



Understanding Learning Differences Across Schools2030 Contexts



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Executive Summary

This report presents an analysis of policies and practices on learning differences and inclusion across Schools2030 programme countries – Afghanistan, Brazil, India, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Portugal, Pakistan, Tanzania and Uganda. The report aims to document for each of the countries studied: the current policy landscape relating to inclusion and learning differences, current conceptualisations and definitions of inclusive education and learning differences, attitudes to disability, teacher training provision on inclusive practice, service provision for learners with disabilities in schools, and diagnostic practice for learning disabilities and challenges faced.

Schools2030 is a ten-year participatory learning improvement programme based in 1,000 government schools across ten countries. The programme operates in some of the most remote and marginalised communities characterised by low learning outcomes and low resources, where recognition of learning differences is typically limited. Many students in these communities face multiple, overlapping factors that too often constitute barriers to their learning including gender, ethnicity, language and disability. Whilst intentional efforts to meet Sustainable Development Goal 4 have brought about increased attention to matters of inclusion, laws remain in place in many countries around the world that make provisions for educating learners with disabilities in either segregated or integrated settings. This report seeks to address gaps in our understanding about how learning differences are understood and what provisions are in place to support students with learning differences through national-level policies and school-level practices.

The report comprises findings from a literature review of academic and grey literature as well as qualitative data gathered through questionnaires, focus group discussions and key informant interviews with teachers, Schools2030 programme staff and learning assessment experts across each context studied. The report is organised into nine chapters, one for each of the Schools2030 programme countries studied.

Each country chapter includes the following sections:

- 1. Introduction and overview of terminology and definitions commonly used in that context
- 2. Quantitative data on the number of students with learning differences in the country
- 3. Policy and legislation on inclusive education for students with learning differences
- 4. Teacher training provision in support of students with learning differences
- 5. Diagnostic approaches and tools available
- 6. Attitudes and awareness about learning differences
- 7. School-level provision for students with learning differences
- 8. Country-specific challenges and priorities

Each chapter is also strengthened with the addition of quotes and reflections from teachers and other key informants based in each country.

This research has found that inclusive education features prominently as a policy priority across the countries studied, and that there is a general movement across these geographies towards conceptualising inclusive education in policy as the removal of barriers to learning for all children. Nevertheless, initiatives across these contexts to operationalise inclusive learning, including the systematic support of those with learning differences, are largely not yet commensurate with the ambitions laid out in policy. This is due to many common factors, including limited awareness of learning differences within schools and the wider communities, a lack of adequate support and training for teachers, a lack of funding for education more broadly and for inclusive education specifically, as well as the presence of other compounding socio-economic challenges.

As a result, this report makes five key recommendations to bridge the policy-practice gap:

- 1. Strengthen teacher training provision**
Teacher professional education models should incorporate content on inclusive education in compulsory pre- and in-service teacher training, and should be oriented towards practice in the classroom.
- 2. Engage with parents and the community**
Awareness raising activities on the rights of children with disabilities should be increased to combat stigmatising attitudes towards those with disabilities amongst parents and communities.
- 3. Invest in human resource, infrastructure and equipment for schools**
Attention should be given to address teacher shortages, and investment directed at creating accessible learning environments.
- 4. Invest in data reporting, evidence and research to guide interventions**
More research on disability and inclusion is needed in the given contexts, as well as investment in developing data reporting infrastructure and a commitment to acting on evidence.
- 5. Strengthen diagnostic systems**
Investment should be made in strengthening diagnostic systems – specifically in better integrating health and education services, in developing context appropriate tools and in building expertise of specific learning disabilities.

Introduction

This report is the result of a collaboration between [Oak Foundation](#) and [Schools2030](#). Schools2030 is the flagship education programme of the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF). The programme operates across ten countries, in the regions of Central and South Asia, East Africa, in Portugal and in Brazil. In these contexts, Schools2030 works in some of the most remote and marginalised communities characterised by low learning outcomes, low resources and low access to education technologies. By fostering innovation through human-centred design, the programme aims to ensure that all learners have the opportunity to acquire the skills, knowledge, attitudes and values necessary to become contributing members of society. AKF has a long-standing commitment to promoting pluralism, with a view towards positively engaging with differences and diversity. As such, we are particularly interested to better understand how learning differences are perceived, as well as the support and provision available to students within the learning differences population across the contexts where Schools2030 works.

Oak Foundation's [Learning Differences Programme](#) strategically partners with and invests in not-for-profit organisations that improve education for students with learning differences. For Oak Foundation, the learning differences population includes students who have specific learning disabilities (such as dyslexia, dyscalculia and dysgraphia) as well as individuals who may have other related neurological processing challenges that can impact learning (such as attention deficits, sensory processing disorders and executive function challenges).

This report aims to document for each of the countries studied:

- the current policy landscape relating to inclusion and learning differences
- current conceptualisations and definitions of inclusive education and learning differences
- attitudes to disability
- teacher training provision on inclusive practice
- service provision for learners with disabilities in schools
- diagnostic practice for learning disabilities
- challenges faced

The report comprises findings from a literature review of academic and grey literature as well as qualitative data gathered through questionnaires, focus group discussions and key informant interviews with teachers, Schools2030 programme staff and learning assessment experts across the nine countries studied. Data was also collected from Tajikistan and is currently being discussed with the stakeholders. The report will be updated once the data from Tajikistan is finalised. All attempts have been made to report accurate information, though findings are informed by the qualitative data gathered from respondents who are not experts in the area of inclusive education and learning differences.

This report has drawn heavily on information provided by the [Profiles Enhancing Education Reviews](#) (PEER) website. PEER provides

comprehensive descriptions of countries' education legislation and policies related to the themes of the Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report.

The Global Education Monitoring Report has not participated in, approved, endorsed or otherwise supported this report, nor do we have any affiliation with PEER (or the Global Education Monitoring Report).

Global discourse on inclusive education and disability

Inclusive education has become a policy priority championed by donors, international organisations and governments across the globe. International documentation promotes inclusive education as a process of transformation that recognises the diverse needs of learners and seeks to remove barriers that prevent some from accessing quality education. The focus on inclusion, which has been given increased attention through efforts to meet Sustainable Development Goal 4, has brought about a concerted effort to include children with disabilities within the education system. Global treaties and declarations over the past decades such as the [Education for All](#) commitment (1990), the [Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs](#) Education (1994), the [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (2006) and the Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (2015) have brought about a shift in approaches to the education

of learners with disabilities from one of segregation, to integration and ultimately towards inclusion.¹

From the 1950s, educational approaches were dominated by traditional medical views of disability, resulting in disabled learners often being placed in separate institutions outside of mainstream schools. From the late 1980s, this was replaced with a model of integration whereby learners with disabilities were educated within mainstream schools but may have followed a different curriculum pathway or attended special classes. However, the expectation was that they would integrate into the regular school environment. This approach wasn't deemed sufficient or equitable given that disabled students would simply be sharing a space with other learners, but not accessing the same opportunities for learning. Inclusion, on the other hand, constitutes an approach in which education systems are structured in a way that enables all children to feel they belong. To achieve this goal, this requires schools and education providers to structure their provision in a way that meets the diverse needs of a diversity of learners. Inclusion approaches started to be fostered from the 1990s and into the 2000s.

Similar to the way understanding of inclusive education has shifted, understanding of disability has also evolved over the years. Traditionally, disability had been conceptualised according to a medical model that saw disabilities as conditions that need to be treated or cured by health professionals. The more recent social model sees disability result as an interaction between a person's

physical, intellectual, sensory or mental health impairments and the surrounding social and cultural environment.

This is in line with the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) definition, which regards disability as a condition related to three different yet interconnected dimensions; impairment, activity limitation and participation restriction.²

However, these shifts in approaches promoted through global declarations do not necessarily mean that governments have yet adopted a truly inclusive approach, or that inclusive education policies that are in place are effectively being implemented. Indeed, recent UNESCO statistics reveal that laws in 25% of countries emphasise a segregated approach, 10% promote integration and 17% promote

inclusive education.³

What's more, UNESCO also report that primary age children with disabilities are more likely to be out of school and less likely to complete their education than those without disabilities.⁴

Definitions and terms used

UNESCO defines inclusive education as follows:

‘Inclusion is seen as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content,

approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children.’⁵

Whilst global documents guide the definition of inclusive education, a global understanding of disability and the different types of disability are not so cohesive. This report is concerned with understanding current policy and practice as related to inclusive education and learning differences – namely learning disabilities (such as dyslexia, dyscalculia and dysgraphia) and associated neurological processing challenges.

However, learning differences are not necessarily understood in the same way across contexts. Various data sources and stakeholders have been consulted to inform this report with

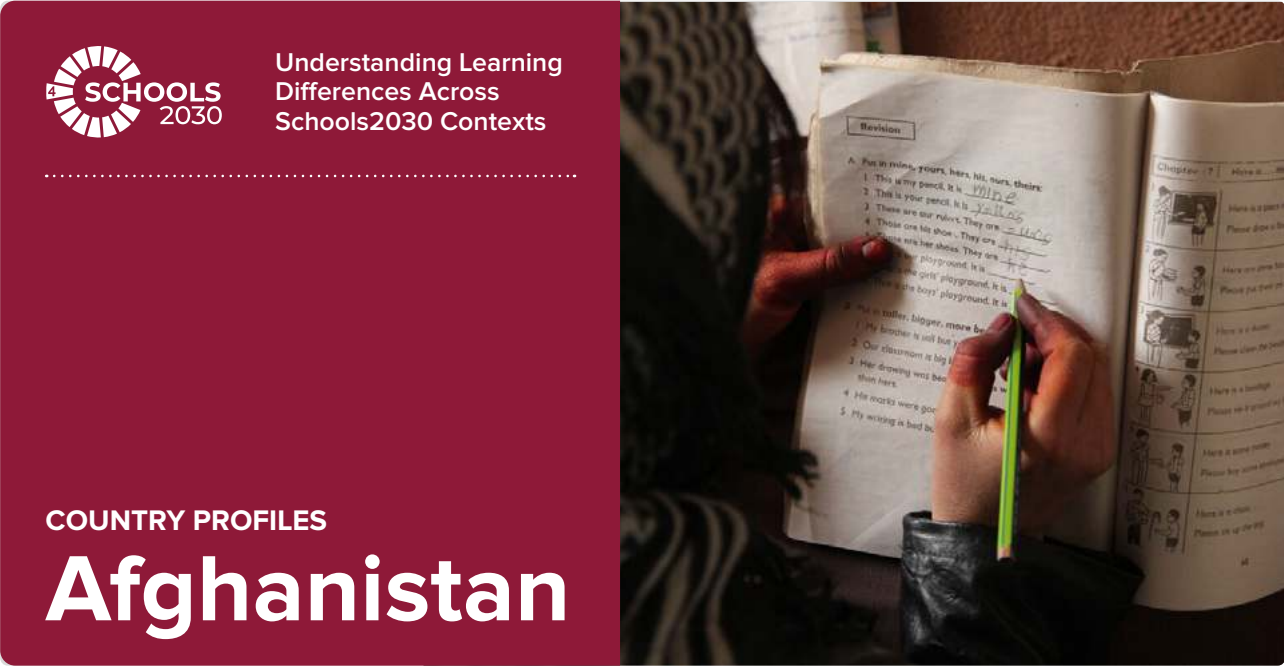
the acknowledgement that terms such as ‘learning differences’ and ‘learning disabilities’ may carry different meanings. Searches of the literature using the term ‘learning differences’ yielded few relevant results. Consequently, it was decided to adopt ‘learning disabilities’ as the main term of inquiry. With the intention of not being overly prescriptive, for the purpose of this report we understood this to refer to a range of cognitive, developmental and intellectual impairments.

Each country chapter in this report seeks to outline current understandings of inclusive education and learning differences, as well as the most frequently used terminology in an attempt to better understand contextualised interpretations.

It is our hope that this contributes to a better understanding of the diversity of learners that

¹ Olipa & Malenye, 2020. ² For more information, see p12 of the Global Education Monitoring Report 2020 and p55 of Situation Analysis of Children with Disabilities in Kosovo. ³ UNESCO, 2020. ⁴ UNESCO-UIS, 2018. ⁵ UNESCO, 2005.





Overview: Defining the concept and terminology of inclusive education

Afghanistan has experienced conflict over the past three decades and now finds itself in a situation of protracted crisis. The regime change in August of 2021 has precipitated uncertainty and a lack of a clear legal framework within which to operate. In the last twenty years, huge gains have been made in school enrolment, with a large focus placed on the enrolment of girls who were previously excluded from school. Between 2000 and 2019, participation in education increased from less than one million in school (less than ten per cent of whom were girls) to around 9.9 million (39 per cent of whom were girls).⁶ The education system in Afghanistan allows access to education via schools and community-based education. In recent years, inclusive education has been understood as an ‘approach to whole school improvement that will ensure that national

strategies for Education for All are really for all’, whilst an inclusive education system has been considered to be one that ‘ensures that all children have equal access to quality education in their community schools regardless of their gender, abilities, disabilities, backgrounds, health conditions and circumstances.’⁷ Groups considered in need of special attention and/or resources include children with different language backgrounds, children with disabilities, gifted and talented students, girls and nomadic children, as specified in the 2004 Constitution and the 2008 Education Law.⁸ With this understanding of inclusive education, hundreds of children with disabilities have enrolled in regular community schools thanks to the provision of integrated education

programmes, and Community Rehabilitation Development Centres were established throughout Afghanistan catering for children, youth and adults with disabilities.⁹ Sign language and braille translated curricula and teacher training materials have been developed and a small number of special education schools exist in Kabul.¹⁰

Despite these positive steps forward, faced with ongoing instability, high levels of poverty and stigmatising traditional beliefs, evidence suggests that children with disabilities, those in remote rural areas from poor families, girls and ethnic minorities have lower school enrolment rates and higher rates of repetition and drop out before finishing school.¹¹

Views from teachers and programme staff

The teachers consulted as part of this study understood inclusive education to mean that all students regardless of gender, ethnicity, economic background, language or learning level could come to school and learn. They understood special education to be more targeted, and specifically for students with disabilities such as deafness or blindness. AKF staff reported that the most commonly used terms to describe students with disabilities were either ‘**child with disability**’ (CWD), ‘**girl with disability**’ (GWD), or ‘**person with disability**’ (PWD). It was also reported that teachers would commonly use terms such as ‘low’ or ‘late learner’ to refer to those children who are behind in class, but that they would not use these in front of the child to whom they are referring.

Teachers commented that they sometimes use the term ‘**person in need**’, but that they don’t use the name of the disability in the class to avoid negatively impacting the students’ self-esteem, which may lead to dropping out of school.

‘I don’t call students by the name of their disability because it weakens the student’s morale and may even cause them to drop out of school.’

High school teacher, Baghlan

6 Afghanistan Education Cluster, 2022 | 7 Afghanistan - Inclusion chapter, Profiles Enhancing Education Reviews (PEER), <https://www.education-profiles.org>, Retrieved May 2022 (Hereafter: Afghanistan – Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022) | 8 Afghanistan – Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022 | 9 Afghanistan – Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022 | 10 Afghanistan Education Cluster, 2022 | 11 Trani et al., 2019

Country profiles | Afghanistan

Sadly, the effects of ongoing conflict imply that Afghan children are at a high risk of either being born with or acquiring a primary or secondary disability.¹² It is reported that statistics on the number of children with disabilities in Afghanistan are not reliable, however a recent estimate suggests up to 17 per cent of Afghanistan's children live with some form of disability.¹³ There is no data related to children with the specific learning needs ADHD/ADD or autism, nor related to developmental impairment or deaf-blindness.¹⁴

Estimates vary on the proportion of students with disabilities who are not attending school. However, the number is expected to be high with the Ministry of Education estimating that 75 per cent of school-aged children with disabilities have never accessed education.¹⁵

According to Accessibility Organizations for Afghan Disabled, 95% of children with disabilities in Afghanistan do not attend schools due to inaccessible environments.¹⁶

A recent study found that even with the increase in the proportion of village schools, access to schooling for disabled children declined between 2005 and 2013.¹⁷ Even so, it has been reported that children with physical disabilities are much more likely to attend school than children with mental and cognitive disabilities.¹⁸ Despite these reports, AKF staff stated that they see a relatively high number of children with disabilities enrolled and attending school in regular classes.

support units at provincial and district level to progressively implement inclusive education, as well as to increase literacy rates particularly for females and people with disabilities, through the 2013 National Literacy Strategy.²¹

The Education Act alludes to provision in public schools for outstanding, gifted and talented students and students with special needs, and the 2009 document Needs and Rights Assessment: Inclusive Education in Afghanistan called for children with and without disabilities to attend the same schools and follow the same curriculum.²²

The [Afghanistan Education Sector Transitional Framework](#) (AESTF) is the current plan being used in place of the NESP being used by

education implementers (international donors and NGOs) in the country. Developed by the Development Partners Group and Education Cluster, this framework has amongst its aims to advance understanding of equity and inclusion challenges.

The main cross-cutting theme of the AESTF is equity and inclusion and Strategic Goal 1 is 'Sustain or improve access to safe, inclusive learning environments for all learners'.²³

AKF staff noted that whilst the new Minister of Education has announced that all policies previously developed would hold, it remains unclear if the new government will continue to implement these or if they will develop new policies.



Policy and legislative commitments

Afghanistan has ratified various international documents, including the UN Convention against Discrimination in Education, and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The 2004 Constitution contains articles to uphold these conventions, such as Article 22, which states that 'any kind of discrimination and distinction between citizens of Afghanistan is forbidden', and Article 53 which affirms that the State shall 'adopt necessary measures [...] for reintegration of the disabled and handicapped persons and their

active participation in society'.¹⁹ Until the recent regime change, the 2017–21 National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) formed the framework for implementation of the Education Law (2008). Equitable access was featured as one of three core objectives, and it included strategies directed at learners with special needs, internally displaced persons, returnees and other disadvantaged groups to promote inclusion.²⁰ The former government laid plans in the Inclusive and Child-Friendly Education Policy to establish resource centres and



Teacher training on inclusive education

A search of the literature found that a UNESCO developed course on creating inclusive learning environments had been translated into Dari and Pashto for operation in Afghanistan, and a new course was being developed in 2019 to be incorporated into the education plan as a compulsory credit course.²⁴ The state also sought to make the teaching profession itself more inclusive, with ambitions outlined in the education strategic plan to increase the number of female teachers, and especially in rural areas.²⁵

However, AKF staff commented that no state implemented training had been conducted at the school, district or community level for government schools covering inclusive education.

