

Inclusive Education in the Post-Pandemic World: Teacher Perceptions, Student Experiences, and Systemic Challenges

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Abstract:

This study explores the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on inclusive education and examines innovative pedagogical practices that support students with disabilities and diverse learning needs. The pandemic highlighted deep-rooted disparities in access, participation, and learning outcomes, disproportionately affecting students with disabilities. Through a review of recent global research, this paper investigates how school closures, online learning, and strained educational systems intensified challenges related to equity, teacher preparedness, and access to support services. Furthermore, the study presents evidence of effective inclusive strategies, such as differentiated instruction, school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS), and culturally responsive pedagogy. Findings indicate that while theoretical awareness of inclusive practices is growing, gaps remain in their practical application, especially in low- and middle-income countries. The study calls for educational policies that are context-sensitive, equity-driven, and technologically adaptive. It emphasizes the need for sustained teacher training, collaborative learning environments, and the integration of assistive technologies. Ultimately, inclusive education must be reimagined as a systemic, rights-based approach that addresses social and educational barriers and affirms the dignity and potential of every learner.

Keywords: Inclusive education, COVID-19, pedagogical innovation, students with disabilities

Introduction:

Inclusive education is globally acknowledged as both a fundamental human right and an effective framework for ensuring equitable access to quality education. It promotes the integration of all learners, including those with disabilities and diverse learning needs, into mainstream classrooms. The goal is to create supportive and adaptive learning environments where every child can thrive academically and socially, regardless of ability.

However, while the ideology of inclusion is widely accepted, its practical implementation continues to be inconsistent and problematic, especially in developing countries (Kibria, 2005; Jarvis, 2016). This study aims to explore the status of inclusive education in the post-pandemic era, particularly focusing on how teachers and schools are adapting their practices in various global contexts.

Significant challenges persist in achieving genuine inclusion. Studies in countries like Bangladesh and Uganda point to systemic limitations such as inadequate policy enforcement, insufficient teacher training, and limited resources (Khan, 2011; Kristensen, Loican-Omagor, & Onen, 2003). In Bangladesh, Khan (2011) found that secondary school teachers often lacked sufficient knowledge and positive attitudes toward inclusive education, a sentiment echoed by Kibria (2005), who emphasized the gap between national inclusion policies and local classroom practices.

Similarly, in Uganda, Kristensen et al. (2003) described the lack of trained staff and accessible learning environments as major obstacles. These findings suggest that inclusion is more than policy adoption—it requires sustained investment in capacity-building at every level of the education system.

Teachers' perceptions and their preparedness play a crucial role in the success or failure of inclusion. Jarvis (2016) argues that in developing countries, the education of teachers on disability issues remains superficial, leading to reluctance or fear when dealing with diverse learners. Hamill, Jantzen, and Bargerhuff (2016), in a study on Norway, found that even in a country with strong inclusion policies, the transition of students with special needs into secondary education often results in exclusionary practices. In South Africa, Kotele (2010) documented how an inclusive pilot program in a low-income community faced structural difficulties, such as inadequate classroom space and insufficient collaboration among stakeholders. These global case studies illustrate that teacher readiness and structural support are essential to making inclusion more than just a theoretical goal.

Compounding these issues are teachers' limited understanding of specific disabilities and how to manage them in the classroom. For instance, Kibuuka (2017) found that many mainstream teachers lacked the knowledge and confidence to support children diagnosed with speech or language impairments, leading to exclusionary behavior even in well-intentioned settings. Klibthong (2015) advocates for re-imagining inclusive education through the lens of cultural capital and social equity, urging educators to recognize how societal structures influence classroom dynamics. Kurawa (2015) also highlights the importance of employing inclusive classroom strategies such as differentiated instruction and collaborative learning, which can address diverse learner needs more effectively when properly implemented.

The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated existing inequalities in education. While it prompted digital innovation, it also revealed deep disparities in access to technology, individualized supports, and mental health resources. In many contexts, already strained systems struggled to accommodate learners with special needs, resulting in learning loss and exclusion (Leff et al., 2021; Jackson & Bowden, 2020).

