

Schools Connect

# Creating more inclusive schooling

Edited by Susan Douglas

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# Foreword

**Mark Herbert**  
Global Head of Schools,  
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Inclusion is at the heart of what we do at the British Council and the core of our cultural relations mission. It represents mutual trust, respect and understanding and is integral to the success of every student, every business and indeed every country – enabling us all to draw on the widest possible field of talent, skills and inspiration. At the British Council we focus on six areas of diversity, aligned to those protected by UK equality legislation: age, disability, ethnicity or race, gender, religion or belief and sexual identity. We recognise that these different areas intersect and, together with other characteristics such as socio-economic status and geographical location, form our multifaceted identities.

At a time when the world is facing great challenges, we believe that it is even more important to understand differences, empathise with alternative perspectives and find ways to build trust between people and nations. Therefore, acting to make education systems more inclusive is essential whether this is in response to the challenges of socio-economic disparities, conflicts, mass migration, evidence of increased nationalism or the seeming desire to close off from, rather than to open ourselves up to, diversity. These feed into and are reflected in who has access to quality education and who does not. Nor are we alone. Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 – and specifically SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all – is a high priority both for us and others.

We believe that inclusive education today calls for a broad rights-based concept of education that encompasses anyone who might be excluded from or have limited access to the educational system within a country. Barriers that affect learning, whether they be environmental, societal, organisational or attitudinal, need to be systematically addressed. We take a social model approach aimed at overcoming socially constructed barriers and empowering both individuals and society as a whole. In our own work, we aim to achieve alignment between what we say and what we do. We want everyone who comes into contact with us, both offline and online, to feel valued and respected, while we wish our programmes, services and ways of working to demonstrate our stated commitment to inclusion. We believe this will enrich everyone's experiences and ultimately lead to more inclusive societies.

## New voices

In this publication, we share thought pieces, insights and case studies that focus on research and evidence related to creating more inclusive schools and that are relevant to local and global contexts. They cover a wide variety of issues relating to groups of pupils that are not always included into the regular education systems in their countries. These include pupils with special educational needs and disabilities, girls and pupils who have been displaced (either internally, cross-border to third countries by conflict, natural disaster or economic hardship) and those who have been excluded from education because of language, culture, ethnicity, social status, trauma or a lack of resources. However, it is fully recognised that there are significant intersectionality issues between and among these groups, and this is acknowledged within the papers.

We hope they will offer policy makers, school leaders and teachers food for thought as they consider the challenges and opportunities of creating more inclusive schools. As we develop our self-awareness and reflect on our practice, our techniques and pedagogies will undoubtedly become more sophisticated. Successful inclusion relies on a continual process of reflection, adjustment and planning, but perhaps, above all else, it relies on our educators having an unwavering commitment to and belief in the Incheon ambition that 'No education target should be considered met unless met by all'. There is no more important an ambition: inclusive education is essential for peace, tolerance, human fulfilment and sustainable development. It is the key to achieving full employment and poverty eradication, and we cannot therefore afford to have any child left behind.

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# Creating more inclusive schooling for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities

**Susan Douglas, Senior Adviser British Council and CEO, Eden Academy Trust**

The two statements 'All children have an entitlement to education' and 'All children have the capacity to make progress' are easy ones to make and to secure agreement on. But while these fundamental beliefs are common, the building blocks that create our educational landscapes – policies, infrastructure, teaching practices, societal values and resources – often mean that fully achieving such aspirations can be at best challenging and, in the worst cases, almost impossible.

Internationally there is a shared commitment to securing more inclusive education systems. Sustainable Development Goal 4, set by the United Nations General Assembly, aims to 'Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' (UNESCO, 2023), while the World Education Forum adopted the Incheon Declaration in 2015, committing to 'a single, renewed education agenda that is holistic, ambitious and aspirational, leaving no one behind' (World Education Forum, 2015). The declaration continues: 'Inclusion and equity in and through education is the cornerstone of a transformative education agenda, and we therefore commit to addressing all forms of exclusion and marginalisation, disparities and inequalities in access, participation and learning outcomes. No education target should be considered met unless met by all' (ibid.).

The British Council believes that the inclusion of children and young people in the education systems of their respective countries is an entitlement and a fundamental human right regardless of their gender, ethnicity, ability, language of choice, socio-economic background, health or medical condition. If the inclusion of all children and young people is to be successful and sustainable, then it must be predicated on an approach that is achievable, empowering and based upon a thorough and sensitive understanding of the current context of the particular school and education system. The commitment to developing inclusive practice therefore requires a multi-tiered response that addresses policy, practice and culture at all levels within the education system.

The British Council's approach to developing more inclusive schooling for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) is premised on two basic principles – access and engagement.