Training may have been provided by NGOs on inclusive education in some districts. For example, AKF have run training on inclusive education in targeted areas for community-based teachers, covering the different types of disability and how to support children with disabilities.

Country profiles | Afghanistan

Teachers reported that they had received some training (for example, through attendance at workshops or seminars) on teaching learners with diverse needs, and those with disabilities such as hearing or visual impairments. Their opinions were mixed as to how useful this training had been.

‘This training is useful to support students without disabilities but not useful for special education or students with disabilities.’

High school teacher, Bamyan

‘I am more aware of the needs of disabled students because of these workshops. But I still need to be trained about this issue.’

High school teacher, Badakhshan

‘Yes, this workshop was very effective because we discussed and learned useful topics related to recognising the types of disabilities of students, how to deal with them in general classes, preparing teaching materials according to the needs of disabled students, and avoiding the negative label of disabled students.’

High school teacher, Baghlan



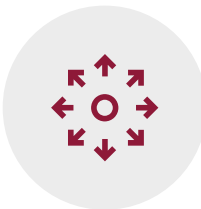
Diagnosis of learning disabilities

In terms of diagnosis of learning disabilities, AKF staff stated that an assessment process doesn’t exist in public schools, however some students may be referred to specialised institutions. Where NGOs have implemented projects for disabled students they may have conducted some kind of diagnostic assessment of the students. When it comes to identifying the needs of students in the classroom, teachers felt that even without diagnostic tools they can identify those with disabilities that are in need. On identifying these students, they try to spend more time with them, or nominate a student to support them if they do not have time themselves.

‘The first step to help disabled children is to make both ourselves and [other] students understand that they should call the disabled child by their name and not over-emphasise their disability. We should also encourage students in the class activities and should have patience and tolerance for the disabled students during their activities in the class.’

High school teacher, Bamyan

Without the existence of diagnostic tools, teachers commented that they can only notice a child’s needs through practice and student group work.



Current attitudes and awareness of inclusive practice and disability

AKF staff felt that the level of understanding of disability across the country is low among school principals and community members, given that inclusive education was a recent development in the country. However, community-based teachers in some targeted areas have some knowledge about different types of disability and how to support children with disabilities, as they have received training from AKF.

Nevertheless, regular public awareness campaigns were run under the previous government with the support of international organisations regarding disability rights and education, and public awareness was building, though these activities may have had limited reach to those living in rural and remote areas.

‘The awareness levels of teachers regarding the recognition of different types of disabilities, especially learning disorders, and their diagnosis is relatively low, but teachers can recognise students who have physical disabilities [...] it is very difficult to distinguish that the students are not slow learners, but have reading and writing disorders, which is why their knowledge is low.’

High school teacher, Baghlan

Similarly, teachers felt that there was low awareness of the different types of disabilities in the community, and especially learning disabilities because people don’t have access to much information on the topic. However, some students and teachers have more knowledge about the needs and right of students with disabilities, and in areas where large proportions of the population are educated, there is higher awareness and more favourable attitudes towards those with disabilities.

‘Because in my town a large proportion of people are educated, there is higher awareness and more favourable attitudes towards those with disabilities – in education for example they believe special care must be given to these individuals.’

High school teacher, Badakhshan

10 Afghanistan Education Cluster, 2022 | 11 Trani et al., 2019 | 12 Whittaker & Wood, 2022 | 13 Whittaker & Wood, 2022 | 14 Afghanistan – Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022 | 15 Ministry of Education, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan & UNICEF, 2018 | 16 Afghanistan – Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022 | 17 Trani et al., 2019 | 18 Whittaker & Wood, 2022 | 19 Afghanistan – Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022 | 20 Afghanistan – Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022 | 21 Afghanistan – Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022 | 22 Afghanistan – Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022 | 23 Afghanistan Education Cluster, 2022 | 24 Afghanistan – Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022 | 25 Afghanistan – Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022

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Education provision, services and support for learners with disabilities

AKF staff stated that they see a relatively high number of children with disabilities attending school and learning in regular classes even though no inclusive education initiatives had yet been implemented by the Ministry of Education for government schools, though in remote areas disabled students may not attend in such high numbers. Additionally, there are specialist schools for learners with visual or hearing impairments supported by NGOs that some learners may be able to access. Nevertheless, it was reported that there is a tendency for those with more severe disabilities to drop out before entering secondary school. Sometimes this happens because of stigmatising attitudes and behaviours from other students and families.

Teachers, on the other hand, gave a more mixed response as to whether disabled students study in regular classrooms although did comment that they have students with disabilities in their classrooms. They identified speech, language and hearing impairments as the disabilities students in their classrooms have. One teacher commented that students with disabilities sometimes face ridicule from other students at school, which can put them off their studies. For this reason, one teacher thought that special education should be delivered in specific places away from regular classes, so that ‘children with learning disabilities [can] be on their own and away from being annoyed by their classmates’. (High school teacher, Badakhshan)

One teacher alluded to the fact that they have limited time to give attention to disabled students, and that there is a lack of equipment and facilities in their school. This teacher called for specialised teachers to teach students with disabilities. Another teacher felt that engaging more closely with families would help to encourage more disabled children into school.

‘The curriculum has some problems, dedicated time for teaching students with disabilities is very limited, those students need more time than other students and teachers should spend more time with students. Special equipment and facilities have been not considered for their needs. Professional teachers are needed for students with disabilities.’

High school teacher, Bamyan



Challenges & priorities

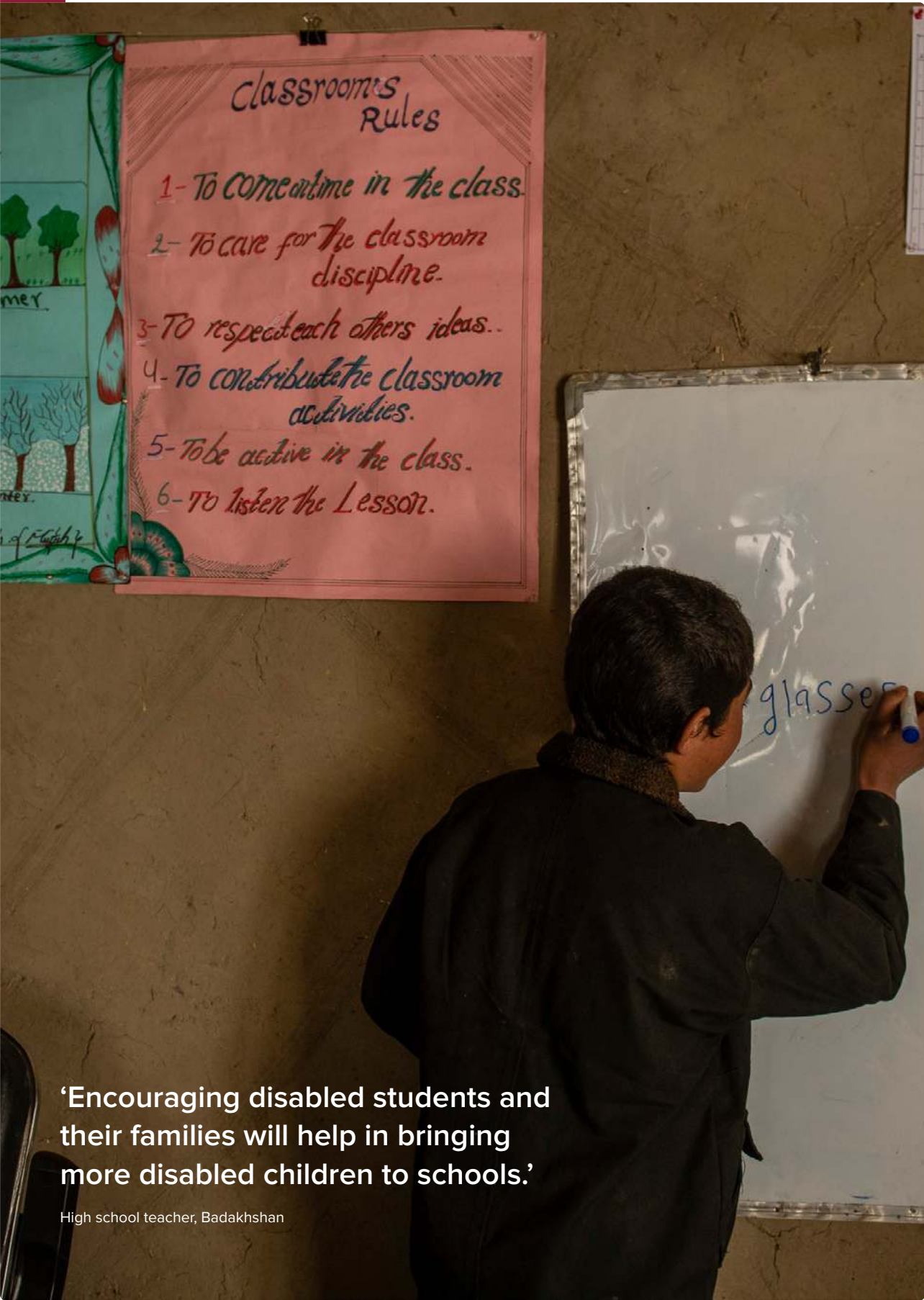
Against a backdrop of ongoing political instability and high numbers of out-of-school children, the country’s limited infrastructure and stigmatising beliefs towards disability present challenges for the advancement of inclusive education. Covid lockdowns followed by the regime change in August 2021 have proved extremely disruptive to children’s education. Complex sanctions introduced following this change has resulted in the suspension of much external cooperation that the education system depended on. Approximately four million school-age children remain out of school, many of whom are in remote and rural areas, and of which over two million are girls.²⁶

Schools are not physically accessible for children with physical disabilities, and there is a lack of assistive devices and strategies that aid the inclusion of children with disabilities in learning.²⁷ What’s more, beliefs at the community level are still highly stigmatising of disability, with derogatory terms being used to refer to those with impairments or learning disabilities.²⁸ A recent report from UNICEF Innocenti calls for efforts seeking to improve provision for these learners to tackle such

negative attitudes which may be preventing students from enrolling in school in the first place.²⁹ Although guidelines for including children with disabilities have been developed by the Interagency Network on Education in Emergencies (INEE), the literature points to a knowledge gap on how to promote inclusion of children with disabilities in conflict settings presents a wider obstacle to making meaningful advancements.³⁰

AKF staff and teachers highlighted a particular need for teacher capacity building, awareness raising and educational materials for disabled learners. They called for a needs assessment to be conducted to provide accurate data and felt that reviewing the policies and procedures on inclusive education developed thus far by NGOs for the Afghanistan context would be helpful to inform a negotiation with the new authorities on how to better support the different needs of children.

²⁶ Afghanistan Education Cluster, 2022 | ²⁷ Afghanistan Education Cluster, 2022 | ²⁸ Whittaker & Wood, 2022 | ²⁹ Whittaker & Wood, 2022 | ³⁰ Trani et al., 2019 | ³¹ In Brazil Schools2030 is implemented by partner organisation Ashoka Brazil and therefore Ashoka staff participated in the focus group discussion with teachers.



‘Encouraging disabled students and their families will help in bringing more disabled children to schools.’

High school teacher, Badakhshan



Overview: Defining the concept and terminology of inclusive education

The concept of inclusive education in Brazil has historically been associated with special education, having been restricted to students with disabilities, those with general developmental disorders and gifted or high ability students. This concept was revisited with the [National Education Plan](#) of 2014 which aimed to ensure an inclusive educational system as relevant to various education modalities, including special education, rural education, quilombola education (aimed at descendants of enslaved Africans brought to Brazil), indigenous education, youth and adult education, and professional education. The term ‘special educational needs’ was adopted followed the Salamanca Declaration into the legal organisational framework of Brazilian education, however it has now fallen out of use, having been removed from laws in 2013 and

replaced by the expression ‘students with disabilities, general developmental disorders and high abilities or giftedness’. An alignment of Brazilian legislation with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has shifted the focus from solutions exclusively targeting impairments of students with disabilities to the overall barriers to learning. Inclusive education is now understood as an expansion of the quality of education for all, and no longer as education aimed at the educational needs of a specific group. Brazil uses the following definition of learning disabilities, ‘Significant limitations of intellectual functioning and adaptive behaviour as expressed in practical, social, and conceptual skills originating before the age of 18’³², as influenced by the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.

Country profiles | Brazil

Views from teachers and programme staff

Teachers and Ashoka staff concurred that inclusive education has become part of discourse on equitable education in Brazil. They felt that there is now much more open discussion about indigenous rights and indigenous culture, and about recognising the diversity of Brazil within the education system. Because of this, new laws and policies have been put into place, including a law that requires schools to teach about other histories and cultures of Brazil.

One teacher explained that working at an ‘escola pluricultural’, or multicultural school, meant that they had a particular focus on celebrating the diversity that is represented in the school, to emphasise that students from all backgrounds are welcome. Another teacher who is indigenous and teaches at an indigenous school, explained that these had been known as rural schools prior to 1997.

Recognising them as indigenous, rather than rural schools was felt to give a sense of identity to the communities, students and teachers attending and working in these schools.

‘Now children are learning about indigenous culture within an indigenous context. Using the word ‘indigenous’ first of all is important to reclaim our identity – the word indigenous should come first rather than second, as a noun not an adjective.’

Primary school teacher, Amazonas

Beyond being conceived of a way of celebrating the ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity of the country, the concept of inclusive education also encompasses the inclusion of children with disabilities. One of the teachers explained that the term ‘special’ is used to refer to students with disabilities, but that she doesn’t like to use it because of the way it can make children feel stigmatised. She prefers to use ‘children with special needs’.

‘The term ‘special’ is used in schools, however I don’t like to use it because it makes these children feel stigmatised.’

Primary school teacher, Goiás



Quantifying learners with learning disabilities

Data from the 2010 census suggests that approximately 1.4% of the 45.6 million people with a disability have a declared learning or mental disability. However, this figure has been disputed amid criticism of the assessment instrument used.³³

Results from the 2018 school census report that the number of enrolments in special education

either in regular or exclusive classes saw an increase of 33.32% compared to 2014.³⁴ This is likely as a result of the mandate from the National Policy on Special Education from the Perspective of Inclusive Education which encouraged schools to adopt measures to ensure access to special education in regular education classes.



Policy and legislative commitments

Key legislation includes the [National Policy on Special Education from the Perspective of Inclusive Education](#) (2008), which encouraged state and municipal education systems to take concrete actions, especially in terms of funding and continuing education, to ensure access and improve retention and achievement of students who qualify for the special education modality in regular education classes. Brazil ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2008, and developed the [Brazilian Law of Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities](#) (2015), which contextualised the requirements

of the convention to the Brazilian context. This law states that public authorities are responsible for ensuring, implementing and monitoring inclusive education at all levels and modalities by offering accessibility services and resources that eliminate barriers and promote full inclusion. This is consistent with goal 4 of the National Education Plan of 2014, whose aim is to universalise access to education for those with disabilities, developmental disorders and giftedness, preferably within multifunctional regular classes.³⁵

32 Carvalho & Forrester-Jones, in press | 33 Carvalho & Forrester-Jones, in press | 34 Brazil - Inclusion chapter, Profiles Enhancing Education Reviews (PEER), <https://www.education-profiles.org>. Retrieved May 2022 (hereafter Brazil – Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022)

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Until its closure in 2019, the Secretariat of Continuing Education, Literacy, Diversity and Inclusion (SECADI) was the body responsible for establishing policies and programmes aimed at

illiterate youth and adults with little schooling as well as for students with disabilities, general developmental disorders and high abilities/ giftedness.



Teacher training on inclusive education

From 2007, teacher training programmes in special education were developed at the national level.³⁶ Further to this, goal 15 of the 2014 National Education Plan speaks of aims to introduce specific training programmes for rural schools, indigenous and quilombola communities and for special education.³⁷ Since the introduction of Brazil’s National Common Curricular Base from 2017-8, guidelines for teacher professional education have

emphasised a need for practical experience, innovation and evidence-based practice.³⁸ However, teachers and Ashoka staff consulted for this study stated they had little or no instruction on inclusive education or strategies to support learners with disabilities as part of their pre-service teacher training. Indeed, the 2020 Global Education Monitoring Report also found that teachers feel a need for better training provision, with over 50% of

teachers in Brazil reporting a high need for professional development on teaching students with special needs.³⁹

‘I had no training in this when I was training to be a teacher - I didn’t know what to do with these children in my classroom or how to include children with disabilities and special needs.’

Ashoka staff member

One teacher expressed that from her experience of her pre-service training between 2002-06, it was as if training was designed to prepare teachers for an “ideal school” where there are no learners with any sort of difficulties. Although inclusive education may now be included as a subject in training curricula and is raising awareness, respondents felt that this isn’t equipping teachers with practical know-how on how to implement this in daily practice in the classroom.



Diagnosis of learning disabilities

A search of the literature revealed that most of the special education services and support available for students with learning disabilities originated in social movements which are mostly dependent on public fundraising, such as the Sociedade Pestalozzi and Associação dos Pais e Amigos dos Excepcionais (APAE). These services are mostly offered by private providers, with governmental support varying across states and administrations. The low security in funding sources and differing levels of provision often result in an inconsistent assessment process whereby many people with learning disabilities never receive a diagnosis.⁴⁰

Focus group respondents perceived diagnosis as an important procedure for the purpose of allowing people to exercise their right to access public facilities. Teachers felt that a diagnosis

should be a driving force to understand what happens in the classroom, rather than solely a defining characteristic, especially as the role of the school is often to encourage families to act on their rights to access public services. Within school, teachers can make a referral to other professionals if they notice a learner may be struggling due to a learning disability. In the case of the indigenous school, this teacher mentioned that there is no qualified professional to assess and diagnose disabilities at his school, but culturally there are local experts with traditional expertise who know how to identify people with disabilities. The majority of the population are indigenous and there are four co-official languages, however Portuguese is used amongst technical education staff under the Municipal Secretary of Education.

35 Ministry of Education, 2014 | 36 Garcia & Michels, 2021 | 37 Ministry of Education, 2014 | 38 OECD, 2021 | 39 UNESCO, 2020 | 40 Carvalho & Forrester-Jones, in press

Country profiles | Brazil



Current attitudes and awareness of inclusive practice and disability

Focus group respondents perceived there to have been a slow advance in levels of understanding of inclusive education, but to a lesser degree on individual learning differences because education remains very standardised.

‘The education that we live, that we breathe, is still very standardised. It wants everyone to learn at the same time, but our reality in classrooms and schools is a very diverse context.’

Primary school teacher, Goiás

It was felt that inadvertently, bias against those with disabilities persisted, especially given the way some teachers referred to children with disabilities as ‘special’, which can be stigmatising.