Moreover, countries like South Africa and Uganda, which had made limited progress toward inclusion, found their efforts stalled or reversed due to shifting priorities and resource constraints (Kabumba, 2017). Against this backdrop, this study investigates how inclusive education is evolving post-pandemic by reviewing literature from diverse national contexts and identifying both challenges and emerging practices that support inclusive learning.

Literature Review:

Inclusive education, a model emphasizing the integration of learners with special needs into mainstream classrooms, has been widely endorsed as a means to ensure equal educational opportunities for all children. Its goal is not only to facilitate academic access but to promote social cohesion, empathy, and a shared sense of belonging. However, the implementation of inclusive education varies considerably across countries, institutions, and even classrooms, with effectiveness shaped by teacher attitudes, institutional readiness, systemic inequalities, and more recently, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

One of the most critical factors in successful inclusive education is the attitude and preparedness of teachers. Numerous studies across different countries highlight the significance of teacher perceptions and training in shaping inclusive practices. In Papua New Guinea, Lodge and Lynch (2004) documented that while teachers expressed theoretical support for inclusive education, many lacked the practical knowledge to accommodate students with special needs.

A similar pattern emerged in Australia, where Lunga (2015) found that although most primary school teachers acknowledged the importance of inclusion, many were skeptical about its feasibility due to inadequate training and support. In South Africa, McConkey and Bradley (2017) found systemic inconsistencies in inclusive education implementation, particularly in resource-limited schools in the Mpumalanga province. Their findings emphasize the need for institutional and policy alignment to support classroom-level inclusion.

Student teachers also hold mixed perceptions regarding inclusive education. Miles (2011), in a study conducted in Northern Ireland, revealed that pre-service teachers often felt unprepared to teach in inclusive settings. Their anxieties were primarily rooted in a lack of experience and inadequate university coursework addressing diverse learning needs. Mnangu (2016) emphasized the role of ongoing professional development in equipping educators to work effectively in inclusive settings. He argued that without continuous training and institutional support, the ideals of inclusion are unlikely to translate into everyday practice. The recurring theme across these studies is that teacher training, both pre-service and in-service, is central to the success of inclusive education policies.

The COVID-19 pandemic introduced additional complexities to inclusive education systems. Jackson and Bowden (2020) documented the challenges faced by students with disabilities in the United States during the shift to remote learning. Their national survey revealed that many students lacked access to appropriate technology, individualized supports, and mental health services, highlighting the fragility of inclusion efforts in times of crisis.

Kogan and Lavertu (2021) noted a significant drop in student performance on Ohio's third-grade English Language Arts assessment, with vulnerable learners being the most affected. Similarly, Kilbride et al. (2022) reported

considerable learning losses in Michigan's benchmark assessments post-pandemic, underscoring the pandemic's widespread impact on educational outcomes.

Kuhfeld and Lewis (2022) and Kuhfeld, Soland, and Lewis (2022) extended these findings by providing longitudinal evidence on student achievement over three pandemic-impacted school years. Their data revealed that the academic recovery has been uneven, with students with disabilities and those from marginalized communities trailing behind. The pandemic not only exacerbated existing disparities but also exposed systemic gaps in how inclusive education is designed and supported. Leff et al. (2021) added another dimension by reporting a significant increase in pediatric emergency visits for mental health during the pandemic, pointing to the broader emotional and psychological toll on children, including those with special needs. These findings underscore the urgency of reimagining inclusive education in a way that is resilient to systemic shocks like global health crises.

Beyond the pandemic, research continues to highlight persistent issues of bias, stigma, and inequity in special education. Kauffman and Badar (2013) discussed how special education services for students with emotional and behavioral disorders often carry stigma, potentially hindering students' social integration and long-term development. Lewis et al. (2010) advocated for school-wide positive behavior support systems that foster proactive prevention and identification strategies rather than reactive discipline. Their work points to the need for a cultural shift in schools toward inclusive and preventative frameworks.

