage of parents or caregivers who increase their communications with a teacher or member of staff at their schools about resources for their deaf or hard of hearing children
Number of children who are deaf who engage with Digital Story Time together with their parents or caregivers (disaggregate)	
Number of children who are deaf who engage with Digital Story Time with their deaf or hearing siblings (disaggregate)	

A final note on measurement. For the past two years, Studio KSL, as part of eKitabu, and in collaboration with Royal Dutch Kentalis and Deaf Child Worldwide, has explored sign language acquisition on a path to literacy among deaf children, their teachers, parents, and caregivers. As part of this effort, we have adapted for our context a research-based sign language acquisition assessment tool, originally developed in Dutch by Royal Dutch Kentalis. We have experimented using this tool as a formative assessment, or assessment for learning, with teachers, children, and parents. We believe the tool, including the adaptations we have made and continue making, can provide a scaffold not only for measurement, but also to help inform learner-teacher interaction models and potentially even a dynamic that involves deaf learners, their teachers, parents, and caregivers. Our aim with this work is fivefold:

- As a means to scale up local sign language acquisition among deaf learners on a path to literacy.
- As a means to scale up teacher professional development and inclusive education.
- As a means to engage parents in individualising their child's education in collaboration with teachers.
- To gather feedback to improve Digital Story Time and interaction models with learners, teachers, parents, and family members facilitated by Studio KSL.
- To build comparability of findings from diverse learners with respect to their learning outcomes on a path from sign language acquisition to literacy.

Author biographies

Kathryn Riley

Emeritus Professor of Urban Education (UCL)

Distinguished educator Kathryn Riley is Emeritus Professor of Urban Education at the IOE, UCL's Faculty of Education, co-founder of The Art of Possibilities and an Associate of the Staff College. She began her work in education as a volunteer teacher in Eritrea, later teaching in inner-city schools, before holding political office as an elected member of the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) and becoming a local authority chief officer.

An international scholar whose work bridges policy and practice, Kathryn has been engaged in research, policy and development work on educational reform and leadership in Australasia, Africa, Europe, and North and South America. Her international work includes heading up the World Bank's Effective Schools and Teachers Group – where she contributed to the Bank's education leadership programme for policy makers and projects with the OECD and UNICEF.

Professor (Dr) Vinay Kumar Singh

Professor and Head, Education of Children with Special Needs, India

Professor Singh currently heads the Department of Education of Groups with Special Needs in the National Council of Educational Research and Training at the Ministry of Education.

He is a rehabilitation practitioner with expertise and educational experience in the field of disability, and has published widely in his field. He has contributed to framing government policy documents on inclusive education, including the National Guidelines and Implementation Framework on Equitable and Inclusive Education.

Dr Aisha Abdul

Director of Special Programmes, Universal Basic Education Commission, Nigeria

Aisha Abiola Abdul is an experienced education specialist. She joined the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) in 1999 as a monitoring officer and has risen through the ranks to become the Director of Special Programmes.

Dr Abdul holds a doctorate in Educational Management from the University of Ilorin and has authored several articles and papers. She is passionate about education and believes all Nigerian children of school age should have access to high-quality inclusive education.

Jatau Vincent John

Programme Manager, English and Schools Education, British Council

Jatau is a project management professional with over 10 years of experience in the education sector and with NGOs. He is a certified project manager, an advocate of Access to Qualitative Education for All, an Associate of the Chartered Institute of Personnel Management of Nigeria (ACIPM), and host of the Nigeria Annual Inclusive Education Conference.

He has supported the Federal Ministry of Education in the development and implementation of the Inclusive Education Policy and supported the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria in developing the School Leadership Professional Standard and Professional Standards for Nigerian Teachers.

He has previously worked on British Council programmes including Connecting Classrooms and the International School Award in Nigeria. He is currently with the British Council as programme manager for English and School Education Programmes in Nigeria, leading policy strengthening and implementation.

Mrs Deborah Kimathi

Education Workforce Lead, The Learning Generation Initiative, and Strategy and Partnerships Advisor, Dignitas, Kenya

Deborah Kimathi has over 22 years of experience as a senior development professional designing and delivering impactful education programming in East Africa. Her expertise lies in education workforce, school leadership, teacher professional development, instructional coaching, and behaviour change for education systems transformation.

Deborah is the Education Workforce Lead for the Learning Generation Initiative, tasked with oversight of programmes, research, and strategic communications, as well as the establishment and management of partnerships that enable impact and growth.

Deborah is also the Strategy and Partnerships Advisor at Dignitas where she offers critical support to the senior management team to ensure the ongoing delivery of Dignitas' vision.

Dr John Simpson

British Council Senior Adviser on Language and Education

Dr John Simpson is the British Council's Senior Adviser on Language and Education in sub-Saharan Africa. He provides technical assistance to country teams designing and implementing education projects involving English as a subject or English as the medium of instruction. He has over 20 years' work experience in Africa and 15 years in UK higher education. Dr Simpson has provided long-term advice on language-in-education issues to the Governments of Rwanda and Ethiopia. He currently supports the Secondary Teachers English Language Improvement Rwanda (STELIR) project and is co-investigator on a study of equity and inclusion in large scale teacher professional development in the country. He also authored the British Council's position paper on English language and medium of instruction in basic education in low- and middle-income countries.