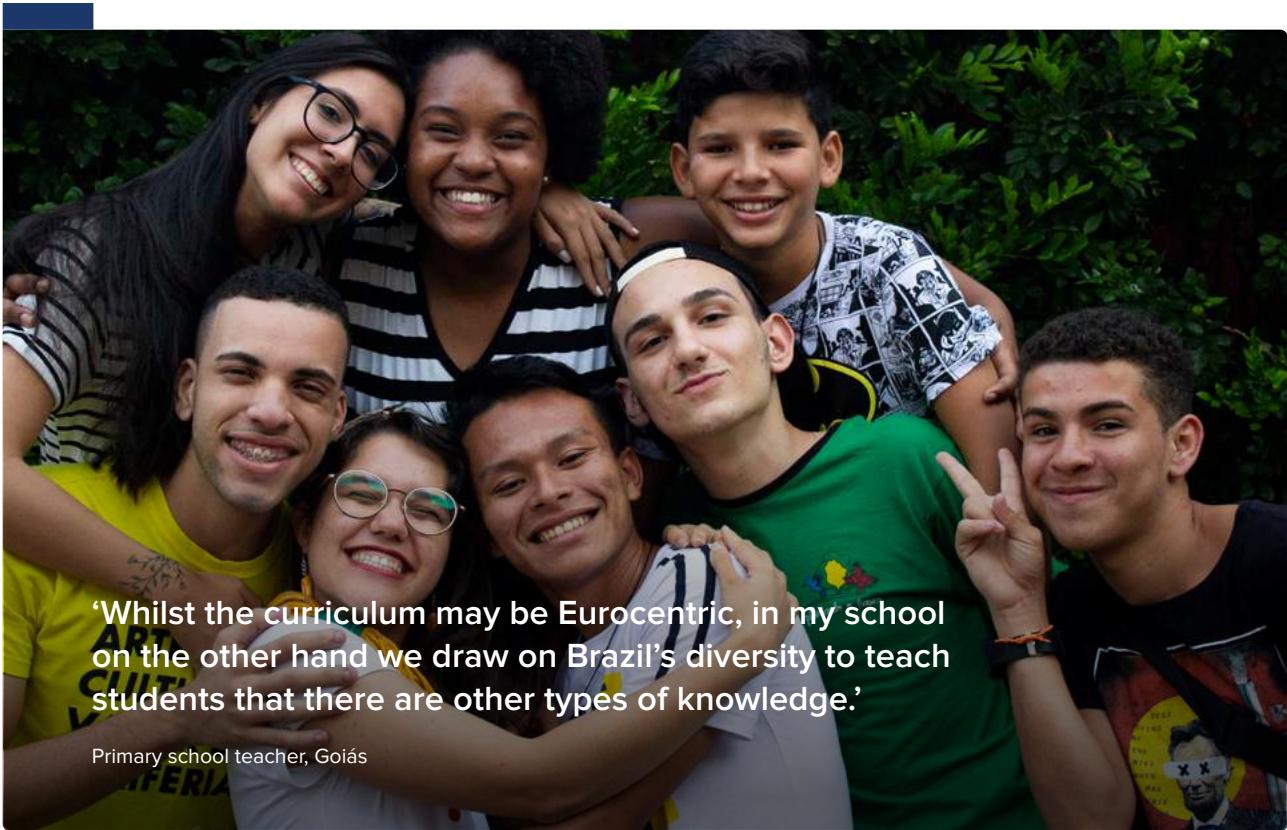
On top of this, the group discussed that persistent racist attitudes in Brazil hamper genuine efforts to increase inclusion and representation of indigenous people within education.



Education provision, services and support for learners with disabilities

Available evidence suggests that there are no specific governmental programmes or services dedicated to those with learning disabilities developed or led at the federal level, with much of the work reliant on private organisations and NGOs.⁴¹ However, there are some initiatives at the state and municipal government level led in collaboration with organisations such as

Ashoka, including the [Movement for Innovation in Education](#).⁴² This was also apparent from the focus group discussion where no mention was made of government provided services in place except those of the innovative movement. It was noted that public schools often lack the physical and human resources necessary to be able to accommodate learners with disabilities.



‘Whilst the curriculum may be Eurocentric, in my school on the other hand we draw on Brazil’s diversity to teach students that there are other types of knowledge.’

Primary school teacher, Goiás

For example, the physical infrastructure is not accessible for those in a wheelchair. Schools within the network that make up the Movement for Innovation in Education tend to have more resources and higher quality human resource to be able to include learners with disabilities.

One teacher commented that they don’t have children with disabilities in their school – however it was unclear if she meant that she is unaware of the number because this isn’t monitored or simply that no disabled students attend. It was reported that indigenous schools are considered objects of inclusion, because the learners and teachers come from a minority community. That said, a teacher at an indigenous school also shared that his school did not have students with special needs either.

Teachers commented that despite conversations around increasing the presence of Brazil’s diversity in the national curriculum, it

largely remained Eurocentric. However, ‘multicultural schools’ and indigenous schools focus on teaching students that there are other types of knowledge.

‘If we are talking about valuing local knowledge and strengthening these practices, I believe that this is happening.’

For example, some points of the common curriculum, such as Portuguese and Mathematics, are being worked on, but without forgetting the particularities of local knowledge.’

Primary school teacher, Amazonas

⁴¹ Carvalho & Forrester-Jones, in press | ⁴² Movimento de Inovação na Educação, a movement made up of a network of schools aiming to transform education through innovative practice: <https://movinovacaonaeducacao.org.br/>

Country profiles | Brazil



Challenges and priority areas

Despite putting in place legislation that is in line with global recommendations on inclusive education, Brazil faces challenges in realising the promises of its policy goals. Insecure and inconsistent funding, as well as a service provision ecosystem dependent on a mix of mainly private and some public services has resulted in blurred accountability and inconsistent support for those with learning disabilities.

In terms of diagnosis and assessment, international diagnostic standards are starting to be used more widely. However, the country has not yet established contextualised standards for individually administered measures for learning disabilities by testing international measures on its own population.⁴³ Presently there is limited evaluation of services for students with learning disabilities, however academic research on disability and inclusive education is growing within Brazil.⁴⁴

These findings were backed by teachers and Ashoka staff, who acknowledged that public schools face challenges in delivering an education that can be fully inclusive of disabled learners. This was felt to be majorly impacted by a lack of adequate human and physical resources. The group called for more investment in pre-service teacher training, as well as in-service training – from their experience they saw that schools with better human resource were much better prepared to support learners with disabilities. With the growing understanding about inclusion, many teachers are now critiquing “the ideal classroom” training that they receive and recognising learning diversity across their student population. However, more needs to be done at the school level to support the roll out of policy initiatives aiming at advancing inclusive education in Brazil.

⁴³ Carvalho & Forrester-Jones, in press | ⁴⁴ Carvalho & Forrester-Jones, in press | ⁴⁵ Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, 2016 | ⁴⁶ Saravanabhavan & Saravanabhavan, 2010 | ⁴⁷ From Standing Outside Classrooms to Learning Within Them: Inclusive Education for Children with Learning Disabilities in India, The Bastion, retrieved May 2022 | ⁴⁸ Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, 2016 | ⁴⁹ Ministry of Human Resource Development, nd | ⁵⁰ India - Inclusion chapter, Profiles Enhancing Education Reviews (PEER), <https://www.education-profiles.org>, Retrieved May 2022 (Hereafter India - Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022)



‘People deconstructed the ideal classroom and the belief that there are no children with difficulties.’

Primary school teacher, Goiás



Overview: Defining the concept and terminology of inclusive education

Inclusive education in India is understood as ‘a system of education wherein students with and without disability learn together and the system of teaching and learning is suitably adapted to meet the learning needs of different types of students with disabilities’, as defined in the 2016 [Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act](#) (RPWD).⁴⁵ Existing legislation limits inclusive education to the education of persons with disabilities, and in practice this has focused mainly on individuals with visible disabilities.⁴⁶ It is only relatively recently that learning disabilities have been officially recognised and researched in India, with an amendment in 2009 to the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995 adding the category of Specific Learning Disabilities.⁴⁷ In the RPWD Act these are defined as ‘a heterogeneous group of conditions wherein there is a deficit in processing language, spoken or written,

that may manifest itself as a difficulty to comprehend, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations and includes such conditions as perceptual disabilities, dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, dyspraxia and developmental aphasia.’⁴⁸ India’s national flagship scheme for school education, [Samagra Shiksha](#), aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education from pre-school to senior secondary stage in accordance with SDG4, and is targeted at disadvantaged groups, such as persons from Scheduled Castes and Tribes, Muslim minorities, landless agricultural workers, children with special needs and transgender children.⁴⁹ In particular, Bihar is one of four states to implement residential bridge courses, which aim to improve access to regular schools for children and youth with disabilities.⁵⁰

Views from teachers and programme staff

AKF staff consulted also felt that inclusive education and special education is mainly thought of as referring to children with disabilities, however it can also encompass other marginalised groups such as minority language speakers. At the conceptual level it means having different groups in the same classroom and same schools learning together.

Staff ruminated on the ideas of special and inclusive education and where they differ and overlap. Special education is more targeted at children with disabilities, where there is a problem of access to education whereas inclusion is about who is already in the classroom. However, socio-cultural as well as economic differences account for marginalised groups that are also excluded from education, affecting cultural and religious minority groups that make up the superdiversity of India.

Whilst policies talk about disabilities and other disadvantaged groups, it was felt that there is inconsistency in the way they are mentioned alongside terms such as special/ inclusive education, meaning policies lack precision. Some commonly used terms include ‘**Children with Disabilities**’ (CWD), ‘**Children with Special Needs**’ (CWSN), and ‘**Specially Enabled Children**’ (SEC).

‘We need to normalise the range of conditions and disabilities in the community, because the way we tend to make it ‘special’ leads to more exclusion.’

AKF India staff member



Quantifying learners with learning disabilities

Given the recent recognition of learning disabilities in the country, there is limited data available. However, UNESCO estimate that approximately 10 to 12% of the student population in India has a learning disability,⁵¹

which equates to four to six students in every average sized classroom.⁵² Studies identify dyslexia as the most common specific learning disability, and it is believed to affect 80% of those identified as learning disabled.⁵³

Country profiles | India



Policy and legislative commitments

The two main laws as related to the protection of students with learning disabilities in education include the 2009 [Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act](#) (RTE) Act, and the 2016 [Right of Persons with Disabilities \(RPWD\) Act](#). The RTE Act legislates for special protection to be provided to disadvantaged groups and children belonging to ‘weaker sections’, such as those whose parents or guardians earn an annual income below a minimum threshold.⁵⁴ The RPWD Act requires all education institutions that are funded or recognised by local authorities to provide inclusive education to children with disabilities. This includes admitting them without discrimination and ensuring school infrastructure and accommodation is accessible,

with individualised support provided as necessary.⁵⁵ However in terms of a child’s learning, the act is unclear about diagnosis, pedagogical methods or assessment that may be appropriate for these groups.⁵⁶ The National Education Policy 2020 recognises that ‘[m]ost classrooms have children with specific learning disabilities who need continuous support.’⁵⁷ Importantly, the policy emphasises a need for content on how to teach children with specific disabilities to become integral to all teacher education programmes. It further alludes to plans to adopt flexible curricula and develop appropriate assessment guidelines and tools for students with learning disabilities. These recommendations are being incorporated into the national Samagra Shiksha programme.



Teacher training provision on inclusive education

In 2019, the Rehabilitation Council of India, the body responsible for special education, recognised over 60 pre-service teacher training programmes that focus on the education of children with disabilities. In Bihar in particular, there are two training modules dedicated to raising awareness of in-service teachers of upper primary classes to integrating disabled and non-disabled learners in the classroom.⁵⁸

Building on this, AKF staff confirmed that inclusive education and how teachers can address disability features in in-service and pre-service teacher training. They explained that content on inclusive education practice was introduced for teachers as an elective option for in-service training just prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, they had the impression that teachers generally prefer to choose subject content such as Maths or Science, over a topic

such as inclusive education. Though in-service training exposes teachers to certain types of inclusion challenges and some content on learning disabilities, in general teachers do not develop expertise in this. It was stated that there are very few teachers who have a specialisation in inclusive practice and working with students with disabilities. In private schools it is more common that teachers have attended courses on inclusive practices, however in government schools not many teachers will have been trained on this or had exposure in supporting disabled students. Overall, respondents mentioned that content on learning disabilities is not part of general teacher education, with the majority of the teacher education programmes offering optional courses only on supporting learners with disabilities.



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Diagnosis of learning disabilities

Whilst the working definition and assessment practices used to identify learning disabilities are largely influenced by Western understanding of learning disabilities, understanding and capacity for learning disability diagnosis is growing, with the establishment in 2015 of the Dyslexia Assessment for Languages of India (DALI), the first dyslexia assessment tool contextualised to Indian needs, which is available in multiple regional languages.⁵⁹

Even with these positive developments, staff pointed out that the effectiveness of the current system relies on the proficiency of teachers to be able to use and understand diagnostic tools.

AKF staff explained that there is an annual assessment process which is supposed to happen through teacher administered tools in schools. Once a learner is diagnosed, their care can then be managed by the local district, though gaining access to qualified experts is not easy for those on limited means. They felt that teachers’ limited preparedness and time means that the tools are little used in practice. On top of this, little interest is shown from parents.

‘For most of the different kinds of learning disabilities most of the time they go undiagnosed.’

AKF India staff member

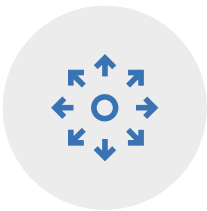
‘For a state like Bihar with a huge population it’s not easy to actually administer these kinds of tests. Teachers are given assessment tools but the problem lies again in the execution of the implementation.’

AKF India staff member

‘In country we have different kinds of tools for multiple kind of disabilities at different levels- for that we are prepared. Teachers’ capacity to use those tools is where we are struggling.’

AKF India staff member

⁵¹ Learning Disabilities - What, Why and How?, UNESCO Mahatma Gandhi Institute for Education of Peace and Sustainability Studies, 2022 | ⁵² From Standing Outside Classrooms to Learning Within Them: Inclusive Education for Children with Learning Disabilities in India, The Bastion, May 2022 | ⁵³ Saravanabhavan & Saravanabhavan, 2010 | ⁵⁴ Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2009 | ⁵⁵ India - Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022 | ⁵⁶ From Standing Outside Classrooms to Learning Within Them: Inclusive Education for Children with Learning Disabilities in India, The Bastion, May 2022 | ⁵⁷ Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020 | ⁵⁸ India - Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022 | ⁵⁹ From Standing Outside Classrooms to Learning Within Them: Inclusive Education for Children with Learning Disabilities in India, The Bastion, May 2022



Current attitudes and awareness of disability

AKF staff noted that learning disabilities tend to receive little attention because they are unseen. What’s more, supporting disability is frequently considered as a matter of charitable kindness, rather than a matter of human rights. In this approach, people with disabilities are considered as inferior and this only reinforces barriers to including them as part of mainstream society.

‘Learning disabilities are seen either in extremities (eg. autism, physically handicapped); or ignored completely if these are subtle and invisible.’

AKF India staff member

Within the education system, it was felt that teachers would have limited understanding of how to implement inclusive education and effectively support those with disabilities in their classes. Whilst teachers would have some exposure to learning disabilities, this would be rather surface level knowledge that wouldn’t allow them to put anything into practice.

‘My immediate experience is that teachers have very limited exposure. In the same community we have all the different groups and different kinds of disability. Knowledge of how you incorporate and involve all the learners is limited in the system, especially with the large spectrum of disabilities.’

AKF India staff member



Education provision, services and support for learners with disabilities

Census data from 2011 indicated that only 61% of children with disabilities aged 5-19 were attending an education institution.⁶⁰

Of those attending school, most children attend mainstream schools, however a small proportion of students attend special schools run either

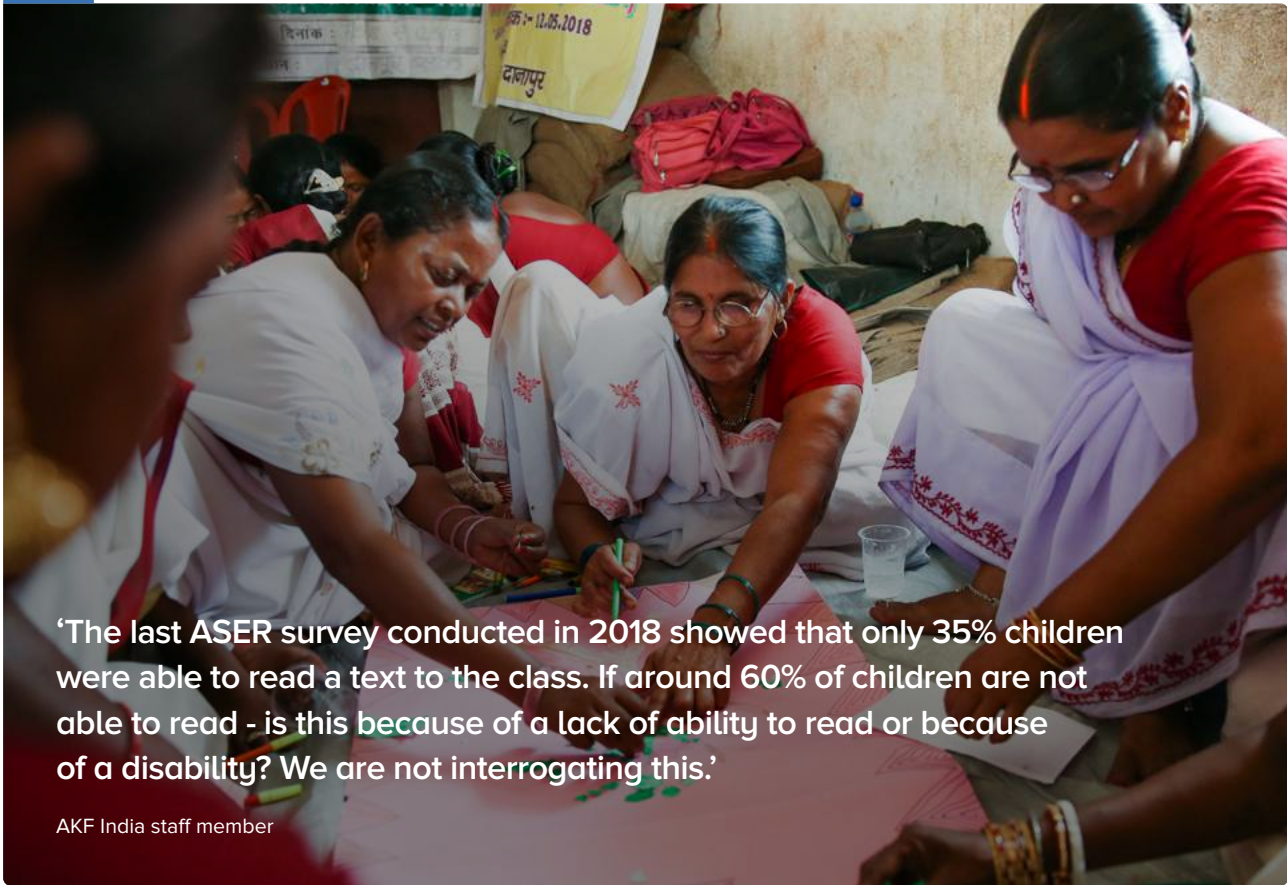
⁶⁰ India - Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022

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by private organisations, NGOs or the state. Special schools cater to different kinds of disabilities, and in some cases these include learning disabilities though these services tend to be at cost to families. Teachers in special institutions are certified by the Rehabilitation Council of India.