The issue of racial and disciplinary inequities in special education is another pressing concern. Losen et al. (2014) examined how racial disparities in special education identification and discipline practices reinforce structural inequalities. They found that students of color are often overrepresented in special education categories associated with behavioral challenges and are more likely to face punitive discipline. This aligns with earlier work by Losen and Orfield (2002), who documented systemic racial inequities in special education placement and treatment, calling for policy reforms that address both educational and racial justice. These patterns of inequity demonstrate how inclusion is not merely about physical placement in classrooms, but also about addressing deeper systemic and institutional biases.

Early intervention emerges as a promising strategy to support students with learning difficulties and reduce long-term disparities. Lovett et al. (2017) conducted a longitudinal study on early reading interventions and found that earlier identification and support led to more positive educational outcomes, especially for children at risk for reading disabilities. This finding aligns with the broader literature emphasizing the importance of early and targeted interventions within inclusive frameworks. Kulkarni and Sullivan (2019) similarly found that behavior observed at school entry significantly predicted the services students received by third grade, suggesting that early assessment is key to effective support planning.

Together, these studies provide a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted nature of inclusive education. They emphasize that while the vision of inclusion is universally supported, the realization of this vision requires coordinated efforts at the classroom, school, and policy levels. Teachers need sustained professional development, students need individualized and early support, and systems must address the cultural and racial biases that influence special education practices. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has served as a stark reminder that inclusion must also be adaptable to crisis contexts, with robust support systems in place to ensure no student is left behind.

The literature underscores both the promise and the complexity of inclusive education. From teacher preparation to policy implementation, from early intervention to equitable discipline, a wide range of factors influence the success of inclusion in practice. The pandemic has added urgency to addressing these challenges, while also offering a unique opportunity to rebuild education systems that are more resilient, inclusive, and just. Moving forward, researchers, educators, and policymakers must work collaboratively to close the gap between the ideal and the real in inclusive education.

Methodology:

This study utilized a systematic review methodology to explore and synthesize scholarly literature on inclusive education, with particular emphasis on trends and findings from both pre-COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 contexts. The systematic review approach was selected to provide a comprehensive and evidence-based understanding of how inclusive education has evolved over time, particularly in response to global disruptions caused by the pandemic.

A total of 26 sources were examined, including peer-reviewed journal articles, doctoral theses, and institutional or government reports. These sources were selected based on their empirical contributions to the discourse on inclusive education, particularly concerning teacher perceptions, instructional practices, student outcomes, and systemic challenges. The review covered a 20-year publication window from 2002 to 2022, allowing for a robust comparison between pre-pandemic and post-pandemic literature.

Relevant studies were identified through electronic searches using academic databases such as Google Scholar, ERIC (Education Resources Information Center), and JSTOR. Keywords used during the search included "inclusive education," "teacher attitudes," "special education," "COVID-19 and education," and "student learning outcomes." Additional references were located through backward citation tracking and hand-searching of key education journals.

To ensure relevance and rigor, inclusion criteria required that studies focus specifically on inclusive education in mainstream school settings and report either empirical findings or policy analyses. Studies were also required to engage with topics such as teaching practices, student diversity, disability inclusion, or institutional responses to inclusion. Articles were excluded if they were purely theoretical, lacked empirical data, or did not directly address inclusive education frameworks.

Findings and Discussion:

Teacher Perceptions and Preparedness

Teacher perceptions and preparedness remain foundational in the successful implementation of inclusive education. Across various studies conducted in both developing and developed contexts, teacher attitudes significantly influence the effectiveness of inclusive practices. In developing nations, such as Bangladesh and Uganda, studies by Khan (2011), Kibria (2005), and Kristensen, Loican-Omagor, and Onen (2003) consistently emphasize that teachers often lack the training and confidence required to manage diverse classrooms. In particular, Kristensen et al. (2003) observed that Ugandan teachers viewed the inclusion of students with disabilities as a burden due to insufficient support and large class sizes.