Frederick Haga

Director, Special Needs Education, Ministry of Education, Kenya

Frederick Haga is the Head of Directorate, Special Needs Education in the State Department for Basic Education at the Ministry of Education. He leads the team that co-ordinates the provision of quality and inclusive education services to learners with disabilities and other special needs. As a person with disability, Fred has been involved in the disability rights movement at all levels for more than 20 years. For his contribution to disability inclusive education, he was awarded the Order of the Grand Warrior (OGW) in 2018.

Fred holds a master's degree from Monash University, Australia, specialising in Inclusive and Special Education. He initially graduated from Kenyatta University with a teaching qualification as his first degree.

Mohamed Hassan Al-Sibai

Head of the Technical Office at the Central Administration for General Education, Ministry of Education, Egypt

Mohamed Hassan Al-Sibai is the Director of the Technical Office at the Central Administration for General Education, Ministry of Education and Technical Education in Egypt. He is a member of the Special Education Trainers Accreditation Committee at the Professional Academy for Teachers, and a certified special education trainer.

He is responsible for presidential health initiatives for basic education students, and led the implementation of the plan for UNICEF's interventions for inclusive education students in the basic education stage, which created 419 resource rooms and provided 37,000 training opportunities for teachers.

He previously worked as a teacher for deaf and hard-of-hearing students, an assistant principal at a school for intellectual education, and then in various roles at the Ministry of Education.

Dr Fekede Tuli

Vice Academic President, Kotebe University, Ethiopia

Dr Fekede Tuli Gemeda is a teacher educator, researcher, and trainer with over 20 years of experience. Apart from teaching in the Department of Curriculum and Instructional Sciences, He is currently serving as Vice President for Academic Affairs at Kotebe University of Education.

Dr Gemeda's expertise spans teacher education, pedagogy, and action research, with publications in various journals. He has consulted on national education initiatives and led transformative projects within higher education. He is also actively involved in various international educational project initiatives, such as the Erasmus+ Faith Project, the Horizon 2020 Skills for Justice Project, and the Erasmus+ mobility programme.

Professor Cina Mosito

Associate Professor, Nelson Mandela University, South Africa

Cina P. Mosito is an Associate Professor of Inclusive Education at Nelson Mandela University. Her research centres on understanding and supporting child development and learning in challenging circumstances, and mainstreaming inclusive education in teacher education. She is leading the roll-out of the British Council funded Teaching for All (T4A) project in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. T4A is a curriculum and materials development project that aims to mainstream teacher acquisition of inclusive pedagogy. She is also a PI in a study exploring how pedagogy is transacted in diverse South African classrooms, in partnership with the National Education Collaboration Trust.

Emma Sarton

Emma Sarton is a Senior Principal Education Advisor at Cambridge Education, where she leads transformative initiatives to enhance educational access and quality. With over 20 years of experience in the education sector, Emma has made significant contributions, from teaching to managing large-scale education programmes. As the last Technical Director on the Girls Education Challenge, Emma oversaw the closure of a £500 million programme aimed at reaching 1.6 million marginalised girls, breaking down barriers to education, fostering inclusive learning environments, increasing learner agency and impacting learning outcomes.

Emma's experience spans across East and Central Africa and the Middle East, where she has collaborated with governments, NGOs, academics, and educators to drive impactful educational reforms. She has worked in many areas with education, with the aim of improving educational outcomes, whether as a teacher, M&E adviser or programme leader, she is focused on improving practice and sharing evidence and learning around change.

Carolyne Datche

Lead for the Imarisha Msichana Project at FAWE

Carolyne is a Kenyan educationalist who specialises in early childhood development and girls' education. She has 18 years' experience in conceptualising, implementing, and managing projects to promote both ECD and girls' empowerment, and programming for sustainable development in development organisations such as Plan International and Catholic Relief Services.

She is currently the Lead for the Imarisha Msichana Project at FAWE, which gives girls second chances to enter and remain in education. Carolyne is committed to this cause and has ensured that at least 5,000 girls have returned to school and education.

Amon Bett

Senior Manager Marketing and Communications – eKitabu

Amon Bett is a publishing and marketing professional with extensive experience in African literature, digital media, and inclusive publishing. As Senior Manager, Marketing and Communications at eKitabu, he leads strategic marketing initiatives and campaigns, and media engagement to promote the accessibitty and distribution of high-quality African books.

With expertise in marketing, Amon develops and manages campaigns, optimises content for social platforms, tracks media traffic, and collaborates with media buying organizations and PR agencies. He is also eKitabu's video production lead, with over 70 video and audio productions to his credit. A member of The Digital Principles Forum, he engages in peer learning and discussions on the Principles for Digital Development.