Even where children with disabilities are attending school in regular classes, staff felt that the core issue is the lack of knowledge on what is contributing to low learning levels, given that children may underperform for a variety of reasons. It was felt that where practice is failing is in the lack of ability to interrogate whether this is because of an inability to read or because of an impairment or disability.

That said, when a disability is more apparent (i.e. is a physical disability) the school will try to manage this in a sensitive way with the resources available. Even if a mainstream school wanted to create special classes this is unlikely to be possible due to a lack of space and the fact that teachers often attend to several classes at a time. In theory, it was felt that the curriculum and classroom materials had been designed to be inclusive however, in practice with teachers teaching in multigrade, multilevel classrooms they struggle to implement this or engage specifically with children with disabilities.



Challenges and priority areas

Although a course on inclusive education was introduced in all general teacher education programmes in 2014 ⁶¹, the available evidence consistently reports that a lack of appropriate teacher training remains a barrier. Limited awareness about learners with disabilities among teachers and parents is thought to be perpetuating negative attitudes towards these learners. ⁶²

AKF staff also highlighted teacher training as a priority, calling for expertise to be built in the teaching profession to better enable teachers to identify children with invisible disabilities.

Mainly, they felt there is a need to consider inclusion in a wider sense so that the nation works to address the exclusion and the needs of all groups that are marginalised, including those least visible. Even though policies have been developed, greater efforts need to be dedicated to ensuring these can be practically implemented.

This could be achieved through awareness raising, the provision of better equipment and infrastructure, and better use of data to guide initiatives.



⁶¹ India - Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022 | ⁶² Saravanabhavan & Saravanabhavan, 2010 | ⁶³ Ruguru Ireri et al., 2020 | ⁶⁴ Kenya - Inclusion chapter, Profiles Enhancing Education Reviews (PEER), <https://www.education-profiles.org>, Retrieved May 2022. (Hereafter: Kenya - Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022)



Overview: Defining the concept and terminology of inclusive education

Inclusive education has progressed in recent years in Kenya, with the government having domesticated various international agreements in its own legal framework.⁶³ Inclusive education is promoted through the inclusion of learners with special needs and disabilities in regular schools, rather than in special schools or special units. As defined in the 2018 [Sector Policy for Learners and Trainees with Disabilities](#), inclusive education is understood as an approach according to which ‘learners and trainees with disabilities are provided with appropriate educational interventions within regular institutions of learning with reasonable accommodations and support.’⁶⁴ [The National Special Needs Education Policy Framework](#) of 2009 offered a broad definition of learners with special needs, including children with and without disabilities, and gifted and talented

children. This definition was further refined in the 2018 Sector Policy for Learners and Trainees with Disabilities to mean learners with hearing impairment, visual impairment, deaf-blindness, physical impairments, intellectual and developmental disabilities, specific learning disabilities (dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia), cerebral palsy, speech and language difficulties, multiple disabilities, autism and albinism. This definition also acknowledges other forms of special needs, such as gifted and talented learners and students affected by psychosocial disorders and chronic illness.

Whilst the emphasis has been on promoting education for learners with special needs and disabilities in regular schools, policy recognises the need to draw on the education services provided by special institutions, special units in

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regular institutions and home-based education, specifically for learners and trainees with severe disabilities and under vulnerable circumstances.⁶⁵

Despite advances made in policy, evidence suggests that efforts to guide implementation are fairly weak and that this means practice is not meeting the aspirations of policy.

Views from teachers and programme staff

Teachers consulted felt that inclusive education used to be a topic more frequently talked about across all levels of the education system, however now most of the focus is on primary and early years education. When speaking about inclusive education and special education, this can be understood to refer to gifted and talented students, but is also considered as education appropriate for those with specific needs. For example, they mentioned that Kenya has schools for children with cerebral palsy or mental disabilities.

In general, students with physical and mental disabilities are those most targeted through inclusive and special education initiatives.

In the past the term ‘special needs’ was used more frequently, however nowadays it is more common to say ‘**challenged**’ or ‘**abled differently**’ when speaking about learners with disabilities.

‘All children are talented in their own ways, all have magic in them.’

Primary school teacher, Mombasa



Quantifying learners with learning disabilities

Data from the Kenyan Ministry of Education reports that 11.4% of children aged between 3 and 21 years old have special needs or a disability, which is relatively evenly distributed amongst male and female children. The majority

of children with disabilities and special needs live in rural areas (76.2%) compared to 27.4% who live in urban areas, suggesting that there may be a need to geographically focus resource for specialised teaching and infrastructure.

Proportionately, this is slightly higher than the urban-rural split amongst the general population, with 72% of the population residing in rural areas.⁶⁶ Although a significant number of children are enrolled in schools, there is a high dropout rate.⁶⁷ Data from the Kenya National Survey on Special Needs Education conducted in 2014 found that 6.8% of children 21 years old and below reporting to have a

disability self-reported that they had a learning disability.⁶⁸

In the subsequent National Survey on Children with Disabilities and Special Needs in Education conducted in 2016-17, the category of learning disabilities was not included in the scope of the study because of the need for diagnostic tests to have been run over a period of time to identify and categorise learners.⁶⁹



Policy and legislative commitments

Sessional Paper No.1 of 2005 identified that existing provision for learners with disabilities, such as special schools and special units, only catered to learners with disabilities ‘in the areas of hearing, visual, mental or physical challenge’, which ignored other areas of special needs including gifted and talented, psychosocially different, autism, specific learning difficulties and communication disorders.⁷⁰ Following this, the government released the [National Special Needs Education Policy Framework](#) in 2009, aiming to remove barriers for learners with disabilities, which they classified into 22 categories, of which one is ‘learning disabilities’. Building on this, the [2018 Sector Policy for Learners and Trainees with Disabilities](#) aims to develop specific procedures and guidelines for assessment, early identification and

interventions for learners and trainees with disabilities, including learning disabilities, as well as to establish new multidisciplinary Education Assessment Resource Centres (EARCs) at the national, county and sub-county levels. The policy moves beyond segregated education as had been encouraged before and advocates the right of every learner with a disability to be enrolled in a regular classroom.⁷¹ Despite mention of learning disabilities in policy since 2009, in the [Basic Education Statistical Booklet](#) of 2019 the Ministry of Education reports only on five categories of learners with special needs: hearing, intellectual, physical, visual and multiple,⁷² which can be assumed to be due to a paucity of data on learning disabilities.

⁶⁵ Kenya - Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022 | ⁶⁶ The World Bank Data, retrieved November 2022 | ⁶⁷ Ministry of Education, 2018 | ⁶⁸ Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, nd | ⁶⁹ Ministry of Education, 2018 | ⁷⁰ Ohba & Malenya, 2020 | ⁷¹ Kenya - Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022 | ⁷² Ohba & Malenya, 2020

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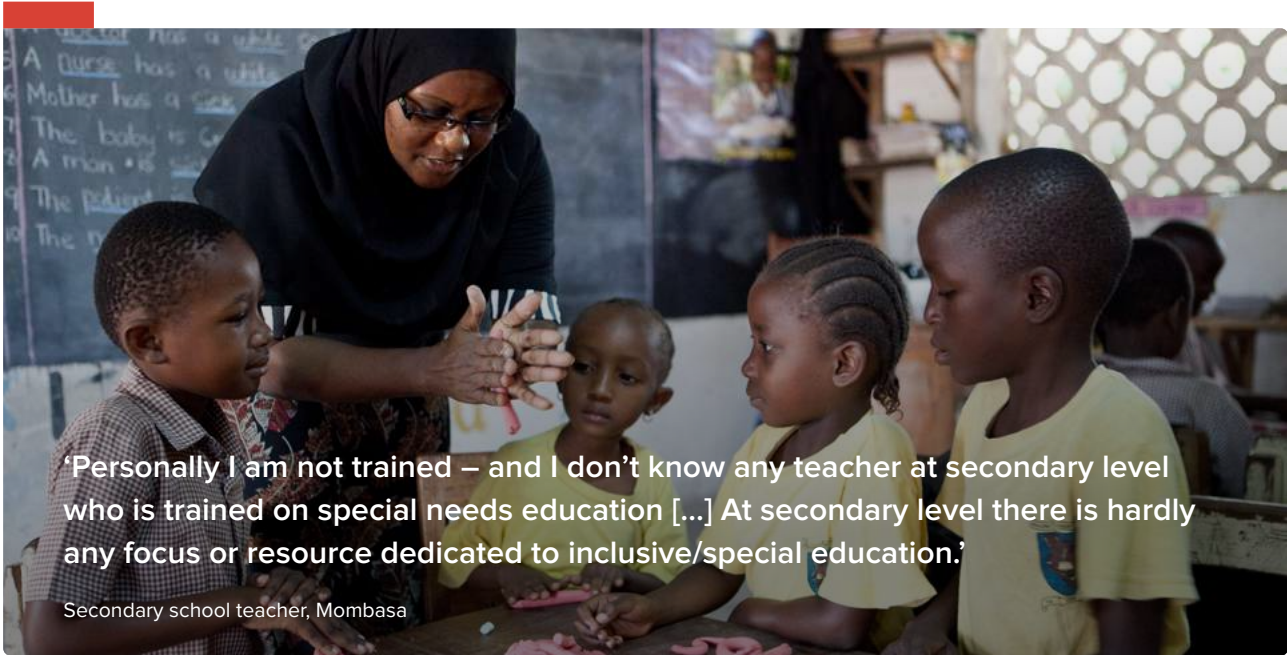
Teacher training provision

Teacher training on supporting learners with disabilities is provided at the Kenya Institute of Special Education (KISE) for pre-service and in-service training, but teachers commented that this is only for pre-primary and primary teachers. Kenyatta University also provides a bachelor programme with a specialisation in special needs education. However, the 2018 Sector Policy for Learners and Trainees with Disabilities acknowledged that regular teaching education does not adequately incorporate training to equip teachers to cater for the needs of learners with disabilities.⁷³

Findings from teachers supported this conclusion, as those consulted for this study

considered it to be rare particularly for secondary teachers to have received training on supporting learners with disabilities because training opportunities are mostly for pre-primary and primary teachers. Besides this, training may have been provided by NGOs implementing inclusive education projects.

For example, one teacher had worked on a UNICEF project that sought to integrate street children into regular schools, and was trained on inclusive education as part of this. Knowing that there are limited opportunities to gain knowledge in this area, this teacher felt it was down to individuals to proactively share knowledge with colleagues.



‘Personally I am not trained – and I don’t know any teacher at secondary level who is trained on special needs education [...] At secondary level there is hardly any focus or resource dedicated to inclusive/special education.’

Secondary school teacher, Mombasa



Diagnosis of learning disabilities

As laid out in policy in 2018, the role of Education Assessment Resource Centres (EARCs) is to identify and assess the needs of children with disabilities and then identify the most suitable education services for them. The centres are staffed by a variety of professionals including teachers and social and medical workers who involved the community in early identification, assessment, intervention and placement of learners considered to have special needs.⁷⁴

However, teachers consulted mentioned that there are only two assessment centres for secondary level in Mombasa, and these are both for physical disabilities. When prompted to reflect on the mechanisms in place to diagnose learners who may have a learning disability, teachers were frank about the many other challenges that students face that may account for low learning levels. They explained that teachers are not only extremely busy managing large class sizes, but they are also coping with significant social and emotional problems in their classrooms. Therefore, if a child is struggling it is difficult for teachers to know whether it is a learning disability or an external factor negatively affecting their learning outcomes. With the pressures that teachers face in the classroom, this leaves them little time to identify learners who they might otherwise refer on to specialists.

‘Teachers are firefighting the social problems – they are not trained for dealing with disabilities or mental health challenges. They are too busy dealing with the manifestations of these problems – such as children not coming to school.’

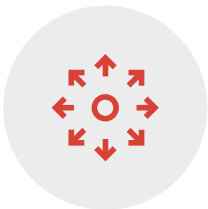
Secondary school teacher, Mombasa

‘Due to the challenges of large classes and a push to complete the syllabus within the stipulated time, child/learner observation is waning out. At the early grades teachers are not able to note learners exhibiting learning difficulties in good time for referral and/or assessment.’

AKF Kenya staff member

73 Ministry of Education, 2018a | 74 Kenya - Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022

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Current attitudes and awareness of disability

It was felt by AKF staff that teachers should have a good understanding and awareness of inclusive education and disability because the teacher training curriculum has a unit dedicated to inclusive education and disability. What is lacking is not the awareness but the resources to take action and implement. Regarding learning disabilities, there was felt to be lower awareness

apart from where teachers have taken the Special Education Needs option in post graduate education or in-service professional development courses. That said, teachers had commented that there is limited access to professional development opportunities and that many would not be aware of methods and strategies to implement inclusive practice.



Education provision, services and support for learners with disabilities

Teachers reported that there tends to be better provision and support for learners with disabilities at early years and primary school level. At ECD level, regular schools are equipped with EARCs that provide additional support for learners with disabilities, including mental disabilities and physical disabilities. Students receive additional support, however they are integrated in regular classes with other students. When learners transition to secondary and appear to have lower learning levels, sometimes secondary schools blame the primary level for not preparing students adequately. Despite better levels of support

early on, children with special needs frequently end up at challenging schools with underperforming students. That said, some children do very well and are determined to learn, especially where teachers act on their own initiative and make a special effort to support the child. An example was given where a school paid for medication for a child who could not afford it. This then allowed them to focus better on school and sit their exams. Even though they didn't pass the first time the school allowed the student to sit their exam again to improve their grade.



Challenges and priority areas

Despite best efforts in introducing policy commensurate with international legislation on inclusive education, the policy framework lacks concrete plans to operationalise the implementation of inclusive practices. Adding to this, there has historically been a lack of monitoring and evaluation,⁷⁵ which has made it difficult to analyse current practice and devise evidence informed action plans. This is compounded by a combination of poor attitudes towards inclusive education by some key stakeholders, a lack of funds and resources to adequately tailor provision to ensure equal access to all learners, an inflexible curriculum, and a lack of specialised staff trained on appropriate pedagogical techniques.⁷⁶ This has resulted in a high drop-out rate and low transition rate from primary to secondary school for learners with disabilities.⁷⁷

Teachers consulted spoke extensively about the challenging socio-economic circumstances which may even prohibit students coming to school in the first place. In coastal Kenyan communities children grow up dealing with many economic and social issues – such as substance abuse, difficult family circumstances, health issues, social tension

and bullying. As a result, children come to school with many emotional and mental health challenges. Some children have to work to support their family, and they are then too tired to attend school, or they don't want to turn up late so don't come at all.

Teachers expressed that many children face barriers and so it is an achievement for them to get to school in the first place, though it is difficult for a teacher to determine whether the cause is a disability or other socio-economic factors.

In terms of priorities, the teachers and staff consulted felt strongly that what is required is more parental involvement in the education of their children. The new Competency Based Curriculum in Kenya, which allows learners to select their subject areas at age 11, was felt to offer an opportunity to reduce the push for academic excellence. There was hope that this may offer a new way of engaging and keeping students motivated in their learning as they have the agency to choose their own pathway. However, this will require buy in from both parents and teachers.

75 Ruguru Ireri et al., 2020 | 76 Ruguru Ireri et al., 2020 | 77 Ohba & Malenya, 2020



‘We are in need of parental involvement. Good school-community relations are important for influencing change.’

Primary school teacher, Mombasa



Overview: Defining the concept and terminology of inclusive education

Kyrgyzstan recognises inclusive education and the rights of learners with disabilities to learn in regular settings, however learners with disabilities remain largely excluded from the education system.⁷⁸ Since 2019, inclusive education has been defined as the ‘process of ensuring equal access to education for all students, taking into account the diversity of the educational needs and individual capabilities’.⁷⁹ The term ‘Special educational needs’ is used to refer to ‘learners whose needs require creating special conditions and environments, as well as the use of special technologies, within the provision of education services.’⁸⁰ UNICEF note that the used definition of disability as per the 2008 [Law on the Rights and Guarantees of Persons with Disabilities](#) reflects the medical concept of disability and is not in compliance with the Convention on the Rights of Person’s

with Disabilities.⁸¹ The medical model conceptualises disability as a condition, illness or disease that needs to be treated and cured through medical intervention, as opposed to the more recent social model that understands disability as the interaction between an individual with specific impairments (whether physical, intellectual, sensory or mental health related) and the surrounding social and cultural environment.⁸² Kyrgyzstan’s legal framework states that education for learners with disabilities is to be provided in regular settings and in special institutions when necessary, and that special and regular schools should work in partnership to facilitate this. The idea of inclusive education has been endorsed through various policies however current provisions are not regarded as sufficient to ensure the rights of children with disabilities are fulfilled.⁸³

Views from teachers and programme staff

AKF staff shared that there are ongoing debates in the country on how inclusive education should look and how this should be defined in the Kyrgyzstan context. For example, whilst UNICEF describe and promote inclusive education as the inclusion of children with learning and physical disabilities, there are some national level experts that believe that inclusive education should be expanded to cover broader groups of children that are also at risk of being excluded from the education system, such as children who have deviant behaviour, those who come from poor households, children of migrant parents and orphaned children. As such, there are disagreements over how to define the concept and over the proposed model which targets children with disabilities, in that some view this as too narrow an approach which doesn't address the scope of all children at risk. One teacher expressed that to her inclusive education stands for the creation of an inclusive classroom which focuses on abilities, not disabilities, and welcomes all children together regardless of ability or background.