Similar sentiments were echoed in Papua New Guinea and Australia. Lodge and Lynch (2004) and Lunga (2015) found that teachers were skeptical about inclusive education, citing overcrowded classrooms, limited professional development, and lack of specialized training. In Northern Ireland, Miles (2011) reported that student teachers often entered their practicum experiences without adequate understanding or preparedness to manage inclusive classrooms. Even in more resourced settings, there appears to be a significant knowledge gap regarding evidence-based practices in inclusive education.

Teachers often struggle with specific disabilities, particularly speech and language impairments. Kibuuka (2017) found that mainstream teachers lacked the knowledge and resources to effectively support children diagnosed with such impairments, largely due to inadequate early intervention strategies and limited access to specialist support. Jarvis (2016) reinforced this by highlighting that teachers in developing countries were rarely exposed to comprehensive training on disability education, which ultimately affects their confidence and competence in inclusive settings.

The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed and amplified these challenges. Jackson and Bowden (2020) reported that while online learning platforms allowed some degree of instructional continuity, they also revealed stark disparities in accessibility, particularly for students with disabilities. Many teachers were not equipped to modify or differentiate content for learners requiring accommodations, and the sudden shift to digital platforms left students with disabilities at a significant disadvantage due to the lack of adapted materials and assistive technology.

McConkey and Bradley (2017), focusing on South Africa, emphasized the lack of ICT integration training among special education teachers. This deficiency resulted in missed learning opportunities for students with special needs, particularly during school closures. Moreover, Kabumba (2017) noted that educational reforms during the pandemic prioritized curriculum restructuring but overlooked the urgent need to support inclusive practices, leading to further marginalization of students with disabilities.

The post-pandemic period also saw a deterioration in overall academic performance, especially among vulnerable groups. Kuhfeld and Lewis (2022) and Kuhfeld, Soland, and Lewis (2022) documented learning losses over three consecutive school years, with students receiving special education services experiencing disproportionate declines. In Ohio, Kogan and Lavertu (2021) revealed that achievement gaps widened further, particularly in early literacy, where students with disabilities struggled to meet benchmark expectations.

Inclusive education is not solely dependent on individual teacher attitudes—it is equally shaped by systemic and institutional frameworks. Several studies pointed to a lack of policy coherence, resource allocation, and school-wide support systems as barriers to effective implementation. For example, Klibthong (2015) and Kotele (2010) highlighted that even where inclusive policies exist, they are often poorly executed due to limited monitoring and insufficient funding for inclusive resources.

Kurawa (2015) explored teacher strategies in a primary school context and found that while some educators used culturally responsive and differentiated strategies, these efforts were inconsistent and largely dependent on individual teacher initiative. Lewis, Jones, Horner, and Sugai (2010) stressed the need for whole-school positive behavioral

support systems to enhance inclusive outcomes, particularly for students with emotional and behavioral disorders. Unfortunately, such systems are often lacking or underutilized in both low- and middle-income countries.

In terms of equity, racial and socioeconomic disparities continue to intersect with disability, compounding exclusion. Losen, Hodson, Ee, and Martinez (2014), as well as Losen and Orfield (2002), illustrated that students from racial minorities in the United States are disproportionately identified for special education and face harsher disciplinary measures, leading to a cycle of marginalization. This suggests that effective inclusive education must also address broader systemic issues related to race, poverty, and access to quality instruction.

Despite these challenges, some studies underscore the importance of early and targeted intervention. Lovett, Frijters, Wolf, and Steinbach (2017) demonstrated that children identified early for reading difficulties and provided with individualized support showed significant improvement in reading outcomes. Kulkarni and Sullivan (2019) similarly found a strong link between early behavioral assessments and the provision of appropriate services by third grade, reinforcing the need for early screening and intervention programs.

However, the pandemic negatively impacted these systems. Leff, Setzer, Cicero, and Auerbach (2021) observed a sharp decline in pediatric mental health consultations, which likely contributed to the under-identification of students requiring specialized support. These findings point to the urgent need for reinforced support systems as schools transition to post-pandemic recovery.