Amon plays a key role in eKitabu's dual-strategy approach, combining title development with targeted marketing to enhance the visibility of African literature. He works closely with authors, booksellers, and media across 14 African countries, leveraging major book fairs, literary festivals, and author events to expand global reach.

Passionate about accessibility and sustainability, Amon champions eco-friendly publishing practices and ensures the affordability of eKitabu's offerings. His commitment to inclusivity drives his efforts in producing books across multiple formats; print, digital, audiobooks, braille, and sign language adaptations.

Mentored by globally respected publishing leaders, Amon has built strong rights relationships, positioning eKitabu to connect African stories with international markets and establish a thriving global literary ecosystem. He holds a Bachelor of Information Science in Publishing and Media Studies from Moi University and is deeply invested in leveraging technology for teaching and learning.

Endnotes

1 Riley, K (2025). Schools as Places of Belonging. *Staff College: Schooling for the Future*. Available at: https://futureschooling.co.uk/inclusive-schooling/schools-as-places-of-belonging/

2 Rethinking Schools (2017). Little kids, big ideas, teaching social issues and global conflicts with young children. *Rethinking Schools*, *31*(4), 4–5.

3 Riley, K. (2017). Place, *Belonging and School Leadership: Researching to Make the Difference*. London: Bloomsbury.

4 Riley, K. and Docking J. (2004). Voices of disaffected pupils: implications for policy and practice. *British Journal of Educational Studies, 52*(2), 166–179. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8527.2004.00261.x

5 We know, for example, that 300,000 students drop out of the public school system in Morocco, every year: an issue being pursued in Morocco by Mohammed Elmeski and colleagues: see his earlier work (Elmeski, 2013).

6 Riley, K., Mendoza, M. and Gonzales, S. (2020). *Cross-sector and Interdisciplinary Perspectives on School belonging and Exclusion: What we know; what we need to know; and what needs to change*. London: UCL Institute of Education. https://www.theartofpossiblities.org.uk/docs/ NewResearch3.pdf

7 Ma, X. (2003). Sense of belonging to school: Can schools make a difference? *The Journal of Education Research, 96*(6), 340–349. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00220670309596617

8 Allen, K. A. and Kern, P. (2020). *Boosting School Belonging: Practical strategies to help adolescents feel like they belong at school*. Oxon and New York: Routledge.

9 Riley, K., Montecinos, C. and Ahumada, L. (2016). Effective Principals serving in high poverty schools in Chile: Managing competing realities (pp 1–8), *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences,* 237, 843–849. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2017.02.181

10 Riley, K., Coates, M. and Martinez, S. P. (2018). *Place and Belonging in Schools: Unlocking Possibilities*. London: UCL Institute of Education. www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/departments-centres/ centres/london-centre-for-leadership-inlearning www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe-place-and-belonging-in-schools and http://www.theartofpossibilities.org.uk Accessed: 10/11/2020.

11 Riley, K. and Rustique-Forrester, E. (2002). W*hy children lose interest in school and what we can do about it*. London: Chapman Sage.

12 Riley, K. (2017). *Place, Belonging and School Leadership: Researching to Make the Difference*. London: Bloomsbury.

13 Flewitt, R. S. (2017). Equity and diversity through story: a multimodal perspective. In Cremin, T., Flewitt, R. S., Mardell, B. and Swann, J. (eds.), *Storytelling in Early Childhood: enriching language, literacy, and classroom culture*. London and New York: Routledge, pp150–168.

14 Yuval-Davis, N. (2006) Belonging and the politics of belonging. *Patterns of Prejudice, 40*(3), 197–214. https://doi.org/10.1080/00313220600769331

15 Riley, K. (2022). *Compassionate Leadership for School Belonging*. London: UCL Press. https://www.uclpress.co.uk/products/171324

16 Allen, K. A., Kern, M. L., Vella-Brodrick, D., Hattie, J. and Waters, L. (2018). What Schools Need to Know about Belonging: A meta-analysis. E*ducational Psychology Review, 30*(1),1–34. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-016-9389-8.

17 Goodenow, C. and Grady, K. E. (1993). The relationship of school belonging and friends' values to academic motivation among adolescent students. *Journal of Experimental Education*, 62(1), 60–71. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220973.1993.9943831

18 Riley, K. (2019). Agency and belonging: What transformative actions can schools take to help create a sense of place and belonging? *Journal Educational and Child Psychology, 36*(4), 91–103. Agency and belonging: What transformative actions can schools take to help create a sense of place and belonging? | Request PDF

19 Riley, K., Coates, M. and Allen, T. (2020). *Place and Belonging in Schools: Why it Matters Today.* London: UCL Institute of Education and The National Education Union (NEU). Place and belonging in school: Why it matters today | National Education Union

20 Riley, K. (2022). *Compassionate Leadership for School Belonging*. London: UCL Press. https://www.uclpress.co.uk/products/171324

21 Riley, K., Coates, M. and Allen, T. (2020). Place and Belonging in Schools: Why it Matters Today. London: UCL Institute of Education and The National Education Union (NEU).