'Children with SEND' or 'children with disabilities' was perceived to be the most commonly used terms to describe students with disabilities. Again, the fact that different stakeholders have differing opinions was brought up, suggesting that different stakeholders may use different terminology.

'Without quality education in mainstream schools and adequate information for parents about the right to inclusive education, children with disabilities will remain at risk of being segregated in residential institutions or isolated in the confines of their home, receiving little to no education.'

Preschool teacher, Naryn



Quantifying learners with learning disabilities

It is difficult to quantify how many learners may have learning disabilities in Kyrgyzstan as the data is unclear. Data collected on children in education often doesn't include children with

disabilities as they are mostly attending segregated settings, though data collected by NGOs estimates that a high proportion of learners with disabilities are not attending school.⁸⁴



Policy and legislative commitments

Kyrgyzstan has domesticated international legislation such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child through the 2006 Code of the Kyrgyz Republic on Children. The rights of learners with disabilities to learn in regular settings is promoted in the 2008 [Law on the Rights and Guarantees of Persons with Disabilities](#). However, Kyrgyzstan's [2012-20 Education Development Strategy](#) had among its objectives to promote inclusive education while maintaining specialised schools for children with special needs.

The strategy also outlined plans for the development of new curricula, models and programmes of in-service training for teachers working both in special schools and in regular schools embracing an inclusive education programme. The more recent [2019-23 State Concept for the Development of Inclusive Education](#) aims to lay the groundwork to be able to develop the education system towards inclusion in the areas of diagnosis, curriculum, special services, support and rehabilitation services, monitoring and evaluation.⁸⁵



Teacher training provision on inclusive education

Plans were laid out in the 2018-20 Action Plan for Educational Development (APED) for the development of training modules for pre-and in-service teachers working in specialised settings and regular schools to implement inclusive education programmes within the EU-funded multi-annual action programme.⁸⁶ AKF staff noted that the Republican Teacher Training Institution had developed these however funding limitations and disagreement

at national level means that efforts to roll out the training model are currently on pause. There are no other national level trainings specifically to help teachers support disabled learners, though some training may be provided by NGOs. Teachers may also seek information on their own, or work closely with parents to understand more about the child's needs.

⁷⁸ Kyrgyzstan - Inclusion chapter, Profiles Enhancing Education Reviews (PEER), <https://www.education-profiles.org>, Retrieved May 2022 (Hereafter: Kyrgyzstan - Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022) | ⁷⁹ Kyrgyzstan - Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022 | ⁸⁰ Kyrgyzstan - Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022 | ⁸¹ UNICEF, 2021 | ⁸² Hunt & Belegu-Caka (at the request of UNICEF), 2017 | ⁸³ UNICEF, 2021 | ⁸⁴ UNICEF, 2021

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This experience was reflected by one of the teachers consulted, who had not attended a training programme on teaching learners with special needs. However, she had sought out opportunities to learn more about this topic independently, such as through attending short courses. These tend to have been developed and delivered in Russian, as there are few training resources in the Kyrgyz language.

She felt that training in Kyrgyz would be beneficial for teachers especially in learning about different teaching methodology for learners with disabilities.

‘I think it would be beneficial if different trainings on teaching children with special learning needs in the Kyrgyz language were included, especially when it comes to the methodology of teaching.’

Pre-school teacher, Naryn



Diagnosis of learning disabilities

Whilst disability is generally understood and defined in the medical sense, the assessment and registration of children with special education needs falls under the responsibility of the Medical-Social Commission of Experts, and the Psycho-Medical-Pedagogical Commission (PMPC), which sit under the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, and the Ministry of Education and Science. According to the literature, children undergo an initial medical-social identification which is carried out in a hospital by the Ministry of Health, before being assessed by a multiprofessional team and referred to the appropriate services.

Even if there is limited knowledge amongst teachers, one teacher illustrated how a child may get support for a speech disorder from her experience teaching children aged 3-4 years old from a trained ‘teacher-defectologist’.

‘The teacher-defectologist, who conducts an in-depth examination of children with disabilities, determines a plan for correctional and developmental work with each child, implements it, and monitors the dynamics of the development of the learner; provides

organisational and methodological assistance to other teachers on issues of integrated education and upbringing of children, including the approach to assessing the child in the classroom.

A speech therapist, who identifies speech disorders in children and conducts corrective work to overcome them, participates in the development of speech skills in the general educational environment. The speech therapist also develops recommendations for the child assessment system surrounding oral and written responses.’

Pre-school teacher, Naryn

Additionally, she commented that teachers are unable to discuss any observations they have about a child with school leaders or the child’s family if they aren’t learning as expected. Respondents noted that there are no diagnostic tools in place within the education system, and that those used by medical professionals are all in Russian. Overall, children may be able to access experts to help with their diagnosis, but often this is down to families being persistent, with limited access to doctors being a common challenge.

‘In general, the development of a system for assessing educational achievements and adaptation to the needs of students with special educational needs is in high demand at the level of the general education program.’

Pre-school teacher, Naryn



Current attitudes and awareness of inclusive practice and disability

AKF staff felt that there is a general understanding among teachers and school leaders of inclusive education and disability, however that this is fairly surface level. For instance, one staff member cited research that found that teachers, school leaders and principles have poor understanding of inclusion and learning disabilities. This could be

explained because until 2019 there was very little information available on the state of learning for children with learning or physical disabilities in Kyrgyzstan.

Teachers are generally very eager to support these learners but in most cases this is based on

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their empathy. Learners with disabilities are able to learn in regular classes however in urban areas there are sometimes people who are against having their children in classes together with physically disabled children, due to negative attitudes. It was noted that sometimes even school-parent committees may show bias against certain students attending with other children.

‘Overall my personal observation is that the general societal attitude towards children with disabilities is changing for the better. I’m really happy about that.

Until you speak about the topic the issues won’t be solved. The majority is acknowledging the importance of inclusion.’

AKF Kyrgyzstan staff member

Reflecting on their own experience at school during the rule of the Soviet Union, one respondent felt that nowadays people are speaking about disability rights much more. As a result, some of the barriers that prevented people getting help are coming down. She felt that efforts from government, NGOs and civil society to help public awareness raising are positively affecting the situation.



Education provision, services and support for learners with disabilities

Data from the nongovernmental sector claims that only one fifth of all children with disabilities are attending school.⁸⁷ AKF staff explained that those not attending are entitled to receive education at home. However, there is no quality assurance system in place for education received at home in this way, nor a mechanism to ensure these teachers are adequately trained. Until 2019 most children with disabilities were placed in special institution or were in regular schools in separate classes. In rural areas it was more common for disabled learners to be kept at home, whereas in urban areas most families would place their children with disabilities in special institutions. AKF staff reported that there are only 18 schools

remaining who accommodate children with special needs in Kyrgyzstan. It was felt that there is a clear consensus that the system should be working towards closing down special institutions but it was acknowledged that the current push to close special institutions should be done very gradually and carefully. The teacher felt that ideally support for learners with disabilities would be provided by specially trained teachers. At present, classroom materials and the national curriculum haven’t yet been adapted for learners with disabilities. When asked about where any support that is or has been provided has come from, the teacher mentioned that it is mainly local NGOs working on inclusive education.



Challenges and priorities

Whilst efforts have been made in policy documents to promote inclusive education, guidelines are sometimes contradictory and practice remains influenced by negative attitudes towards learners with disabilities, which still remain a major factor in exclusion from education. Enrolment and levels of learning outcomes vary across geographical

regions and by language of instruction, and a significant amount of internal migration to Bishkek and Osh has further strained education services and infrastructure. The OECD have highlighted a lack of cooperation across ministries as a major hindrance to the effective implementation of inclusive education.

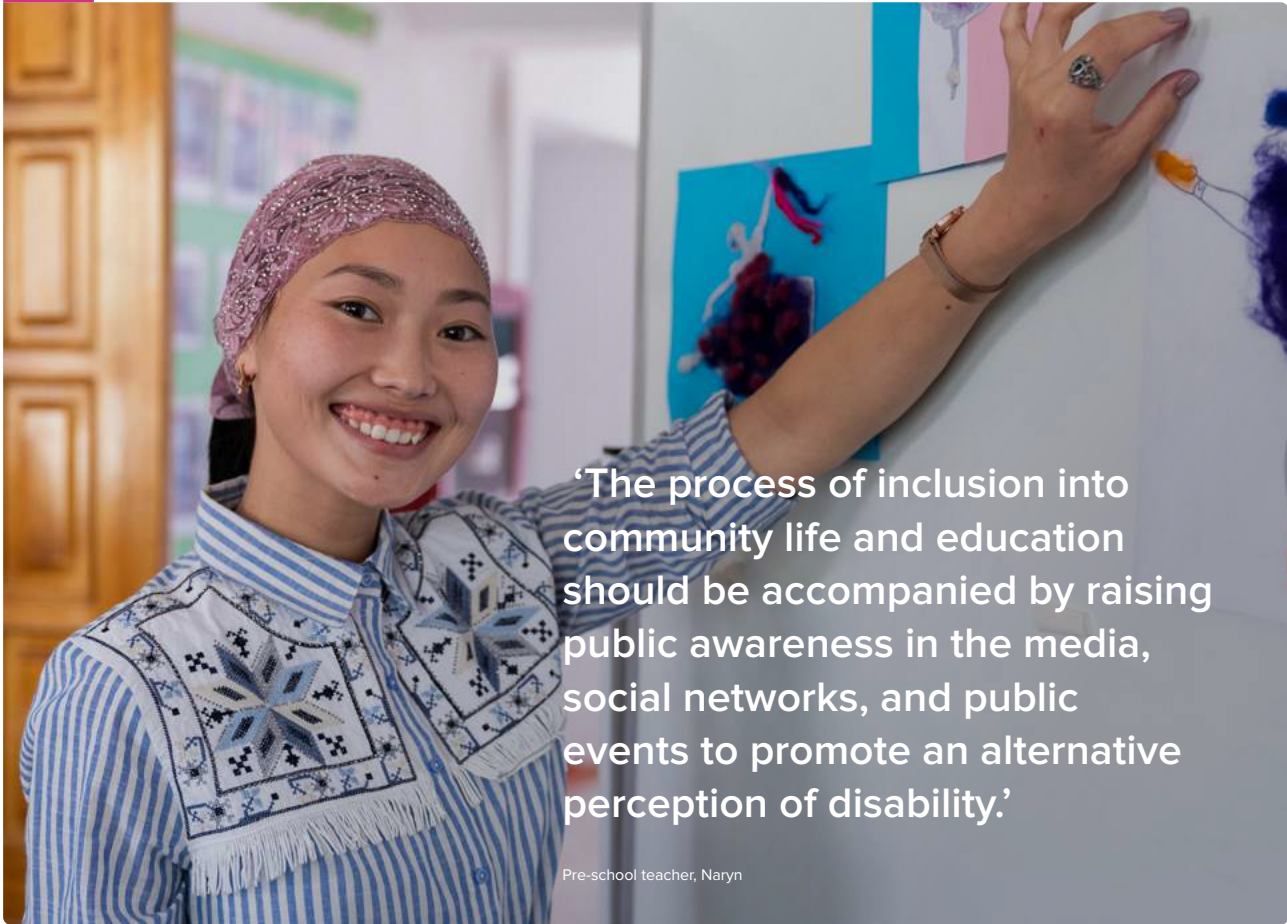
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Inadequate teacher education and a lack of materials are also constraining factors in the implementation of inclusive pedagogical approaches.⁸⁸ Staff and teachers consulted concurred that stigmatising attitudes and systemic barriers are some of the most significant factors preventing inclusive education ever taking off in school settings.

A recent paper from UNICEF recommends that the Kyrgyzstan government and development partners halt the current Concept and Program for Inclusive Education in the Kyrgyz Republic project until a full review is carried out of existing documents to ensure inclusive

education is in line with international norms – particularly given that existing intervention is almost exclusively limited to medical services.⁸⁹ The country does not currently have a policy for implementing early identification and intervention, relying on a fragmented approach involving many ministries. Investment in research and evaluation is also required given the scant data and academic evidence available on the topic in the Kyrgyzstan context. In terms of priorities, staff and teachers felt that there needs to be investment in school infrastructure, pre- and in-service training and awareness raising with parents.

87 | UNICEF, 2021 | 88 Kyrgyzstan - Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022 | 89 UNICEF, 2021



‘The process of inclusion into community life and education should be accompanied by raising public awareness in the media, social networks, and public events to promote an alternative perception of disability.’

Pre-school teacher, Naryn





Overview: Defining the concept and terminology of inclusive education

Pakistan follows a decentralised system of education with the central government developing the overall policy framework, curriculum and accreditation. Under this structure, the Ministry of Education (MoE) oversees the majority of national approaches to supporting students with disabilities. Pakistan currently has the second highest number of out-of-school children in the world, with an estimated 22.8 million children aged 5-16 not in school⁹¹, a considerable number of whom are thought to be children with disabilities.

The government reports that ‘a rapid transition of integration, mainstreaming, and inclusion of children with disabilities in regular schools has taken place over recent years’.⁹²

The 2017 National Education Policy endorses UNESCO’s definition of inclusive education as ‘a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures, and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures, and strategies.’ It describes inclusion as beneficial ‘not merely for children with special needs only; it applies to all children.’⁹³

At present, the most common terms found in the literature used to describe learning differences are ‘specific learning disability’ and ‘slow learners’. While the term ‘slow learner’ appears to be widely used in research on education in

Pakistan, there is concern about the lack of specificity in the term. It can include anyone from those who have learning differences to those who come from conditions of poverty that prevent them from reaching their potential in school.⁹⁴

Views from teachers and programme staff

Those consulted did not perceive inclusion to be a topic given due importance in the education agenda in Pakistan. To date, policies haven’t had much of a focus on inclusive education, though the new curriculum may make more mention of inclusive practice and special needs. That said, the level of challenge in the context is felt to be significant.

In terms of the understanding of inclusion, it was reported that this is often thought of narrowly to mean only disability, with most recognition of physical disability, and is often equated with special education. Since there is low awareness of learning differences, specific conditions such as dyslexia and ADHD may not be considered.

Terms often used to refer to children with disabilities are ‘special children’, ‘handicapped children’ and ‘slow learner’, which are sometimes used interchangeably with ‘children with special educational needs’.

Through their inclusion programmes, Aga Khan University (AKU) aim to promote people first language and the adoption of using the term ‘children with SEN’.

‘Generally speaking when they hear inclusive education they think disability – they think visible physical disability or a mental condition/challenged mentally.’

AKF Advisor

‘Even if there was mention of learning differences and disability and including in mainstream schools it has stayed on paper and not found its way into implementation.’

AKU-HDP Faculty Member

⁹⁰ Interviews were conducted with an Education & ECD Advisor to the Schools2030 programme in Pakistan, and an inclusion specialist at The Aga Khan University Human Development Programme (AKU-HDP). A questionnaire gathered views from a member of AKF Pakistan. | ⁹¹ UNICEF Pakistan, retrieved Nov 2022 | ⁹² Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, 2017 | ⁹³ Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, 2017 | ⁹⁴ Who is a ‘Slow Learner’?, Daily Times, retrieved May 2022

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Quantifying learners with learning disabilities

The Pakistani Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) is the largest citizen-led, household-based initiative that aims to provide reliable estimates on the schooling status of children aged 3-16 years residing in all rural and few urban districts of Pakistan. It collects information on schools and students which includes disability status. The most recent report published in 2019 shared that just over 20% of schools in Pakistan serve students with disabilities.⁹⁵ Based on answers from primary caregivers on six functioning areas assessed, less than 1% of children aged 3 to 16 (with

information on difficulties) reported difficulties with seeing, hearing, walking, self-care, understanding or remembering.⁹⁶

It has been noted that the national census of 1998 and 2016 failed to incorporate a realistic instrument to gather data on special needs and inclusive education.^{97,98} Statistics testify to the alarming number of disabled learners who are out of school, with less than 5% of school-aged disabled children enrolled in special education institutions and the remaining 95% not in school.⁹⁹



Policy and legislative commitments

The [National Education Policy 2009](#) made little mention of inclusive education and offered little in the way of clear strategies to achieve this.¹⁰⁰

The [2017 National Education Policy](#), however, includes a chapter on Special and Inclusive Education, and has amongst its objectives to promote and expand access to special and inclusive education by providing the necessary

facilities and infrastructure, and to universalise enrolment for students with special educational needs.¹⁰¹ It goes on to specify that teacher education should prepare teachers to 'adapt to a variety of student learning styles to cater for individual learning differences.'

Though it doesn't make explicit mention of inclusive education, the [National Education](#)

[Policy Framework 2018](#) mentions that special focus is required on 'disadvantaged areas, minorities, girls and children with disabilities'.¹⁰² It highlights four priority policy actions to ensure that 'all children have a fair and equal opportunity to receive a high quality of education to achieve their full potential'. These priorities encompass reducing the number of out-of-school children, achieving uniformity in the education system, improving the quality of

education, and enhancing access to skills training and higher education. Education laws on disability have also been developed at the province level. The 2018 Sindh [Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities Act](#), for example, supports education in special schools for children with disabilities, though it also calls for the inclusion of those with disabilities in mainstream settings.



Teacher training provision on inclusive education

The [2017 National Education Policy](#) states aims for teacher education that should prepare teachers to 'adapt to a variety of student learning styles to cater for individual learning differences.'¹⁰³ Though it is reported there are relatively few institutions offering special education training to teachers, provision is available at some universities, as well as through the Directorate General of Special Education and the National Mobility and Independence Training Centre based in Islamabad.¹⁰⁴ However, interview respondents felt the current teacher education offering to be somewhat archaic and theoretical, and that this in turn was contributing to a low sense of morale and professionalism amongst teachers.

'We're still trying to get teachers to learn about learning and using appropriate teaching methodologies, let alone learning differences and differentiation [...] Before teachers can change in the classroom they need to be aware and know about their own biases and what role they play as a teacher.'

AKF Advisor

⁹⁵ Grimes, 2021 | ⁹⁶ Annual Status of Education Report Pakistan, 2018 | ⁹⁷ Who Is a 'Slow Learner?', Daily Times, retrieved May 2022 | ⁹⁸ Malik et al., 2022 | ⁹⁹ Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, 2017 | ¹⁰⁰ Ministry of Education, 2009 | ¹⁰¹ Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, 2017 | ¹⁰² Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, 2018 | ¹⁰³ Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, 2017 | ¹⁰⁴ Pakistan - Inclusion chapter, Profiles Enhancing Education Reviews (PEER), <https://www.education-profiles.org>, Retrieved May 2022 (Hereafter: Pakistan - Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022)

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Policy ambitions for further teacher education in special education is starting to be realised with the establishment of training academies such as the teacher training academy working under the Department for Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities in Sindh. Aga Khan University is aiming to respond to a variety of teacher profiles by offering training in inclusive

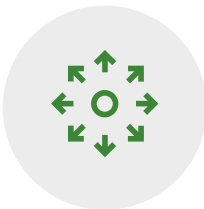
education through an MEd programme, as well as through short and custom designed courses. In Gilgit Baltistan and Chitral, 400 teachers have been trained on inclusive education through training provided by AKU, which included the provision of assistive aids.