- Access relates to pupils being able to freely attend school regardless of their age, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic background, ability, health or language needs. Access therefore focuses mainly on policies and structures.
- Engagement is about quality and ensuring that what pupils experience – when they do access their school – is relevant, meaningful, empowering and beneficial. Engagement is therefore focused on practice and pedagogy and ensuring that pupils learn successfully.

Without access, an engaging curriculum is of no relevance. Without engagement, access is simply about being there rather than about learning and achieving. These two things cannot be achieved



without a culture that supports and expects high standards for all. Of course, in order to secure changes in policy, practice and culture, the people that work within the system need to be both empowered and enabled to make those changes.

- Empowerment is about giving practitioners not only the permission but also the encouragement and incentives to change, as people are far more likely to put in the time and effort if they feel there is an agreed course to follow and that they have the authority to act.
- Enablement is about supporting our practitioners to develop the skills and knowledge they need to effectively teach children with a wide range of needs and from diverse backgrounds.

Successful inclusive practice will only be secured by change at all levels within the system. While there have been some gains in expanding access to education over the last 15 years (UNESCO, 2023), this has been hampered by the global pandemic as well as international conflicts and natural disasters, meaning there is still a long way to go. Schools and teachers can still positively effect change for pupils, however, by altering and improving their experiences, the expectations that surround them and by creating supportive and enabling environments. Simply put, teachers can improve engagement, which will ultimately lead to improved learning outcomes.

The British Council believes a consideration of some of the research related to inclusive education can empower a practitioner to look at issues from a fresh perspective, allowing the development of new ways of thinking and finding new solutions to some old challenges. There is a fundamental difference between equality – where everyone is treated the same – and equity, where everyone is treated according to their own needs. Inclusion is not about treating everyone the same, it is about demonstrating the skills and awareness as a teacher of how to identify and respond to the diverse needs of any group of pupils. To help teachers acquire and hone these skills, consideration of the following three models is useful.

## 1 Social relations

Inclusion in society and education is affected by many factors, both externally from the environment and internally from our attitudes and beliefs. Some of these factors are explicit and easily seen, while some may be hidden or unrecognised. The social relations framework originated with academics led by Naila Kabeer at the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex. It explores how, in any organisation or society, including schools, exclusion and poverty arise out of unequal social relations; that is to say an unequal distribution of power, resources and opportunities among certain groups, based on characteristics such as disability, gender, class, caste or ethnicity. The research shows that it is the people who make the decisions and hold the power who make the rules and distribute the rewards. Social relations theory is interested in looking at five aspects of institutions:

- **Rules** – who makes them? They usually prescribe how things get done – what is done, how it is done, by whom it will be done and who will benefit.
- **Activities** – what is done and by whom? For example, certain tasks are often assigned to certain social groups, such as women caring for the young, sick and elderly. The rewards for this type of work are often much smaller than for other types of work.
- **Resources** – what is used and what is produced? This includes physical material such as food, assets and capital, human resources such as labour or education, or intangible resources such as goodwill, information or networks.
- **People** – who is in and who is out? This refers to the question of who is allowed in and who is excluded from institutions as well as who is allowed into higher positions.
- **Power** – who decides and whose interests are served? Who loses power if social relations change? Who gains it?

These social relations are not fixed, however, and can change through time and with commitment from the people and institutions in a society. Practitioners in school might consider their own organisations in relation to the five aspects outlined above. How diverse is the senior leadership team and does it ensure that it hears from pupils with SEND and their families about their lived experience of provision? Do all pupils access the same opportunities?



## 2 Unconscious bias

We all tend to have unconscious biases that we have developed over time about certain groups of people – usually those that are different from us. Unconscious bias is defined as an inflexible positive or negative prejudgement about the nature, character and abilities of an individual, based on a generalised idea about the group to which the person belongs (Benson and Fiarman, 2020).

Left unchallenged, these unconscious biases, which are influenced by background, cultural environment and personal experience, can have a significant impact on our decisions, actions and behaviours without us realising. Importantly, in an educational setting, this can mean a practitioner having significantly lower expectations of one or more groups of pupils within their context. This can particularly be the case for those pupils with SEND (Chatzitheochari and Platt, 2018).

## 3 The social model of disability

The British Council's approach to creating more inclusive schooling for pupils with SEND is premised on the social model of disability, which moves away from a deficit-focused approach where the differences of the individual are seen as a personal inadequacy or abnormality. This medical model of thinking requires that the individual is 'mended' or 'cured' and then supported to enable them to fit in.

Social models of disability turn the medical model around. It is the school or the organisation that carries the responsibility to change, not the individual. Barriers to inclusion are social, not personal.