22 Riley, K. (2022). *Compassionate Leadership for School Belonging*. London: UCL Press. https://www.uclpress.co.uk/products/171324

23 Riley, K. (2017). *Place, Belonging and School Leadership: Researching to Make the Difference*. London: Bloomsbury.

24 Riley, K. (Forthcoming). *Inspiring School Belonging: Across Borders and Inclusive of all Learners. London:* Bloomsbury.

25 Riley, K. (2017). *Place, Belonging and School Leadership: Researching to Make the Difference.* London: Bloomsbury.

26 Riley, K. (2013). *Leadership of Place: Stories for Schools in the US, UK and South Africa.* London: Bloomsbury.

27 Riley, K. (2013). *Leadership of Place: Stories for Schools in the US, UK and South Africa*. London: Bloomsbury.

28 Riley, K. (2013). *Leadership of Place: Stories for Schools in the US, UK and South Africa.* London: Bloomsbury.

29 Riley, K. (2019). Agency and belonging: What transformative actions can schools take to help create a sense of place and belonging? *Journal Educational and Child Psychology, 36*(4), 91–103.
Agency and belonging: What transformative actions can schools take to help create a sense of place and belonging? | Request PDF

30 Smylie, M. A., Murphy, J. F. and Seashore Louis, K. (2020). *Caring School Leadership*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

31 Riley, K. and Mendoza, M. (2020). *Leading in a New Era: Compassionate Leadership for Place and Belonging.* London: UCL Institute of Education, Telford and Wrekin Council and the London Boroughs of Hackney and Islington https://www.theartofpossiblities.org.uk/docs/ NewResearch2.pdf

32 Riley, K. (2022). *Compassionate Leadership for School Belonging.* London: UCL Press. https://www.uclpress.co.uk/products/171324

33 Riley, K. (2024) Does belonging Matter? And what does it look like? Schools Week, 15 November 2024
The Knowledge. Why belonging matters and what it looks like

34 See Murphy (2016). *Understanding Schooling Through the Eyes of Students*. Dallas: Corwin, for a comprehensive analysis of students' perspectives on their school experiences.

35 NCERT (2006). *National Focus Group on Problems of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Children*. New Delhi: NCERT.

36 Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) (2018). *Gender-responsive pedagogy: A toolkit for teachers and schools*. Available at: https://www.unicef.org/esa/media/6726/file/grp-a-toolkit-for-teachers-and-schools-2020.pdf

37 UNESCO (2021). *Global education monitoring report*. Paris: UNESCO.

38 UNESCO (2018). *Global education monitoring report: Gender review.* Paris: UNESCO.

39 Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) (2018). *Gender-responsive pedagogy: A toolkit for teachers and schools*. Available at: https://www.unicef.org/esa/media/6726/file/grp-a-toolkit-for-teachers-and-schools-2020.pdf

40 Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) (2018). *Gender-responsive pedagogy: A toolkit for teachers and schools.* Available at: https://www.unicef.org/esa/media/6726/file/grp-a-toolkit-for-teachers-and-schools-2020.pdf

41 UNESCO (2018). *Global education monitoring report: Gender review*. Paris: UNESCO.

42 Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) (2018). *Gender-responsive pedagogy: A toolkit for teachers and schools*. Available at: https://www.unicef.org/esa/media/6726/file/grp-a-toolkit-for-teachers-and-schools-2020.pdf

43 UNESCO (2018). *Global education monitoring report: Gender review*. Paris: UNESCO.

44 Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) (2018). *Gender-responsive pedagogy: A toolkit for teachers and schools*. Available at: https://www.unicef.org/esa/media/6726/file/grp-a-toolkit-for-teachers-and-schools-2020.pdf

45 UNESCO (2018). *Global education monitoring report: Gender review*. Paris: UNESCO.

46 UNESCO (2018). G*lobal education monitoring report: Gender review.* Paris: UNESCO.

47 UNESCO (2018). *Global education monitoring report: Gender review*. Paris: UNESCO.

48 Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) (2018). *Gender-responsive pedagogy: A toolkit for teachers and schools.* Available at: https://www.unicef.org/esa/media/6726/file/grp-a-toolkit-for-teachers-and-schools-2020.pdf

49 Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) (2018). *Gender-responsive pedagogy: A toolkit for teachers and schools*. Available at: https://www.unicef.org/esa/media/6726/file/grp-a-toolkit-for-teachers-and-schools-2020.pdf

50 UNESCO (2018). *Global education monitoring report: Gender review*. Paris: UNESCO.

51 UNESCO (2018). G*lobal education monitoring report: Gender review.* Paris: UNESCO.

52 Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) (2018). *Gender-responsive pedagogy: A toolkit for teachers and schools*. Available at: https://www.unicef.org/esa/media/6726/file/grp-a-toolkit-for-teachers-and-schools-2020.pdf

53 UNESCO (2017). *A guide for gender equality in teacher education policy and practices*. Paris: UNESCO.

54 World Health Organization (2018). *Global Standards for Health Promoting Schools*. Available at: https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/health-promoting-schools/global-standards-for-health-promoting-schools-who-unesco.pdf?sfvrsn=251c2d0c_2

55 Global Partnership for Education. (2019). *Gender equality in and through education*. Available at: https://www.globalpartnership.org/node/document/download?file=sites/default/files/2019-07-kix-gender-final-english.pdf

56 World Bank (2020). *Women, business, and the law*. Washington DC: International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank. Available at: https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/6c2b5974-9a3b-5249-995b-2b22e5fd7909/content

57 UNESCO (2016). Education 2030: *Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action*. Paris: UNESCO.

58 UN Women (2018). *Turning promises into action: Gender equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. New York: United Nations.