Diagnosis of learning disabilities

Some evidence points to teachers at a variety of schools using ‘whole learner’ curricula in support of ‘slow learners’. Interview participants also referenced the way teachers are learning to be more aware of children with difficulties, such as those with visual or hearing impairments. In general, if the difficulty is presenting a problem, teachers will refer a child on to a medical professional, however governmental diagnostic facilities tend to be of low quality and there is limited knowledge

of learning disabilities. Good services are available in the private sector with specialists that are able to diagnose conditions such as dyslexia, autism and ADHD, though this comes at a cost. In Punjab province, there currently exists a referral mechanism for children with disabilities. District Disability Assessment Boards are in place at each district headquarter hospital, which are overseen by the Department of Social Welfare.¹⁰⁵



Current attitudes and awareness of inclusive practice and disability

Interview respondents noted that large numbers of the children who are out of school are kept at home due to negative attitudes towards disability. Disability is considered by some as a punishment and some parents would forego their child’s education because of a sense of shame and a belief that they wouldn’t be able to learn. In some cases children with special needs end up leaving school because of bullying.

Although teachers know that some children learn at different paces, children with

differences are frequently labelled as ‘slow learners’ and are relegated to the back benches of the classroom.

‘Schools are a microcosm of society and teachers are part of that society. They will also unconsciously imbibe stereotypes.’

AKF Advisor



Education provision, services and support for learners with disabilities

Whilst schools cannot refuse admission to any child, children with disabilities have very little support in school, largely because teachers are poorly trained and are under prepared to support learners with special needs.

‘Teachers teach a class not an individual child – even if the child is present they don’t give them adequate attention.’

AKF Advisor

Separately established special schools for those with mental, visual and hearing impairments are run by the private and public sector, however enrolment at government special institutions tends to be low because of inadequate facilities and poorly trained staff. However, some private organisations have their own teacher training arrangement and have started integrating children with disabilities into mainstream classes.

105 Pakistan - Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022

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There are many organisations providing remedial services for learners with disabilities, such as Kazim Trust who work with children with ADHD, READ who work with children with dyslexia, and NOWPD, which is a supporting organisation aiming to maximise efforts of organisations working on disability and inclusion. Such organisations are providing rehabilitation services and vocational services to children who may not be able to learn in mainstream schools in the current structure.



Challenges and priorities

With tentative aspirations to develop an inclusive education system laid out in policy, evidence suggests that the challenges to effectively implement efforts moving towards inclusion are multiple and include; the shortage of adequate and accessible schools, of female teachers and of suitable learning materials, poor quality of teaching, unfavourable cultural beliefs towards girls’ education and minorities, political unrest, environmental disasters and weak governance. Respondents felt that limited teacher capacity and negative beliefs about learners constitute some of the most significant barriers to implementing inclusive learning. They also spoke of an absence of reliable data on children with disabilities and the challenges encountered around language of instruction. Many children are not accessing education in a language they can understand, given the multilingual makeup of the country and the push for English or Urdu medium instruction.

‘I think teachers can get really overwhelmed and are used to a culture where the textbook is the guide. When you start talking to them about learning differences and learning disabilities this can become very overwhelming.’

AKF Advisor

The evidence points to various areas of opportunity for improvements including drawing on Pakistan’s pre-existing commitment to constructive, child-centred pedagogy to engage teachers and school administrators.

Respondents reinforced this, recommending that steps to move forward must include developing a teacher training offering that is practice focused, builds awareness and encourages teachers to explore how they form their own values. This should be led by qualified instructors capable of modelling the behaviours. However, efforts must be multi-pronged and include awareness raising as well as systemic investment in service provision to ensure support is more consistently available and accessible across the country.



‘The appetite and need is there, the parents are really motivated to get their children to school.’

AKU-HDP Faculty Member

‘In my opinion, improving school physical infrastructure, with provision of trained teachers, and learning resources is prerequisite to support.’

AKF Pakistan staff member



Overview: Defining the concept and terminology of inclusive education

Portugal has often been lauded for its progressive stance toward inclusive education that accommodates students of all learning abilities into mainstream schools.¹⁰⁶ With a relatively centralised government for a European country, most educational practices occur in a top-down fashion.¹⁰⁷ Like many school systems across the world, the Portuguese education system had previously relied on segregated ‘special education’ schools to educate students with disabilities, including dyslexia. As early as the 1980s, the national education strategy made explicit its commitment to integrate children with special educational needs into mainstream schools.

Two departments within the Ministry of Education are dedicated to disability and learning difficulties: the Department for Special Education covers compulsory education (basic education) and the Department of Special and Vocational Education covers upper-secondary education. Unlike many other countries, Portugal has laid out specific definitions within its disability legislation that define inclusive education terms. The 1986 Education Act defined special education as a specific type of education that facilitates the socio-educational recuperation and integration of individuals with SEN caused by physical or intellectual disability.¹⁰⁸

The [2018 Education Act](#) defined inclusion as ‘the right of all children and pupils to access and participate, fully and effectively, in the same educational contexts’ and learning difficulties as ‘a condition which requires specialised resources of support to learning and inclusion’. Significantly, the act drops the term and categorisation of ‘special educational needs’, speaking of schools adapting ‘to the needs and potential of each pupil’.

Views from teachers and programme staff

In practice, it was noted by focus group respondents that teachers are very conscious of the focus on inclusive education and reforms to move away from segregated education for learners with disabilities, to including all learners in regular classrooms.

Those consulted explained that the common perception among educators is that all children have individualised learning needs.

‘We shouldn’t have labels – they are children in school.’

Teacher, Lisbon area

The term ‘special needs’ was used until 2018, however since then language speaks more about **children with additional learning support needs**, regardless of the causes.



Quantifying learners with learning disabilities

The most recent data on learners with disabilities was collected by the Portuguese General Directorate of Statistics of Education and Science (DGEEC) in 2017/2018. The data shared that 98.9% of students with special educational needs in Portugal were enrolled in mainstream schools (public and private).¹⁰⁹

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Policy and legislative commitments

Compared to other countries in western Europe, Portugal has more detailed legislation that supports the implementation of inclusive education. The 1991 Education Act called for mainstream schools to take greater responsibility for learning disabilities by opening schools up to pupils with special educational needs and include involvement from parents in guiding their child’s educational frameworks. The 2008 Education Act called for tailoring the education experience to each student, and for disability to be conceptualised according to functional limitations by a team of multi-disciplinary professionals as early as possible, with mainstream teachers responsible for

coordinating Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for those students who require additional learning support. Rather than focus on the needs of students with disabilities, the [2018 Education Act](#) proposed the notion of inclusion, with an emphasis on support for all students. It further proposed Universal Design for Learning with flexible curricular models and systematic monitoring, stating that all students may need universal, selective and/or additional support needs. A 2019 amendment to this Act states that the government is required to ensure the necessary means so that education staff in public schools can access free specific training to support inclusion and learning.¹¹⁰

The teacher consulted explained that in Portugal normally teachers require a master’s degree to become specialised in supporting those with additional learning support needs, but general teachers sometimes receive some training on this also. Since 2015, the government must offer training to teachers in topics such as pedagogical differentiation, universal learning, supporting those with

additional learning support needs and supervision. In-service training on assessment and digital skills is paid for by the government, but schools must find funds from their own budgets to pay for trainings in other topics, potentially risking inconsistency in the proportion of teachers trained in inclusive practice.



Teacher training provision on inclusive education

As part of the mainstream teacher training curriculum, initial teacher education includes a generic and introductory approach to issues related to inclusion, as well as how to work with families. It also features content on understanding and supporting learners with diverse characteristics and additional needs.¹¹¹ OECD statistics reveal that 45% of teachers

were trained to teach in mixed-ability settings as part of their formal teacher education or training. Despite these measures in place, teachers report a need for further support, with only 39% of teachers in Portugal stating that they feel prepared to work in an inclusive environment with students with diverse educational needs.¹¹²



Diagnosis of learning disabilities

Early identification of additional learning support needs in young children up to the age of 6 falls under the responsibility of interdisciplinary Local Early Intervention Teams, under the regulation of the Social Security, Education and Health Ministries. A child may be referred through health centres, creche/pre-school teachers, or

parents, but assessment and diagnosis will mainly be conducted through these local teams. Following a family-centred approach to assessment, the team decides together with the family who will act as the coordinator for the child, whether this be a teacher, psychologist or doctor.

¹⁰⁶ Towards a more inclusive education system in Portugal, OECD Education Today, Retrieved May 2022 | ¹⁰⁷ OECD, 2020 | ¹⁰⁸ Country information for Portugal - Legislation and Policy - European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education. Retrieved May 2022 | ¹⁰⁹ Alves et al. 2020 | ¹¹⁰ Alves et al. 2020 | ¹¹¹ Country information for Portugal - Teacher education for inclusive education - European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education., Retrieved May 2022 | ¹¹² OECD, 2019

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Many schools also implement universal screenings at the end of pre-school (at age 5 years), in line with ambitions outlined in the 2018 Education Act.

The purpose of such assessments is not to screen for disabilities but rather focuses on literacy and language development, seeking to identify children who may need additional support in vocabulary, phonological awareness, print or letter recognition.

Preschool teachers may introduce literacy interventions for entire classes or certain groups of children in response to results from the screening, and may choose to involve educational psychologists. There are also Information and Communication Technology Resource Centres (ITRC) in place to assess pupils' needs for assistive technology.

AKF staff and teachers consulted spoke favourably of Portugal's early intervention system. Whilst this system was perceived to be very strong, it was felt that even when children are assessed, teachers are not necessarily changing anything in their classroom to accommodate learning differences.

'We are moving in a good direction – children are assessed and then pigeonholed to an extent, but teachers are not necessarily changing anything in the classroom to accommodate the learner.'

Assessment expert, Portugal



Current attitudes and awareness of inclusive practice and disability

The country's shift from segregation to inclusion of all learners in the same school suggests a significant attitudinal shift in the perception of learners with disabilities. When asked more about how this shift is happening on the ground, AKF staff made the point that in the Portuguese context the principle was always inclusion, but that the operation aiming to achieve this was previously segregation. This has required a departure from segregation. This has required a departure from segregation and a journey towards inclusion starting since 2018 when the

design of the education system was modified to allow all students to develop their potential regardless of physical or learning impairments, or social disadvantage. The shift was seen to be about adding more children in the meaning of inclusion.

'The teachers teach everyone – each one and all of the students, to give what each of the children need for success.'

Teacher, Lisbon area



Education provision, services and support for learners with disabilities

Portugal has made gradual progress towards designing and delivering an education system that is inclusive of all children with additional learning needs. Before 1991 special education was given separately in special units for children with profound physical or intellectual disabilities. Since 2008, all children have been learning together in mainstream settings, however, the focus remained on providing special education classes to students with profound physical disabilities. Since 2018, there has been a push to move towards a more inclusive model that recognises factors other than physical disability that may exclude learners from fully accessing learning, whilst also ensuring all children can access support and learn together.

All children are now taught together in regular classrooms, including those with physical and learning disabilities, and those who speak Portuguese as an additional language. The teacher expressed how important he felt this was, so that all children can learn together, and especially for the development of socio-emotional skills such as empathy, resilience and critical thinking. All schools are equipped with Learning Support Centres which aim to support teachers in promoting the quality of learner participation in their classes and other learning contexts.¹¹³

'Learning Support Centres aren't considered as special needs units, because they are for all children.'

Teacher, Lisbon area

Schools can also draw on expertise provided through Resource Centres for Inclusion, through which they can access professionals such as speech therapists, physiotherapists, psychologists and social workers.

The specialists work with children separately outside of regular classes, or sometimes within regular classes – for example, speech therapists can help or give advice to regular teachers. What's more, in the case of the teacher consulted, as a Priority Intervention Education Territory (TEIP), the school is provided with extra resources which can be used to pay for experts from a university, teacher training or to provide breakfast and snacks.

Students are supported in school by a team coordinator and a reference teacher; the former is responsible for academic performance, and the latter takes charge of contact with the family. The coordinator and reference teacher work together to prepare the strategy of support for learners with disabilities.

'Our school also applies to a lot of projects – we have even had animal therapy with donkeys, dogs, chickens for those with more severe needs. The children really enjoy it. What is important is that every child is happy in the school.'

Teacher, Lisbon area

¹¹³ Country information for Portugal - Systems of support and specialist provision - European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education., Retrieved May 2022

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‘The focus for us as a school is always on learning disabilities – physical disabilities are the responsibility of the Health Ministry.’

Teacher, Lisbon area

In terms of curriculum and learning materials, Portugal now uses universal design for learning but there is little support for curriculum flexibility. This largely depends on the local authority, resource available and school leadership. There have been some curriculum adaptations, however when it has been determined that a child requires additional support they will have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) that tailors their learning according to their needs. The Schools2030 programme in Portugal is developing assessment tools for non-academic learning domains in line with the principles of universal design for learning. In this way, assessment developers are aiming for these to be more adaptable for those with learning

differences. Children can participate in a number of different ways, for example choosing whether they wish to answer scenario-based tasks through drama, written response or other means.

‘This adaptation is implicit not explicit – we use universal design for learning as a key set of principles.’

Assessment expert, Portugal

Schools also focus on supporting students for their transition from school to work or further study by creating a transition plan for each student. In the case of students with additional support needs, in the last two years of schooling, their IEP becomes a Transition Plan which lists the learner’s skills, abilities and desires as well as the parents’ expectations which aims to prepare pupils for adult life.



Challenges and priorities

Portugal has taken many steps towards developing an inclusive school system, yet there remain some challenges to full-scale implementation. Evidence shows that teachers report the greatest need for professional development in teaching learners with special educational needs.¹¹⁴ Focus group respondents agreed that there is a need for better teacher training on supporting diverse learners, and for

supporting regular teachers on learning disabilities. Learning disabilities have not been so much of a focus, and as such these students are much more vulnerable than those with severe physical disabilities who have historically had extra resources in place. Recent research also reveals an underdiagnosis of disability in female students, which may be limiting their access to appropriate educational support.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Country information for Portugal - Teacher education for inclusive education - European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education., Retrieved May 2022 | ¹¹⁵ Alves et al. 2020





Understanding Learning
Differences Across
Schools2030 Contexts

COUNTRY PROFILES

Tanzania



Overview: Defining the concept and terminology of inclusive education

Education policy in Tanzania is largely set at the national level by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, with regional commissioners appointed by the central government. Zanzibar, an autonomous region of Tanzania, creates its own education legislation. The country has made recent efforts that strive towards a more inclusive education system, via the development of a National Strategy for Inclusive Education, the installation of special needs units within mainstream schools, and the mainstreaming of more progressive and holistic understandings of how special needs develop in children.¹¹⁶

According to the Education and Training Sector Development Plan for 2007-2011, 'special needs may arise throughout the learning career from

social, psychological, cultural and/or physical disability factors'.¹¹⁷ There is limited information available on how learning differences are thought about and addressed in the country. The Ministry of Education of Tanzania defines inclusive education as 'an approach which transforms the education system, including its structure, policies, practices and human resources, to accommodate all learners in mainstream education by addressing and responding to learners' diverse needs'.¹¹⁸

While several special needs education institutes continue to operate, most children with disabilities receive education in integrated special needs units in mainstream schools.¹¹⁹

Views from teachers and programme staff

Focus group respondents felt inclusive education to be a topic of importance in Tanzania's current education agenda, following on from the country's commitments to the Education for All movement. Staff and teachers understood inclusive education to mean education that broadens opportunities for all children – including marginalised groups that have historically been excluded such as hunter gatherers, fishing communities, street children, as well as children with disabilities and special educational needs. An inclusive education means that all children are learning together and sharing resources in one school, regardless of socio-economic background, sex, race or language. Special education was understood to be a more specific intervention targeting learners with special needs and enabling them to learn according to their needs, which could mean learning in special units or special schools.

Those most targeted by such interventions are those with impairments (e.g. hearing, visual or physical) and those with special needs (gifted and talented, or 'slow learners'). Factors that have presented barriers to being included in education are language, poverty and gender, however a lack of knowledge and skills related to supporting children with special educational needs has held the system back from being inclusive. Most commonly '**children/learner/pupil with disabilities**' is used, or the disability is specified, for example with reference to children with sight or hearing impairment.

'When we're talking about inclusive education, this should broaden education opportunities for all children - including children with disabilities.'

AKF Tanzania staff member



Quantifying learners with learning disabilities

The primary source of data on learners and disability is collected through Tanzania's decennial census. Additional data has been collected by UNICEF as part of its 2016 verification study of the out of school population, which found that approximately 3.5 million school age children were not in school.

Repetition rates are high, with 10% of Standard 1 learners repeating their first year of schooling.¹²⁰ The government acknowledge that data on learners with disabilities is limited and underutilised to inform planning.

¹¹⁶ Tanzania - Inclusion chapter, Profiles Enhancing Education Reviews (PEER), <https://www.education-profiles.org>, Retrieved May 2022 (Hereafter: Tanzania - Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022) | ¹¹⁷ Tanzania - Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022 | ¹¹⁸ Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2017 | ¹¹⁹ Tanzania - Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022 | ¹²⁰ Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2017

Country profiles | Tanzania



Policy and legislative commitments

The Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MoEST) oversees the [National Strategy for Inclusive Education](#), the most recent iteration of which was put forward for 2018-2021.