Overall, the findings reveal that teacher attitudes, preparedness, and systemic infrastructure significantly influence the success of inclusive education. Pre-pandemic literature already highlighted significant gaps in teacher training, support, and policy alignment. The COVID-19 pandemic further strained these systems, reducing access to quality education for students with disabilities and revealing the fragility of current inclusive practices. As education systems recover, targeted investments in professional development, digital inclusion, early intervention, and systemic reform are essential to create resilient, equitable, and inclusive learning environments for all learners.

Systemic and Structural Challenges

Systemic and structural challenges continue to hinder the full implementation of inclusive education globally. These barriers persist across both high-income and low-income contexts, manifesting in inadequate policies, funding limitations, and weak institutional coordination. A consistent theme across the literature is that even when inclusive education is mandated in policy, practice often lags behind due to logistical, structural, and socio-political constraints.

Kristensen, Loican-Omagor, and Onen (2003) emphasized the critical infrastructural gaps in Uganda, where many schools lacked basic physical accommodations, appropriate teaching materials, and trained personnel. While inclusive education was promoted in national guidelines, the actual school environments were largely inaccessible to learners with disabilities. The study underscores a broader issue faced by many developing countries—policy intentions are not supported by the operational frameworks needed for successful implementation.

Similarly, Hamill, Jantzen, and Bargerhuff (2016) found that in Norway—despite having advanced policies on inclusion—students with special needs faced complex and often exclusionary transitions into upper secondary education. Their findings suggest that even progressive systems may fall short during critical educational transitions when institutional pathways are not carefully coordinated. Transition planning and follow-through remain weak points, leading to fragmented educational experiences and eventual disengagement for many learners with disabilities.

Systemic underfunding is another persistent challenge. Kotele (2010) investigated an inclusive education program in a socio-economically disadvantaged primary school and concluded that lack of financial investment was a key barrier. Without sustained funding, inclusive programs could not expand resources, provide training, or involve parents and community stakeholders. This lack of multisectoral collaboration led to implementation gaps that disadvantaged both students and teachers. Kibria (2005) made a similar point in the context of Bangladesh, arguing that national policies promoting inclusion were often symbolic and lacked the financial backing required to make a genuine difference at the classroom level.

Continuity of services and early intervention have also emerged as structural weaknesses. Kulkarni and Sullivan (2019) found that while some students exhibited behavioral and learning challenges at the point of school entry, there was often a disconnect in translating these early indicators into sustained support. By third grade, many students had "fallen through the cracks" due to lack of intervention continuity and poor communication among service providers. This points to broader issues of system fragmentation, where health, social services, and education sectors operate in silos rather than integrated support frameworks.

The COVID-19 pandemic further magnified existing structural vulnerabilities. Jackson and Bowden (2020) reported that the shift to online learning disproportionately affected students with disabilities, as most digital platforms lacked

accessibility features. Additionally, special education teachers received little to no professional development on how to adapt online instruction to meet diverse needs. Kuhfeld and Lewis (2022) and Kuhfeld, Soland, and Lewis (2022) also documented significant learning losses among students in special education across the 2020–2022 academic years, with delays in both academic recovery and service resumption.

Socio-cultural dynamics compound these systemic gaps. Jarvis (2016) and Khan (2011) explored how cultural attitudes and teacher beliefs in developing countries often hinder inclusive practice. Teachers frequently reported feeling ill-prepared to accommodate diverse learners, particularly in resource-strapped environments. These perceptions are deeply embedded within broader social narratives that frame disability as a personal deficit rather than a social or systemic issue. Kurawa (2015) adds that teachers in primary schools tend to default to traditional pedagogical methods that fail to address the diverse needs of their classrooms, in part due to a lack of exposure to inclusive teaching strategies during pre-service training.