59 UNESCO (2017). A *guide for gender equality in teacher education policy and practices.* Paris: UNESCO.

60 Global Partnership for Education. (2019). G*ender equality in and through education*. Available at: https://www.globalpartnership.org/node/document/download?file=sites/default/files/2019-07-kix-gender-final-english.pdf

61 UNESCO (1994). The Salamanca statement. Available at: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000107676

62 UNHCR (2024). *Education report 2024 – Refugee education: Five years on from the launch of the 2030 refugee education strategy*. UNHCR. Available at: https://www.unhcr.org

63 UNESCO (2024). *The global education monitoring report, 2024*. Available at: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000391406

64 Results for Development and Education Above All Foundation (2017). *Out-of-School Children (OOSC): Global costs and investment trends. Results for Development*.

65 UNESCO (2020). *Global education monitoring report 2020: Inclusion and education: All means all, Easy to read version, key messages, recommendations*. UNESCO Digital Library. Available at: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/

66 Davis, A. M. (2022). The problem with tables. *Stanford Social Innovation Review.* Available at: https://doi.org/10.48558/JY4W-G212

67 Sakellariou, M., Strati, P. and Anagnostopoulou, R. (2024). The role of social skills throughout inclusive education implementation. *East African Scholars Journal of Education, Humanities and Literature, 2*(10), 633–641.

68 Open Society Foundations (n.d.). *The value of inclusive education*. Available at: https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org

69 Jardinez, M. J. and Natividad, L. R. (2024). The advantages and challenges of inclusive education: Striving for equity in the classroom. *International Journal of Education, 12*(2), 57–65.

70 CAST (n.d.). *UDL guidelines 3.0*. Available at: https://www.cast.org

71 Evans, D. K. and Yuan, F. (2019). *What we learn about girls' education from interventions that do not focus on girls*. World Bank Group. Available at: https://www.worldbank.org

72 Education Commission (2019). *Transforming the education workforce: Learning teams for a learning generation*. Available at: https://educationcommission.org/transformingtheeducationworkforce/

73 Education Commission (2019). *Transforming the education workforce: Learning teams for a learning generation*. Available at: https://educationcommission.org/transformingtheeducationworkforce/

74 Buhungiro, E. (2015). School mentors programme: The successes and challenges. T*he New Times.* Available at: http://www.newtimes.co.rw/section/read/192590

75 Lewis, I. and Bagree, S. (2013). *Teachers for all: Inclusive teaching for children with disabilities.* Brussels: International Disability and Development Consortium (IDDC).

76 Navarro, F. M. (2015). *Learning support staff: A literature review*. OECD Education Working Papers, No. 125. Paris: OECD Publishing.

77 Lynch, P., McCall, S., Douglass, G., McLinden, M. and Bayo, A. (2011). Inclusive educational practices in Uganda: Evidencing practice of itinerant teachers who work with children with visual impairment in local mainstream schools. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 10, 1119–1134.

78 Lynch, P., Lund, P. and Massah, B. (2014). Identifying strategies to enhance the educational inclusion of visually impaired children with albinism in Malawi. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 39, 226–234.

79 Singal, N., De, A. and Bhutani, S. K. (2016). *A critical analysis of the education of children with disabilities under RMSA: Resourcing and provision*. Cambridge: Cambridge Education.

80 Singh, D. (2010). *A study of stakeholders' perception of role performance of itinerant teachers in elementary education in UP* (Unpublished M.Phil. thesis). National University of Educational Planning and Administration, New Delhi, India.

81 Singal, N. (2008). Working towards inclusion: Reflections from the classroom. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 24, 1516–1529.

82 National Council for Teacher Education (2014). *National Council for Teacher Education (Recognition Norms and Procedure) Regulations, 2014*. New Delhi: Government of India.

83 Deluca, M. and Kett, M. (2017). *The role of classroom assistants on teaching practices and on retention of children with disabilities.* London: Leonard Cheshire Disability and Inclusive Development Centre, University College London.

84 Naylor, R., Jones, C. and Boateng, P. (2019). *Strengthening the education workforce*. Forthcoming background paper for Transforming the Education Workforce: Learning Teams for a Learning Generation. New York: Education Commission.