The strategy aims to ‘maintain standards of inclusiveness, adaptation, and modification of curriculum content, pedagogy and environment to ensure access and participation in quality education for all learners irrespective of [...] intellectual abilities and special learning needs’.¹²¹

The MoEST developed a network of Resource Assessment Centres which aim to improve early identification and assessment of children with special needs, improve care and teaching for children with Albinism, visual and hearing impairments, intellectual impairment and autism.¹²²

The Primary Education Development Plan (PEDP), developed over phases between 2001 and 2021, introduced inclusive education as a way to address the exclusion of hard-to-reach groups, orphans and those with disabilities.¹²³



Teacher training provision on inclusive education

The 2004 [National Policy on Disability](#) identified the need of an individualised education plan for teachers. With an acute shortage of teachers trained in special educational needs and inclusion, subsequent policies have called for a review of teacher education curricula and programmes to include content on special needs. In the current system, itinerant specialist teachers are tasked with providing support to teachers and learners in several regions. Their task is mainly to assist mainstream schools in

making adaptations and preparing materials for blind learners.¹²⁴ As of 2013, five higher education institutions provide teacher training for special needs education. Three schools award postsecondary certificates and diplomas in special needs education, and two schools award bachelor’s degrees in this area.¹²⁵ One of the key strategic objectives of [The National Strategy for Inclusive Education](#) is to strengthen the capacity of teacher training colleges and teachers to work with vulnerable students and those with special

needs. The strategy outlines ambitions to review the teacher education curriculum, increase the numbers of specialised teachers, and build capacity of in-service teachers.¹²⁶

Consistent with these findings, AKF staff members explained that in-service training on inclusion is currently exclusively for special needs teachers. However, they are aware of the government’s efforts to establish training on inclusion in teacher training colleges so that all teachers are trained on this. Most of the teachers consulted had undergone some form of training on this, but they also requested that training was available for in-service non-specialist teachers and spoke of the need for teachers to be equipped with more tools and strategies to apply. One teacher had covered inclusive classroom practice in a master’s course which they viewed as particularly helpful

‘It helped much on how to deal with them and create lesson plans that accommodate all my learners depending on their disabilities

because you can’t teach all of them using the same approach. It helped me on how to choose learning materials that will accommodate all of them despite of their disabilities.’

Secondary school teacher, Dar es Salaam

Nevertheless, all consulted expressed a request for more focus on training:

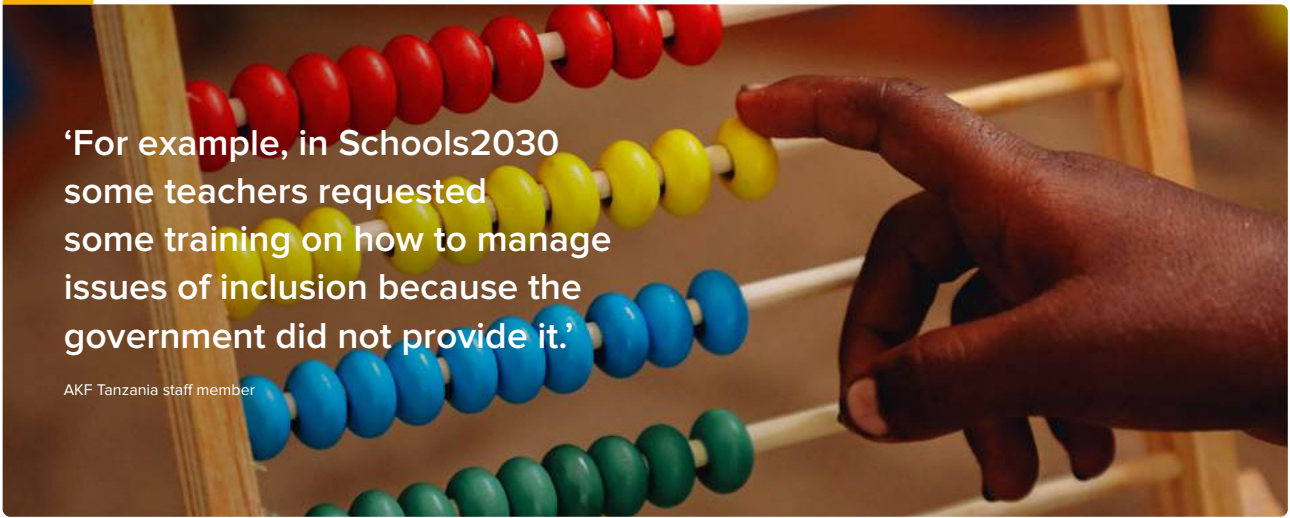
‘Learners need more support on technology and many teachers lack knowledge and skills on how to manage them and assist them.’

Secondary school teacher, Dar es Salaam

‘Some teachers requested skills to know how to accommodate these children - when you ask what they want to learn more about this is what they will say.’

AKF Tanzania staff member

¹²¹ Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2017 | ¹²² Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2017 | ¹²³ Tanzania - Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022 | ¹²⁴ Tanzania - Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022 | ¹²⁵ Stone-MacDonald, 2013 | ¹²⁶ Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2017



‘For example, in Schools2030 some teachers requested some training on how to manage issues of inclusion because the government did not provide it.’

AKF Tanzania staff member

Country profiles | Tanzania



Diagnosis of learning disabilities

Though Resource Assessment Centres have been established to support assessment of learners, focus group respondents explained that to their knowledge there is no formal diagnosis system in place, and that the process is mostly based on teacher’s own physical assessment of a child and their assessment of their learning. This tends to mean that most of the focus is on visible signs, and thus more on those with severe learning disabilities.

Teachers will also speak to parents to clarify the learning needs of the child. However, there is no established process to obtain an official diagnosis. Schools can request a basic assessment kit from the government for teachers to use themselves to assess learners.

It is envisaged that these kits are used in schools by teachers on an annual basis for screening. It was raised however, that having the tools is not enough as teachers must be equipped with the skills and knowledge to do so effectively. It appeared that some of the teachers were unaware that these tools exist, but they mentioned they try to give more time to these learners and include them in different learning activities more suited to their learning style.

‘We also have to develop the capacity of these teachers. Having tools is one thing, having teacher capacity is something else. We need to achieve both.’

AKF Tanzania staff member

of the focus is on physical disabilities. It was apparent that one teacher whose school has a special unit reported good awareness of disabilities compared to other schools. Staff cited recent research conducted in the past few years which has shown that most of the teachers didn’t understand how inclusion should be accommodated, again highlighting the policy-practice gap that they had spoken about.

‘Most will focus on physical disabilities and mental health, but they don’t go far.’

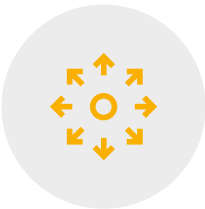
AKF Tanzania staff member

‘The education sector needs to go deeper into the matter of learning disabilities instead of focusing only on physical disabilities.’

AKF Tanzania staff member

‘In our school, most teachers and students are now aware of learners with special needs because we have units for those with intellectual impairments.’

Primary school teacher, Lindi



Current attitudes and awareness of inclusive practice and disability

Focus group respondents felt that the gap between policy and practice in inclusion is largely down to teachers not being adequately prepared with enough knowledge on the topic. Hence, still some negative attitudes persist in schools and in

communities towards children with disabilities. There is some knowledge about disability amongst teachers, however it was perceived that there isn’t as much awareness about learning disabilities as most



Education provision, services and support for learners with disabilities

Staff members and teachers alluded to different models and different ways in which learners with disabilities are learning in school. Some schools put learners with disabilities in special programmes, although eventually they re-join other students to continue studies together; some schools in each district have a special unit that caters especially to students with disabilities; in some schools children with disabilities are in regular classes with other learners, and also get home visits; and in other cases children are referred to a specialised school.

‘Special education is provided in Tanzania but it is not common. For example, in our municipality we have only two units (schools) for special needs pupils. Some learners with learning disabilities are in regular class/schools but other learners with learning difficulties they are in segregated (special classroom/schools) with their trained teachers.’

Primary school teacher, Lindi

Country profiles | Tanzania

Staff explained that the government are currently learning from different models to test whether and how inclusive schooling can happen. However, it was felt that the government are deciding on categorising single-disability special units in regular schools at the expense of inclusion – for example opting to designate schools focusing solely on visual impairment which means learners are not mixed and the approach is not as inclusive.

The government also have ambitions to adapt the curriculum for those with disabilities, and this is currently under review. Support is provided through a mix of the state, private organisations and NGOs.

AKF staff mentioned that many of the solutions emerging from the human-centred design process in Tanzania are addressing a drive to be more inclusive.

‘Classroom materials are not accessible to all disabled learners. Students with vision impairments need assistance of technology, but teaching aids are not accessible to all. Even the classroom seating arrangement is not friendly to them. Many of our classrooms are overcrowded and the seating arrangement used is row and column style which is not a good seating arrangement according to their impairments.’

Secondary school teacher, Dar es Salaam

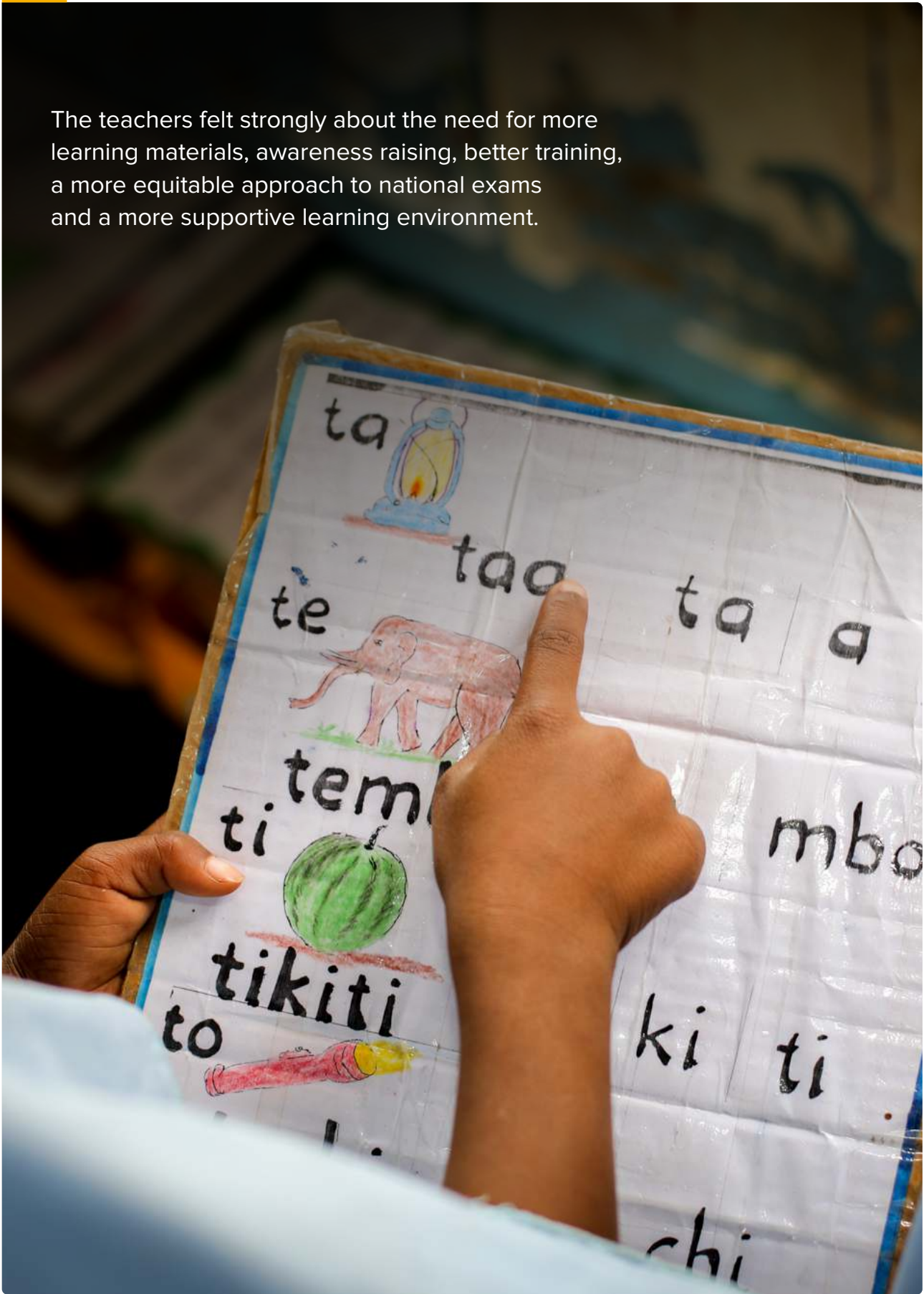


Challenges and priorities

The [2018-2021 National Strategy for Inclusive Education](#) acknowledges that children and youth with disabilities are not supported, reflected by the high repetition rate and large out-of-school population. The strategy cites additional barriers to establishing an inclusive education system as; a lack of funding and framework for teacher trainings, an overall shortage of special needs teachers, and a lack of data availability. Further, information on sub-categories of disability is highly limited both in government policy and strategy, as well as in the work of not-for-profits focused on disability.¹²⁷

Focus group respondents noted that improving infrastructure should be a priority to ensure access for those with physical disabilities.

A core priority was first and foremost to ensure all children are enrolled and attending schools, even in villages where those with disabilities have traditionally not attended school. There was a strong emphasis on the need to build teacher knowledge of inclusion, how to accommodate learners with disabilities and a need for better equipment and capacity to assess learners with learning disabilities.



The teachers felt strongly about the need for more learning materials, awareness raising, better training, a more equitable approach to national exams and a more supportive learning environment.



Overview: Defining the concept and terminology of inclusive education

The Ministry of Education and Sports in Uganda defines inclusive education as a system which ‘... embraces modifications in curricular, teaching methods, teaching/learning resources, medium of communication and adjusting the learning environment to meet individual learning needs. It is learner centred, flexible, and adjustable to the individual needs and potential of every child.’¹²⁸ The Ministry’s understanding of ‘children with special educational needs’ extends beyond those who have physical or other disabilities to cover pupils who are failing in school for a wide variety of other reasons including ‘mild learning disabilities or profound cognitive impairment; developmental delays that catch up quickly or remain entrenched; occasional panic attacks or serious psychiatric problems’.¹²⁹

Compared to other countries in East Africa, Uganda has more explicit mention of learning disabilities in government documents and there are more NGOs working to support those with disabilities in the country.

Terms used across government strategy and research literature include ‘slow learners’, ‘learning difficulties’, and ‘learners with barriers arising from disability’. Education of these populations takes place both in mainstream schools, referred to as ‘all inclusive’ (where most students with disabilities learn), ‘special schools’, and ‘attached units’ that are situated alongside mainstream schools.¹³⁰

¹²⁷ Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2017 | ¹²⁸ Ministry of Education and Sports, Special Needs and Inclusive Education | ¹²⁹ Uganda Ministry of Education and Sport, 2015 | ¹³⁰ Education For All: Making Education Inclusive, Accessible to Uganda’s Children With Special Needs, The World Bank, Retrieved May 2022

Views from teachers and programme staff

Teachers and AKF staff consulted felt inclusive education to be a topic of significance in the Ugandan education system. It was understood to refer to education suited to a range of learners, such as those with physical and intellectual disabilities. However, the group made a point that it is not necessarily those with learning disabilities that underperform, but also children from poorer backgrounds. In terms of terminology, ‘special needs’ or ‘**children with special needs**’ is most commonly used to refer to learners who have disabilities. ‘**Time takers**’ is also a commonly used term which is found in teacher training materials to refer to students disadvantaged for a range of reasons, such as ability or economic status. The acronym ‘SNE’ is used for Special Needs Education.

Whilst it was felt that supporting learners with disabilities was an important priority, the teachers made a case for opening up the category of special needs. They spoke of a need to focus on the large proportion of learners who are disadvantaged, for those learners that are living in extreme poverty or young girls who are forced into the sex industry.

‘Let’s also speak about disadvantaged as a term – I’d rather use ‘disadvantaged’ than special needs.’

Secondary school teacher, Kampala



Quantifying learners with learning disabilities

Data on students and disability is collected by the Bureau of Statistics. It implements a Household Survey every ten years which was most recently conducted in 2019/2020. Questions in the survey assess the degree to which a disability impacts one’s day-to-day activities. For example, among the total adult population, 2.3% reported they have a difficulty remembering/concentrating disability.¹³¹ The World Bank also collects data on students in

Uganda and found that 2.3% of children ages 6-12 don’t attend school because of a disability and out of those students enrolled in a secondary school 0.6% are recorded as having a special learning need.¹³² The World Bank estimates that 2.5 million children in Uganda have a disability that hinders their access to education.¹³³ However, disaggregated data on disability is limited, especially for learning differences.

Country profiles | Uganda



Policy and legislative commitments

The Department for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (SN&IE) is housed within the Ministry of Education and Sport. In 2011 a [Special Needs and Inclusive Education Policy](#) was developed aiming to increase access to schooling for persons with special learning needs, strengthen programmes and initiatives for SN&IE, increase implementation of SN&IE initiatives, and promote sporting programmes for learners with special needs.¹³⁴ However, this policy is still in draft form. The Ministry of Education also developed a department within the National Curriculum Development Centre consisting of a panel of 18 specialists in education of learners with special learning needs. With support from the US Agency on International Development (USAID), the panel advises on modifications to

the primary school curriculum to suit diverse learning needs and education strategies. This has led to the distribution of supplementary guidelines to schools on the adapted curriculum for learners with special education needs.¹³⁵ In 2014, the Ministry initiated a Special Needs Education Programme to provide guidance on the delivery of SN&IE, including testing and special education materials. Listed amongst its aims was the development of an early identification assessment and intervention model for children with invisible impairments, as well as the upskilling of teachers in special needs education. However, the programme performed poorly due equipment shortages, the lack of teacher trainings implemented and funding shortages.¹³⁶



Teacher training provision on inclusive education

Since 2005, the primary school thematic curriculum has asked teachers to use learner-centred methods and to adapt the direction of lessons considering children’s reactions and feedback.¹³⁷ District-based Teacher Development and Management System Centres

play an important role in implementing training in inclusive education. Most of the centres coordinate special tutors who have received training in special needs education and inclusion. These tutors are expected to provide supervisory support to teachers in schools,

organise in-service training, develop educational materials and upgrade teacher training centres. However, in-service training opportunities are limited and many teachers are not sufficiently equipped to assist learners in an inclusive school.

As a result, a number of NGOs have invested in teacher training programmes on inclusion and in health professionals who are able to support schools in identifying children with disabilities.¹³⁸

A shortage of expertise was also highlighted by teachers consulted, who explained that training isn’t provided for non-specialist SNE teachers. From their experience, there are too few specialist teachers to meet the demand.

What’s more, when teachers have large numbers of students it is very difficult for them to know how to cater to students with special needs. Without the training this relies on the teacher’s own initiative and innovation to include that child.

‘We need specialised teacher training for dealing with SNE, but teachers are not prepared. It is down to the teacher’s own innovation in dealing with special needs.’

Secondary school teacher, Kampala

Respondents felt there is also a need to help teachers in facing the profound and complex social challenges, as teachers are not prepared or qualified to know how to respond.