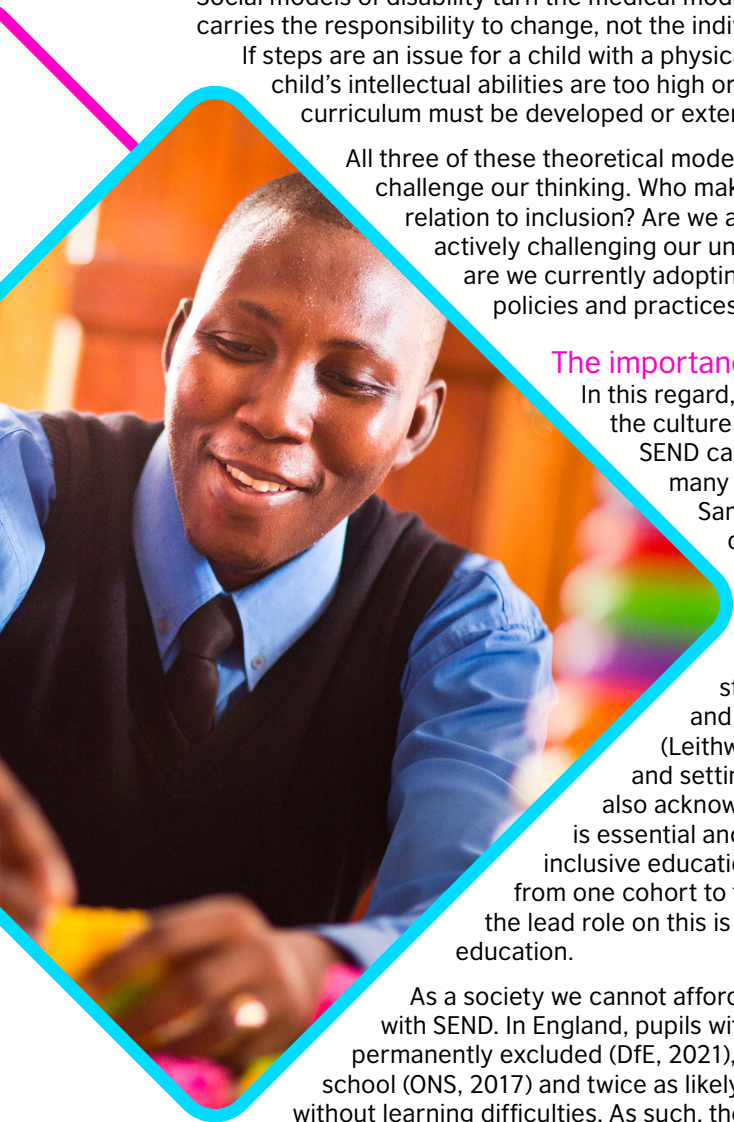
If steps are an issue for a child with a physical disability, then a ramp must be provided; if a child's intellectual abilities are too high or too low for the current curriculum offer, then the curriculum must be developed or extended.

All three of these theoretical models are useful to explore in terms of inclusion and can challenge our thinking. Who makes the policies and promotes effective practice in relation to inclusion? Are we as a school, a training institution or as a practitioner actively challenging our unconscious biases and prejudices? To what extent are we currently adopting social or medical models of disability in our policies and practices?