85 Godwin, K., Cameron, E. and Bellinger, A. (2024). *Learning teams for foundational learning. The Learning Generation Initiative*. Available at: https://learninggeneration.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Learning-Teams_compressed.pdf

86 Johnston, J. and Ksoll, C. (2017). *Effectiveness of interactive satellite-transmitted instruction: Experimental evidence from Ghanaian primary schools*. CEPA Working Paper No.17–08. Available at: http://cepa.stanford.edu/wp17-08

87 Global Agenda Council on Education (2016). *Unleashing greatness: Nine plays to spark innovation in education*. Geneva: World Economic Forum.

88 Robinson, J. P., Winthrop, R. and McGivney, E. (2016). *Millions learning: Scaling up quality education in developing countries*. Washington DC: Center for Universal Education, Brookings Institution.

89 UNESCO (2016). *If you don't understand, how can you learn*? Global Education Monitoring Report Policy Paper 24. Available at: http://unesco.org/ark/48223/pf0000243713

90 World Bank (2021). *Loud and Clear: Effective Language of Instruction Policies for Learning*. Washington: World Bank.

91 Romaine, S. (2013). Keeping the promise of the Millenium Development Goals: Why language matters. *Applied Linguistics Review 4*(1), 1–21.

92 Simpson, J. (2016). Language supportive education in low-income English-medium contexts. In T. Pattison (Ed.) *IATEFL 2015: Manchester Conference Selections*, 160–162.

93 McCarty, T. L. (2011). Language, Education and the Politics of Indigenous Identity. In A. M. Y. J. L. de Jong (Ed.) *Language, Identity and the Politics of Language* (pp 29–48). New York: Springer.

94 Bunyi, G. W. (2005). Language Classroom Practices in Kenya. In A. Lin and P. Martin (Eds) *Decolonisation, Globalisation: Language-in-Education Policy and Practice* (pp131–152). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

95 Probyn, M. (2018). Languages and Learning in South African Classrooms: Finding Common Ground with North/South Concerns for Linguistic Access, Equity, and Social Justice in Education. In: P. Trifonas and T. Aravossitas, (Eds) *Handbook of Research and Practice in Heritage Language Education. Springer International Handbooks of Education*. New York: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-44694-3_28

96 Williams, E. (2011). Language policy, politics and development in Africa. In H. Coleman (Ed.) *Dreams and Realities: Developing Countries and the English Language* (pp 41–57). London: British Council. Available at: https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/publications/case-studies-insights-and-research/dreams-and-realities-developing-countries-and

97 Bernal, E. (2001). Language, Politics and Identity in Spain: The Case of Catalan and Basque in Education. *Language Policy* 1(1), 45–63.

98 Cummins, J. (2000). Language, Power and Pedagogy: Bilingual Children in the Crossfire. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

99 Kosonen, K. (2005). *Education in local languages: Policy and practice in Southeast Asia. First languages first: Community-based literacy programmes for minority language contexts in Asia*. Bangkok: UNESCO, Bangkok.

100 Thomas, W. P. and Collier, V. P. (2002). *A National Study of School Effectiveness for Language Minority Students' Long-Term Academic Achievement*. UC Berkeley: Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence.

101 Benson, C. (2002). Real and potential benefits of bilingual programmes in developing countries. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 5(6), 303–317.

102 Heugh, K, et al. (2007). *Study on MoI in Primary Schools in Ethiopia*. Ministry of Education Ethiopia.

103 Chick, J. K. (1996). Safe-talk: Collusion in Apartheid Education, in H. Coleman (Ed.) *Society and the Language Classroom* (pp21–39). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

104 UNESCO (2008). *Mother Tongue Matters: Local language as a key to effective learning*. Paris: UNESCO.

105 Benson, C., and Kosonen, K. (Eds) (2013). L*anguage issues in comparative education: Inclusive teaching and learning in non-dominant languages and cultures. Rotterdam*: Sense Publishers.

106 Simpson, J. (2024). *Towards a language responsive approach to education* [title subject to change]. Unpublished manuscript.

107 World Bank (2021). *Loud and Clear: Effective Language of Instruction Policies for Learning*. Washington: World Bank.

108 Simpson, J. (2019). *English language and medium of instruction in basic education in low- and middle-income countries: a British Council perspective*. London: British Council. Available at: https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/K068_EMI_position_low-and_middle-income_countries_Final.pdf

109 Clegg, J. (2015). *Developing Readable English-medium Textbooks in Rwanda*. Unpublished paper presented at the 49th Annual International IATEFL Conference and Exhibition, Manchester, UK, April 11–14.

110 Bell Foundation (2023) C*lassroom guidance and strategies to support EAL learners: Primary version*. Available at: https://www.bell-foundation.org.uk/resources/detail/classroom-guidance-and-strategies-to-support-eal-learners/

111 Juba Statement of Principles (2013). in H. McIlwraith (Ed.) *Multilingual Education in Africa: Lessons from the Juba Language-in-Education Conference*. London: British Council. Available at: https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/C413%20Juba%20Publication_FINAL_WEB%20ONLY%20v3.pdf

112 Republic of Kenya (2010). *Constitution of Kenya*. Nairobi: Government Printers.

113 Republic of Kenya (2013). *Basic Education Act.* Nairobi: Government Printers.

114 Republic of Kenya (2003). *Persons with Disability Act.* Nairobi: Government Printers.

115 Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (2017). B*asic Education Curriculum Framework*. Nairobi: KICD.