Diagnosis of learning disabilities

Comments from focus group respondents gave the impression of very little support from the system when it comes to diagnosing learners with learning differences. Whilst some common difficulties amongst students were felt to be dyslexia, hyperactivity disorders, visual and hearing impairments, respondents considered that teachers are in a difficult position to support learners who are undiagnosed with little support and training offered. Children with disabilities

are often kept at home, which makes it even more challenging for teachers to understand the difficulties they are facing so that they may reach out for support.

One of the respondents shared that she discovered her son was dyslexic thanks to a tutor who supports her son at home. It was only thanks to this tutor who had received training in India that they had an understanding of learning disabilities.

Country profiles | Uganda



Current attitudes and awareness of inclusive practice and disability

Focus group respondents spoke of a lack of awareness on learning disabilities especially amongst parents, with some hiding their children at home or even using corporal punishment if their child underperforms at school. It was explained that in some cases children prefer to remain silent in class rather than risk making a mistake or appearing less capable than other students. The teachers gave examples of having students with a stammer in their classes, saying that these students preferred to remain silent and not talk in class, rather than expose their condition for fear of repercussion.

‘Learners with learning differences are called daft, stupid, slow. There is a lack of awareness.’

AKF Uganda staff member

As a result, learners with difficulties are deemed slow or sick and negative attitudes from parents keep disabilities hidden away from society and the school.

However, not many schools have SNE units as these are only in specific designated schools. Sometimes schools will partner together to share materials and resources as the materials are expensive. However, this is on an ad-hoc informal basis where there are connections between individual schools/teachers, and is not formally guided by the education system. Whilst students may understandably struggle in large mainstream classes, in other settings such as special schools learners with disabilities can score highly. In these circumstances the learners have greater adaptations such as extra time and examinations are conducted orally rather than in writing.

‘Most of our schools have at least three streams per class and students’ classes are divided into three: class for time takers, for average students and for high achievers. This comes with an advantage of children learning according to their levels as time takers are usually given more attention. But from the students’ perspective it may also come with the shame of being singled out as time takers.’

AKF East Africa staff member

AKF staff shared that most schools have at least three streams per class dividing learners into groups of: time takers, average students and high achievers, which allows time takers to be given more attention from teachers. In terms of where support for disabled learners comes from, schools sometimes partner with government or NGOs to work on inclusion.

As found in some other East African countries, the language of instruction is a key consideration for ascertaining students’ performance in assessments. Staff felt that the switching of languages between English medium at pre-school, to local languages until Primary 3, and back to English at Primary 4 to be disruptive to children’s learning, and particularly for struggling learners.



Education provision, services and support for learners with disabilities

Those consulted expressed that the focus on inclusion and special education takes place predominantly at the primary school level. Whilst there is a lot of talk about inclusion, respondents felt it wasn’t materialising in practice at country level. One of the teachers spoke of her school which has a SNE unit -

‘My school has an SNE unit with braille machines for blind students, and caters for those with physical impairment. These children learn together with other children, and in the evening they are trained on braille. They are also accommodated in the school.’

Primary school teacher, Arua



Challenges and priorities

The Ugandan Ministry of Education cites insufficient funding, a weak policy framework, limited data and insufficient training for teachers as barriers to implementing its imagined inclusive education framework.

The Education Services Commission 2018/2019 Report shares that bureaucracy has been a major inhibitor of implementing inclusive education practices.¹³⁹ The Uganda Constitution stipulates that public financing for special needs

¹³¹ Uganda Bureau of Statistics: The Uganda National Household Survey 2019/20, 2021 | ¹³² Special Needs Education in Uganda: Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) #4 Concerns Quality and Inclusive Education, The World Bank, Retrieved May 2022 | ¹³³ Education For All: Making Education Inclusive, Accessible to Uganda’s Children With Special Needs, The World Bank, Retrieved May 2022 | ¹³⁴ Policies & Regulations, Republic of Uganda, Ministry of Education and Sports | ¹³⁵ Uganda - Inclusion chapter, Profiles Enhancing Education Reviews (PEER), <https://www.education-profiles.org>, Retrieved May 2022 (Hereafter: Uganda - Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022) | ¹³⁶ Uganda - Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022 | ¹³⁷ Uganda - Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022 | ¹³⁸ Uganda - Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022

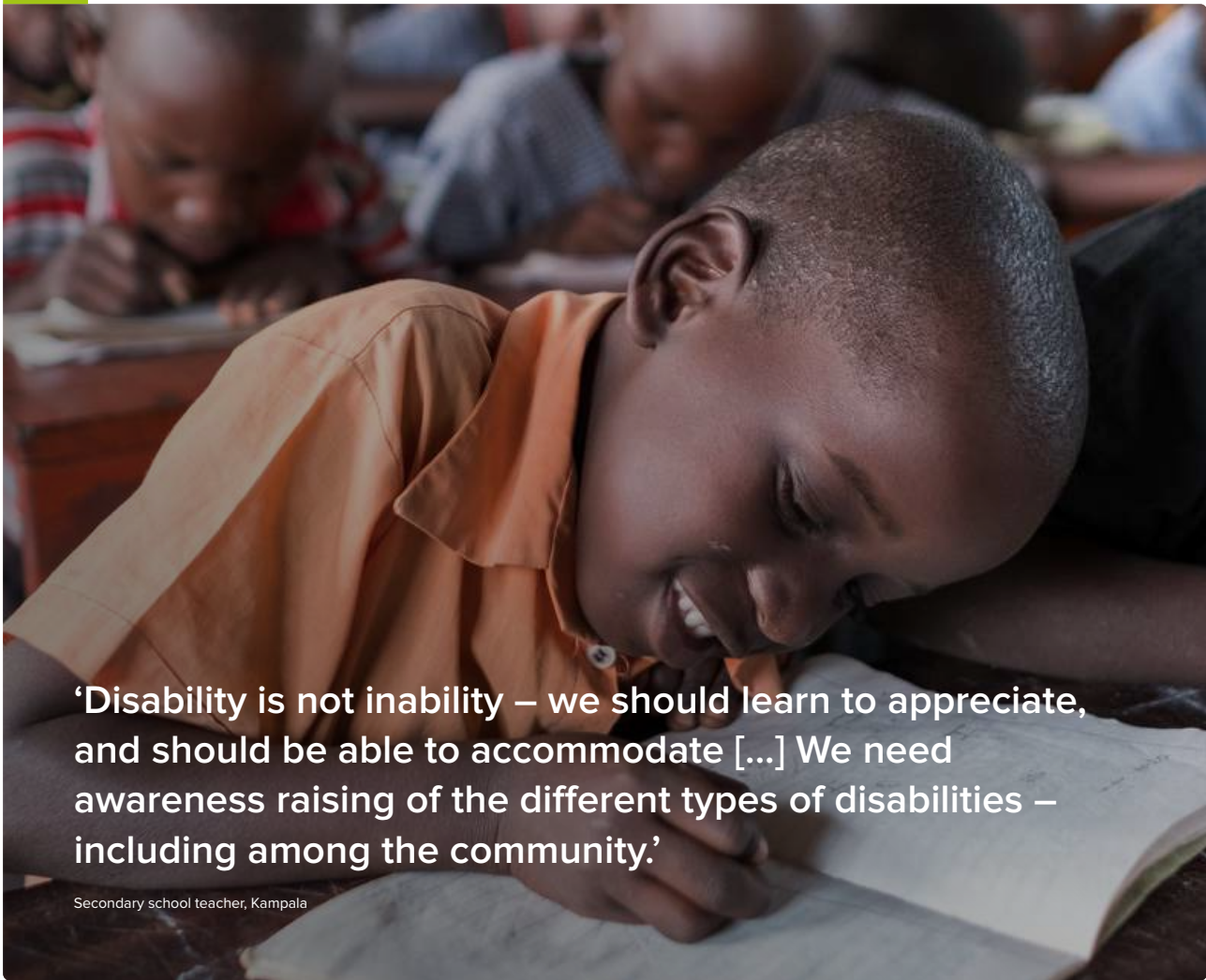
Country profiles | Uganda

and inclusive education should account for 10 percent of the education budget, but it currently stands at 0.1%, an indication that more needs to be done to resource the teaching and learning of learners with disability.¹³⁹

Teachers felt strongly that a lack of awareness and negative attitudes amongst parents that stigmatise those with disabilities, as well as a lack of school infrastructure that recognises differences were major factors in limiting the

advance of inclusion in education. They called for national bodies responsible for teacher training to design and introduce training that prepares all teachers for supporting learners with special needs. It was also felt that the examination body should prepare its trainers on the administration of exams for those with special needs. Other steps felt necessary were on basic education provision, such as having enough learning materials across all fields of learning.

¹³⁹ Uganda Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, 2018, Provision of Inclusive Education in Uganda: What are the challenges? | ¹⁴⁰ Education For All: Making Education Inclusive, Accessible to Uganda's Children With Special Needs, The World Bank, Retrieved May 2022



‘Disability is not inability – we should learn to appreciate, and should be able to accommodate [...] We need awareness raising of the different types of disabilities – including among the community.’

Secondary school teacher, Kampala



Discussion

Summary table of findings

This table displays a summary of some key information points that the data gathered through a review of literature, interviews, focus group discussions and questionnaires report on.

It is apparent that most countries have developed policies or plans to promote inclusive education in their context, and that most governments recognise the learning differences population amongst those who benefit from inclusive education. Whilst this is positive, it is important to note that this does not equate to inclusive education being implemented in practice (as will be discussed below). There is a more mixed picture for the current provision of teacher education on inclusive education and supporting learners

with diverse needs, where in most cases this is either just being introduced or is limited. Whilst there is some form of diagnostic system across the majority of countries, provision is either not widespread/consistent, focuses mainly on physical disabilities, is offered under a medical model of disability or relies on teachers who are not sufficiently trained. Findings also reveal that the majority of countries lack a reliable monitoring and reporting function to record statistics related to learners with disabilities in education.

	Policies/plans/strategies promoting inclusive education have been developed	Policies/government documents make mention of the learning differences population ¹	General pre/in-service teacher training covers inclusive education	A diagnostic system is in place to diagnose learning disabilities	Reliable data on disability is available	Most commonly used terms to refer to students with disabilities
Afghanistan	✓ *	✓	✗	✗	✗	Child/girl/person with disability
Brazil	✓	✓	—	—	—	Children with special needs
India	✓	✓	✓	—	—	Children with Disabilities (CWD) Children with Special Needs (CWSN) Specially Enabled Children (SEC)
Kenya	✓	✓	—	—	✓	Challenged/abled differently
Kyrgyzstan	✓	✓	✗	—	✗	Children with SEND Children with disabilities
Pakistan	✓	✓	—	—	✓	Special children Handicapped children
Portugal	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Children with additional learning support needs (though this is broader than students with disabilities)
Tanzania	✓	✓	✗	—	—	Child/learner/pupil with disabilities
Uganda	—	✓	✗	✗	—	Children with special needs Time takers

* it remains unclear whether the new government will uphold these policies
¹ Refers to either: children with special (educational) needs, learning disabilities, specific learning disabilities, general developmental disorders, individual learning differences, processing disorders, those facing learning barriers resulting from pupil/environment interaction

Summary of progress and challenges

PROGRESS

Societal attitudes are changing for the better

Across many of the contexts studied it was reported that societal attitudes are changing for the better in terms of how disability is perceived. In Kyrgyzstan, for example, stigmatising attitudes towards those with disabilities are slowly being overturned as special institutions are closed down, and in Afghanistan momentum was building in promoting greater awareness and shaping more positive views towards those with disabilities. In Brazil, with the growing recognition that education should value difference and diversity, the notion of the perfect classroom has been challenged. What’s more, some attention is starting to be given over to ‘hidden’ disabilities, such as specific learning disabilities, though more awareness raising is required.

Inclusive education is high up on the policy agenda

Inclusive education is seen to be a core focus for education policy makers across contexts. This is evident from the fact that almost all of the countries studied have developed policies or government strategies dedicated to advancing inclusive education. Inclusion has become the central focus of education policy making in Portugal, and across contexts this is being seen as a way to address exclusion of the most marginalised groups. In Kyrgyzstan

high-level discussions are ongoing between the government and development partners on how to make their education systems more inclusive. There is also an indication that learning differences are entering the policy agenda, with many policies or government plans mentioning specific learning disabilities and individual learning differences. In Kenya, for example, the government have acknowledged that in the past policies have ignored conditions other than physical impairments such as specific learning difficulties.

Systems are moving away from segregated education

Most education systems have moved away from providing segregated special education for learners with disabilities, though some special institutions may remain. This has happened most recently in Kyrgyzstan, and in some contexts inclusion is supported by integrated support units in mainstream schools, such as in Portugal, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, though these are limited in number in the East African countries.

Some attention on contextualised diagnostic tool development

The literature points to a trend in the use of Western developed diagnostic tools being used in global contexts. Some tentative evidence was uncovered of diagnostic tools starting to be developed in contexts where these didn’t

exist prior, such as in India. Efforts have also been made to allow teachers to conduct diagnostic assessments in school, for example in Tanzania and in India, though this has had limited success so far.

Acknowledgement of the importance of early intervention

There was also an acknowledgement of the importance of early intervention, particularly when it comes to supporting the learning journey of children with disabilities and those with additional learning support needs. In Portugal, the early intervention system proves largely successful, and in East African countries, this is identifying learners with the most severe disabilities so that they can get support from an early age through support units attached to pre-schools, although provision is patchy.

CHALLENGES

Policy-practice gap

The starkest challenge emerging from this research is the gap between policy and practice when it comes to inclusive education.

Whilst many policies and plans have been developed in line with international recommendations and explicitly specify the marginalised groups that should be targeted,

practice and provision on the ground are not meeting the aspirations laid out on paper.

Across the countries studied, respondents were vocal about a need for government to focus on the implementation of policies, and for more support to be put in place on the ground. Whilst this rang true for all countries, this was felt most strongly to be a priority in the case of India, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. Even where children with disabilities are educated in mainstream schools, the evidence indicates that many drop out at secondary level, such as in Afghanistan and in Kenya.

Evidence gap

Across many of the contexts there is a lack of accurate data that can be used to inform strategy directed at supporting those learners most in need. Indeed, many of the countries studied lack systematic monitoring and reporting systems that report on learners with disabilities and other related statistics as relevant to inclusion – such is the case in Afghanistan and Kyrgyzstan. In other countries, such as India and in East African countries, data may be gathered on disability but reports primarily on those with physical disabilities. Academic research into learning disabilities is starting to gain momentum, for example in Brazil and in India.

However, research is lacking in low- and middle-income countries, in conflict affected settings, and often lacks the perspectives of disabled students themselves.

Summary of progress and challenges

Limited expertise in learning disability in the system

Accompanying this lack of research and evidence is a lack of in-country expertise on specific learning disabilities (such as dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia). This is resulting in weak provision of information to be fed through the education system to teachers and policy makers, and also implies that diagnosis is reliant either on tools designed under the medical model of disability or imported from Western contexts.

Lack of teacher training dedicated to inclusive practice for non-specialist teachers

An area that was felt of crucial importance to the delivery of inclusion was teacher training. Across contexts, it was deemed that current pre- and in-service training models are insufficient at preparing non-specialist teachers to accommodate learners with diverse needs in the classroom, including those with disabilities. Though there may be detailed content available for those enrolling on a specialist training module or course, general teacher education content on inclusive practice is often minimal, only available as an elective option, or is too theoretical. This is resulting in teachers being underprepared to support all learners in school. Specifically, findings point to an even lower level of expertise amongst teachers in learning disabilities. It is of interest to note that even in Portugal where provision for inclusive practice is strong, evidence suggests that teachers feel underprepared to support learners with diverse needs.

Funding and resource

Whilst policies are calling for change in the system so that learning environments are conducive to inclusion, a lack of equipment, assistive aids and learning materials, as well as inaccessible infrastructure remain a challenge in many contexts. What’s more, in the majority of countries studied, teachers attend to large class sizes or even to multiple classes at the same time – this is often the case in East Africa, Pakistan and India. The stretched capacity of teachers is limiting their ability to focus on individual learning needs.

Lack of awareness / stigmatising beliefs

Though attitudes are changing for the better, negative attitudes persist to the extent that some families continue to keep their children at home, disabled children drop out of school due to bullying, or schools even refuse to allow them to attend in the first place. In rural and remote communities a lack of reliable information sources is preventing a shift in attitudes in line with the principles of inclusion. Stigmatising beliefs were particularly felt to be a challenge in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Kenya, Uganda and Kyrgyzstan.

Other compounding issues

The existence of profound and compounding socio-economic factors disadvantaging students is a considerable challenge to being able to deliver inclusive education. Education systems face the challenge of operating in unstable

crisis contexts with acute social problems, where teachers will find themselves dealing with the effects of poverty, substance abuse, unemployment and sexual abuse in the classroom. Faced with such challenges and few resources, teachers have limited opportunity to focus on individual learning needs and learning

differences. Another common challenge identified was that learners are often educated in a language other than their mother tongue, for example in Pakistan, Kenya and Uganda, with the language barrier potentially masking difficulties due to learning disabilities.



Recommendations

Considering what has been learnt through a search of the literature and in consultation with teachers, Aga Khan Foundation staff and others, the following recommendations are advised:



1. Strengthen teacher training provision

Teacher professional education models should incorporate content on inclusive education for all teachers, not just those opting to specialise. How to support learners with diverse learning needs, including for those with specific learning disabilities, should be covered in compulsory pre- and in-service teacher training, and should be oriented towards practice in the classroom, rather than theory.



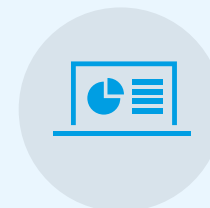
2. Engage with parents and the community

Awareness raising activities on the rights of children with disabilities should be increased to combat stigmatising attitudes towards those with disabilities amongst parents and communities. Parental engagement with the school as well as public awareness campaigns are potential ways to build understanding of disability and shift negative attitudes.



3. Invest in human resource, infrastructure and equipment for schools

Attention should be given to address teacher shortages, and investment directed at creating accessible environments with the necessary basic equipment that can transform a child's learning experience, such as glasses and assistive aids.



4. Invest in data reporting, evidence and research to guide interventions

More research on disability and inclusion is needed in the given contexts, as well as investment in developing data reporting infrastructure to determine the situation of learners with different types of disabilities. Many contexts could benefit from an in-depth review of whether practice is meeting the aims for inclusion as laid out in policy, to identify areas of need and development. Further research is needed on defining learning differences and how these manifest in the chosen contexts. Accompanying this, focus should be given to ensuring uptake of evidence.



5. Strengthen diagnostic systems

Investment should be made in strengthening diagnostic systems – specifically in better integrating health and education services, in developing context appropriate tools and in building expertise of specific learning disabilities.

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