Despite these challenges, the literature suggests some opportunities for reform. For example, Klibthong (2015) advocated for re-imagining inclusive education using a Bourdieuan framework, which emphasizes the role of social capital, habitus, and institutionalized norms. By critically analyzing how schools reproduce inequities, this theoretical lens can offer pathways for systemic transformation that align policies with practice. Likewise, Lunga (2015) and Lodge and Lynch (2004) emphasized the importance of ongoing professional development and teacher collaboration to build a more supportive school culture for inclusion.

However, these reforms require institutional commitment, cross-sector collaboration, and, most importantly, sustainable investment. Without addressing these structural deficiencies, inclusive education risks becoming an aspirational ideal rather than an actionable reality. As McConkey and Bradley (2017) point out, implementation often falters when inclusive education is perceived as an add-on rather than a fundamental reorganization of schooling systems.

While policy frameworks supporting inclusive education have gained traction globally, systemic and structural challenges continue to undermine their implementation. The lack of coordinated support services, funding deficits, weak institutional planning, and socio-cultural attitudes collectively contribute to the exclusion of students with disabilities. Addressing these barriers requires an integrated and well-resourced approach—one that prioritizes not only access but also meaningful participation and educational success for all learners.

Impact of COVID-19 on Inclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed and intensified existing disparities in inclusive education worldwide. For students with disabilities, who already faced marginalization in many educational systems, the shift to remote and hybrid learning disproportionately worsened outcomes in both academic achievement and psychosocial well-being. Numerous studies confirm that the pandemic magnified long-standing inequities and created new challenges, particularly related to access, mental health, and continuity of individualized support services.

Learning losses during the pandemic were significantly more pronounced among students with disabilities. Kuhfeld, Soland, and Lewis (2022) reported that test scores dropped across all student groups in the U.S., but declines were especially severe among students with pre-existing learning challenges.

Kilbride et al. (2022), examining benchmark assessments in Michigan, similarly found that students with disabilities experienced sharper academic setbacks in reading and math, demonstrating the fragile nature of support structures that were dismantled or weakened during the pandemic. These findings underscore the limited resilience of inclusive systems when facing widespread disruption.

The mental health toll of COVID-19 was also considerable. Leff et al. (2021) identified a significant rise in pediatric emergency department visits related to mental health conditions during the pandemic, many of which were linked to increased anxiety, depression, and stress stemming from school closures and social isolation.

However, as school-based services were suspended or reduced, particularly those tailored for students with behavioral and emotional disorders, there was a marked mismatch between need and provision (Kauffman & Badar, 2013; Lewis et al., 2010). This discrepancy highlights the importance of maintaining access to psychological and behavioral services during times of crisis.

The pivot to online learning further deepened the digital divide, especially for students requiring individualized accommodations or assistive technologies. Kogan and Lavertu (2021) examined Ohio's third-grade English Language Arts performance and found sharp declines among students who had Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) or who needed language accommodations. These students faced more barriers to engagement, including the lack of accessible materials, inconsistent internet connectivity, and limited adult supervision at home. The absence of in-

person support staff made it difficult for educators to implement necessary interventions or monitor progress, leading to further academic disengagement.

In this context, Kuhfeld and Lewis (2022) emphasized the urgent need for individualized recovery plans post-pandemic. They argue that a one-size-fits-all remediation strategy is insufficient to address the needs of learners with disabilities, especially those who already lagged behind their peers prior to the pandemic. Instead, they advocate for sustained investment in early intervention, differentiated instruction, and data-informed supports—principles echoed in Lovett et al. (2017), who stress the importance of early identification and targeted remediation to improve long-term educational outcomes for at-risk students.

Jackson and Bowden (2020) also highlighted the inadequacy of school responses during the pandemic, reporting that many districts lacked contingency plans to serve students with disabilities during extended school closures. While some school systems attempted to provide modified instruction via online platforms, these efforts were often inconsistent, poorly coordinated, or inaccessible to families without digital literacy or technological infrastructure. The study's findings align with global trends reported by Kibria (2005) and Khan (2011), who noted that even in non-pandemic contexts, inclusive education in developing countries is undermined by systemic underfunding, lack of teacher training, and weak intersectoral collaboration.