116 Republic of Kenya (2019). *Sessional Paper No. 1 of 2019 on A Policy Framework for Reforming Education and Training for Sustainable Development in Kenya Towards Realizing Quality, Relevant and Inclusive Education and Training for Sustainable Development*. Nairobi: Government Printers.

117 Ministry of Education (2018). *Sector Policy for Learners and Trainees with Disability.* Nairobi: Government Printers.

118 Ministry of Education (2009). *National Special Needs Education Policy Framework.* Nairobi: Government Printers.

119 United Nations (2006). *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability*. New York: United Nations.

120 Ministry of Education (2023). N*ational Education Sector Plan 2023–28.* Nairobi: Government Printers

121 Ministry of Education (2023). *National Education Sector Plan 2023–28.* Nairobi: Government Printers.

122 Ministry of Education (2023). *Report on the Presidential Working Party on Education Reforms.* Nairobi: Government Printers.

123 Ministry of Education (2023). *Report on the Presidential Working Party on Education Reforms*. Nairobi: Government Printers.

124 Ministry of Education (2009). *National Special Needs Education Policy Framework*. Nairobi: Government Printers.

125 United Nations (2015). General Assembly Resolution A/RES/70/1. *Transforming Our World, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.* Available at: http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E.

126 Kemmis et al. (2014). *Changing Practices, Changing Education.* New York: Springer.

127 United Nations (2015). General Assembly Resolution A/RES/70/1. *Transforming Our World, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. Available at: http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E.

128 Harpaz, Y. (2014). T*eaching and Learning in a Community of Thinking*. New York: Springer.

129 World Bank (2023). *Population Data, Ethiopia.* Available at: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=ET

130 Ogato, G. S. (2013). *The Quest for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Least Developed Countries: Policy and Strategy Implications for Achieving Millennium Development Goals in Ethiopia*. Department of Rural Development and Agricultural Extension, Institute of Cooperatives and Development Studies, Ambo University, Ethiopia.
https://doi.org/10.5897/IJSA2013.0454

131 World Bank (2024). *The World Bank In Gender*. Available at: https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/gender/overview

132 Ogato, G. S. (2013). *The Quest for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Least Developed Countries: Policy and Strategy Implications for Achieving Millennium Development Goals in Ethiopia*. Department of Rural Development and Agricultural Extension, Institute of Cooperatives and Development Studies, Ambo University, Ethiopia.
https://doi.org/10.5897/IJSA2013.0454

133 Ogato, G. S. (2013). *The Quest for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Least Developed Countries: Policy and Strategy Implications for Achieving Millennium Development Goals in Ethiopia*. Department of Rural Development and Agricultural Extension, Institute of Cooperatives and Development Studies, Ambo University, Ethiopia. https://doi.org/10.5897/IJSA2013.0454.

134 World Bank (2024). *The World Bank In Gender*. Available at: https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/gender/overview.

135 World Bank (2024). *The World Bank In Gender*. Available at: https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/gender/overview.

136 FDRE Ministry of Education (2002). *Education Sector Development Program II 2002/03–2004/05 G.C.* Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

137 FDRE Ministry of Education (2005). *Education Sector Development Program III 2005/06–2009/10 G.C.* Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

138 FDRE Ministry of Education (2010). *Education Sector Development Program IV 2010/11–2014/15 G.C*. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

139 FDRE Ministry of Education (2015). *Education Sector Development Program V 2015/16–2019/20 G.C.* Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

140 FDRE Ministry of Education (2021). *Education Sector Development Program VI 2020/21–2024/25 G.C*. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

141 NEAEA (2016). *Ethiopian 5th National Learning Assessment of Grades 4 and 8 Students*. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

142 NEAEA (2017). *Ethiopian third national learning assessment of grade 10 and 12 Students achievement*. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

143 Gretland, E., Robinson, B. and Baig, T. (2014). *An investigation into the barriers to female education in Link Ethiopia Schools*. Gondar: Link Ethiopia.

144 Gretland, E., Robinson, B. and Baig, T. (2014). *An investigation into the barriers to female education in Link Ethiopia Schools*. Gondar: Link Ethiopia.

145 Rose, P. (2003). *Can gender equality in education be attained? Evidence from Ethiopia*. Background paper for 2003 UNESCO Global Monitoring Report.

146 Camfield, L. (2011). 'A girl never finishes her journey': mixing methods to understand female experiences of education in contemporary Ethiopia. *Research Papers in Education,* 26(4), 393–412.

147 Totoba, B. A. and György, M. (2024). The Role of Modern Education in Historical Move Towards Gender Equality Issue in Ethiopia. *Sexuality and Gender Studies Journal, 2*(2), 32–51.

148 Tafere, Y., Yorke, L., Rose, P. and Pankhurst, A. (2022). *Understanding the Influences on Girls' Primary Education in Ethiopia from the Perspectives of Girls and Their Caregivers*. RISE Working Paper Series. 22/097. https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-WP_2022/097.