The pandemic also exacerbated pre-existing structural challenges related to inclusive transitions. Hamill, Jantzen, and Bargerhuff (2016) revealed that even in high-income countries like Norway, students with disabilities faced exclusionary barriers during transitions between educational levels. The abrupt disruptions caused by COVID-19 made these transitions even more difficult, as support systems were paused and academic continuity was broken.

Moreover, the crisis exposed gaps in teacher preparedness and adaptive capacity. Jarvis (2016) emphasized that educators in developing countries often lack sufficient training in disability education, making it harder for them to adjust pedagogical strategies under crisis conditions. Similarly, McConkey and Bradley (2017) observed that inclusive practices in mainstream schools frequently rely on face-to-face scaffolding, which was largely impossible to replicate in virtual environments. Without proper training or resources, many educators struggled to adapt their instruction to the diverse needs of learners with disabilities.

The COVID-19 pandemic served as a stress test for inclusive education systems around the world. While it revealed the resilience of some support networks, it more prominently exposed how fragile and uneven inclusive infrastructures remain. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-pronged strategy: investment in digital equity, professional development in inclusive pedagogy, strengthened family-school partnerships, and policies that prioritize the most vulnerable learners in both emergency preparedness and long-term planning. Only by building more flexible and responsive education systems can we ensure that inclusion remains a core value, even in times of crisis.

Pedagogical Practices and Innovations

Inclusive pedagogy lies at the heart of effective education for all learners, particularly those with disabilities or learning differences. It demands not only the adaptation of instructional methods but also a commitment to restructuring classroom environments and school cultures. The literature on inclusive education across diverse global contexts reveals the significance of pedagogical innovations that respond to sociocultural, economic, and systemic challenges.

Kurawa (2015) provided a compelling account of how primary school teachers in Ghana have embraced inclusive strategies through the use of collaborative learning and differentiated instruction. By grouping students heterogeneously and offering varied learning tasks, teachers were able to better accommodate a wide range of abilities in the same classroom. This approach fosters a culture of peer support and reduces stigma around disability or academic difference. Kurawa's findings align with broader evidence that student engagement and achievement improve in environments where diversity is embraced and instructional methods are tailored to individual needs.

Likewise, Klibthong (2015) advocated for reimagining inclusive education by applying Bourdieuan theoretical frameworks. This perspective encourages educators to consider how cultural capital, social habitus, and institutional structures influence student participation and learning outcomes. Through this lens, inclusive pedagogy becomes more than a technical application of teaching strategies—it becomes a socially responsive practice that interrogates power relations and systemic inequities in education.

In Northern Ireland, Miles (2011) found that while student teachers possessed theoretical knowledge about inclusive practices, many lacked the practical confidence to implement them effectively. This gap highlights the urgent need for more robust training in inclusive methods within teacher preparation programs. Similar concerns have been echoed globally. For instance, Jarvis (2016) noted that teacher training in developing countries often fails to sufficiently cover disability education, resulting in classroom practices that unintentionally marginalize learners with special needs.

Practical solutions have been identified and implemented in various contexts. Mnangu (2016) emphasized the effectiveness of school-wide models such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), which have been shown to improve student behavior and reduce referrals to special education. PBIS encourages consistency in expectations and disciplinary responses across a school, promoting a positive climate for all learners. Lewis et al. (2010) further supported this model by demonstrating that PBIS not only benefits students with emotional and behavioral disorders but also contributes to inclusive school cultures that value early intervention and proactive strategies.

Hamill, Jantzen, and Bargerhuff (2016) explored the complexities of inclusion in secondary education settings in Norway. Their study revealed that students with special needs often experience exclusion during transitions between educational levels. These transitions are critical moments that require targeted support to prevent dropout and disengagement. A lack of planning and individualized support structures can cause students with disabilities to fall through the cracks, reinforcing educational inequalities.