149 UNESCO. (2017). *A Guide for ensuring inclusion and equity in education.* Available at: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000248254.

150 Robinson, M., Rusznyak, L. and Modiba, M. (2024). Fifty years of teacher education in South Africa: towards systematic learning and social transformation. *Journal of Education for Teaching, 50*(5), 766–782.

151 Department of Education, South Africa (2007). *National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa*. Pretoria: Government of South Africa.

152 Makoelle, T. M. and Mosito, C. P. (2024). Pre-service Teacher Preparation for Inclusive Teaching in South Africa. In G. Boadu, G. Odhiambo, and P. Marandi (Eds) Practice and Perspectives of Teaching and Teacher Education in Africa. Hershey, Pennsylvania: IGI Publishers.

153 Van Der Bijl, C. (2014). *Twenty year review: South Africa* 1994–2014. Available at:

https://www.dpme.gov.za/news/documents/20%20year%20review.pdf.

154 Rubagiza, J., Umutoni, J. and Kaleeba, A. (2016). Teachers as Agents of Change: Promoting Peacebuilding and Social Cohesion in Schools in Rwanda. *Education as Change*, 20(3), 202–224.

155 Naylor, R. and Sayed, Y. (2014). *Teacher quality: Evidence review.* Commonwealth of Australia: Office of Development Effectiveness.

156 Massoumeh, Z. and Leilato, J. (2012). An Investigation of Medical Model and Special Education Methods. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 46, 5802–5804.

157 Sturm, D. (2023). *The importance of nuance*. Available at: https://schoolscanbebetter.com/2023/03/11/the-importance-of-nuance/

158 Van Der Bijl, C. (2014). *Twenty year review: South Africa 1994–2014*. Available at:

https://www.dpme.gov.za/news/documents/20%20year%20review.pdf.

159 A consortium led by the British Council commissioned a study on 'The state of inclusive education in South Africa'. The study was led by a team from the University of South Africa (UNISA). The consortium consisted of the British Council, MIET Africa, DBE, DHET and UNISA. Later nine more universities with faculties of education were co-opted into the project.
160 British Council. (2019). *Inclusive Teaching and Learning for South Africa: Inclusive Education Unit*. Parklands: British Council.

161 Ainscow, M. (2020). Promoting inclusion and equity in education: lessons from international experiences. *Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy, 6*(1), 7–16.

162 OECD (2018). *Equity in Education: Breaking Down Barriers to Social Mobility*. Available at:
https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/equity-in-education_9789264073234-en.html

163 Sayed, Y., Salmon, T. and Balie, L. (2020). *Technical report for the impact evaluation of the Teaching for All project*. Unpublished report.

164 Machakos, Kajiado, Nyandarua, Nakuru, Kiambu, Nairobi, Turkana, Garissa, Elgeyo Marakwet, Narok, Kakamega, Busia, Bungoma, Meru, Nakuru, Homa Bay, Migori, Trans Nzoia, Siaya and Muranga.

165 KNBS (2022). *Kenya Demographic and Health Survey*. Nairobi: Government of Kenya.

166 Ministry of Health (2022). *Teenage Pregnancy and Maternal Health Report*. Nairobi: Ministry of Health.

167 UNICEF (2021). *Ending Child Marriage and Supporting Girls' Education*. New York: UNICEF.

168 UNESCO (2024). *Situational analysis report on teen pregnancies in Kenya*. Paris: UNESCO.

169 Ministry of Education (2021). *National Guidelines for School Re-Entry in Early Learning and Basic Education*. Ministry of Education, Nairobi.

170 World Health Organization (2021). *Adolescent Health and Well-being*. Geneva: WHO.

171 UNESCO (2022). *Sexual and Reproductive Health Education in Africa*. Paris: UNESCO.

172 UNICEF (2021). *Ending Child Marriage and Supporting Girls' Education*. New York: UNICEF.

173 Ministry of Education (2021). *National Guidelines for School Re-Entry in Early Learning and Basic Educatio*n. Ministry of Education, Nairobi.

174 UNESCO (2022). *Sexual and Reproductive Health Education in Africa.* Paris: UNESCO.\

175 UNICEF (2021). *Ending Child Marriage and Supporting Girls' Education*. New York: UNICEF.

176 World Bank (2022). *Gender and Education in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Washington DC: World Bank.

177 eKitabu (n.d.). Digital content in the form of ebooks and interactive materials. Available at: https://www.ekitabu.com/content.

178 Lederberg, A. R., Schick, B. and Spencer, P. E. (2012). Language and Literacy Development of Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Children: Successes and Challenges. *Developmental Psychology, 49*(1), 15–30.

179 Mitchell, R. E. and Karchmer, M. A. (2005). Parental hearing status and signing among deaf and hard of hearing students. *Sign Language Studies, 5*(2), 231–244.

180 Calderon, R. (2000). Parental involvement in deaf children's education programs as a predictor of child's language, early reading, and social-emotional development. *Journal of deaf studies and deaf education*, 5(2), 140–155.