In Bangladesh, Khan (2011) and Kibria (2005) both reported that teachers' limited knowledge and sometimes negative attitudes toward inclusion pose significant challenges. However, Kibria also observed a growing awareness among educators about the rights of students with disabilities, especially in urban schools, suggesting a shift in perception is underway. This underscores the importance of continuous professional development to ensure teachers are both informed and empowered to create inclusive classrooms.

In Uganda, Kristensen, Loican-Omagor, and Onen (2003) highlighted systemic barriers to inclusion, such as large class sizes, inadequate resources, and inflexible curricula. Despite these obstacles, some schools have managed to implement successful practices through community partnerships and localized innovation. Similarly, Kotele (2010) documented a pilot program in a socio-economically disadvantaged area of South Africa that successfully designed and implemented an inclusive curriculum. The program's success was attributed to strong leadership, teacher collaboration, and a commitment to adapting instructional methods to meet learners' diverse needs.

Kibuuka (2017) and Lodge and Lynch (2004) emphasized the role of teacher beliefs in shaping inclusive practices. Teachers who held positive attitudes toward students with speech and language impairments were more likely to implement supportive teaching strategies. These studies suggest that altering teachers' beliefs through reflective practice, mentorship, and exposure to inclusive success stories is a powerful lever for change.

Furthermore, Lunga (2015) explored the perceptions of Australian primary school teachers and found a general openness to inclusion, though concerns about time constraints and classroom management persisted. This mirrors the findings of McConkey and Bradley (2017), who evaluated the implementation of inclusive education in South Africa's Nkangala region. Their work emphasized that successful inclusion depends not only on teacher readiness but also on the availability of support personnel, learning materials, and infrastructure.

Technology and innovation also play a critical role in inclusive education. While not the central focus of most studies, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the use of educational technology, with mixed results. Jackson and Bowden (2020) reported that many students with disabilities lacked access to the necessary devices and accommodations for remote learning. This highlights the importance of designing digital tools and curricula with accessibility in mind.

Inclusive pedagogy is most effective when it moves beyond a one-size-fits-all approach and instead fosters an ethos of flexibility, empathy, and responsiveness. As the studies reviewed demonstrate, inclusive education is not a singular method but a constellation of strategies that evolve according to context, culture, and the unique needs of learners. To sustain meaningful inclusion, educational systems must invest in teacher training, school-wide frameworks like PBIS, and curriculum reforms that prioritize diversity and equity.

Conclusion:

The pursuit of inclusive education remains both a pressing necessity and a formidable challenge in the post-pandemic world. While significant strides have been made globally, systemic inequities, persistent cultural stigmas, and inadequate teacher preparation continue to undermine the realization of fully inclusive learning environments. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed and, in many cases, deepened educational disparities, particularly for students with disabilities and other marginalized groups. However, it also reignited global conversations about educational justice, accessibility, and the need for adaptive and equitable pedagogical models.

The findings presented in this study emphasize the multifaceted nature of inclusive education. It is not simply about placing students with diverse needs into general education classrooms, but about restructuring teaching methods, rethinking curriculum design, and transforming school cultures to foster genuine belonging and participation for all learners. Research from diverse contexts—from Ghana and Bangladesh to Norway and South Africa—demonstrates

that inclusive education is both possible and beneficial when it is supported by informed, committed educators and responsive policy frameworks.

Moving forward, inclusive education must be guided by policies that are contextually grounded, culturally relevant, and pedagogically sound. It also requires the integration of technology not as a substitute for human interaction, but as a powerful tool for accessibility, differentiation, and engagement. Teacher training programs must prioritize practical, hands-on experience with inclusive strategies and cultivate a mindset of empathy, flexibility, and collaboration.

Most importantly, inclusive education must be viewed as a moral imperative—rooted in the principles of equity, human rights, and social justice. Achieving this goal demands a sustained global commitment from governments, educational institutions, communities, and stakeholders at all levels. Only by embracing the diversity of learners and addressing the systemic barriers they face can we build educational systems that are truly inclusive, resilient, and transformative in the face of future challenges. Inclusive education is not merely an ideal—it is a path toward a more just and equitable world.

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