### The importance of leadership

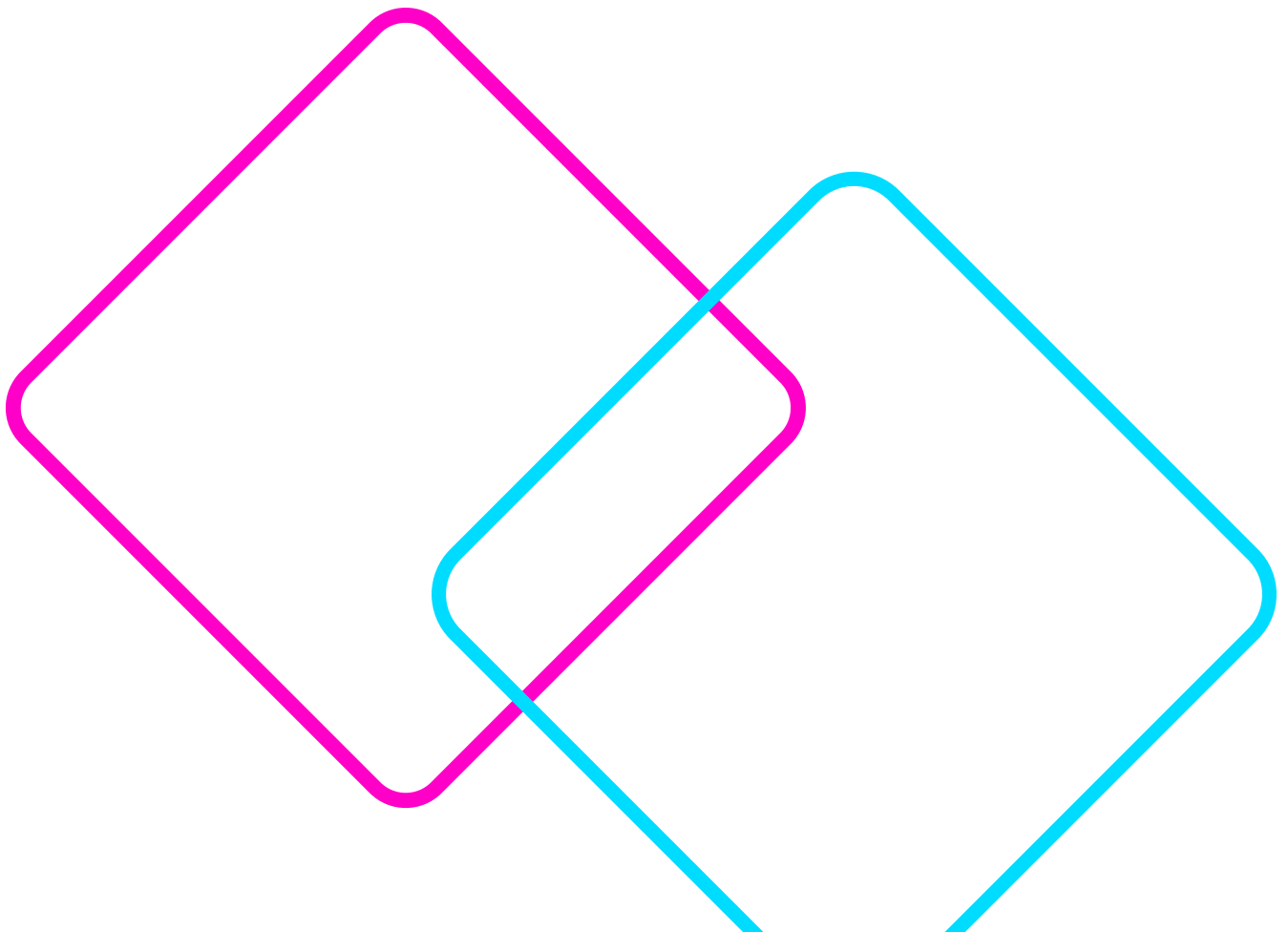
In this regard, the importance of school leadership in influencing the culture and climate of their organisation so that pupils with SEND can thrive has been acknowledged and understood for many years (Marzano, Waters and McNulty, 2005; Day and Sammons et al., 2009). While it is widely agreed that the quality of teaching in a school has the single greatest impact on the quality of learning (Hattie and Yates, 2013) in a classroom, school leaders play a critical role in supporting teachers to develop their effectiveness – through their influence on staff motivation and commitment, teaching practices and by developing teacher capacity for leadership (Leithwood, Day and Sammons, 2009). Prioritising inclusion and setting high expectations across all pupil groups, while also acknowledging the intersectionality issues that may exist, is essential and a key part of a leader's role. We know that creating inclusive education is not a one-off exercise, but a continuous theme, from one cohort to the next. As a result, empowering leaders to take the lead role on this is a key part of the British Council's work on inclusive education.

As a society we cannot afford to overlook the disparity in outcomes for pupils with SEND. In England, pupils with learning difficulties are 7.5 times more likely to be permanently excluded (DfE, 2021), seven times less likely to be employed when leaving school (ONS, 2017) and twice as likely to live in poverty (Shaw, et al., 2016) as those without learning difficulties. As such, the British Council is committed to supporting our schools, school leaders and teachers across the world to create more inclusive provision. Our pupils and families deserve no less.



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# Improving outcomes for children with SEND in the MENA region: common areas for action

**Sian Williams, Independent Education Consultant**

## What? Setting the context

Between September 2018 and March 2023, the British Council worked in partnership with four education ministries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region – Lebanon (2018), the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) (2019), Saudi Arabia (2020) and Egypt (2020 and 2023) – to review education provision for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

These children were traditionally less of a priority in MENA public education systems. They have been educated separately from their peers and those with complex needs cared for outside the education system. As a result, their outcomes are generally low and most teachers are under-skilled in, and under-confident about, creating inclusive classroom environments crucial for equitable education.

Government priorities, however, are changing – as are cultural attitudes towards children with SEND. Education ministries are committed to improving both academic and personal development outcomes for children with SEND. In some contexts, high-profile policy messages emphasise equity for people with disabilities in education and the workplace. Parental expectations of children with SEND are increasing; societal stigma about disability is decreasing.

Consequently, five in-country reviews (two in Egypt) of education provision for children with SEND have taken place to date, with the aim of strengthening inclusive provision and supporting improved outcomes for this group. The reviews focused on priorities identified by education ministries in three areas of inclusion widely accepted to underpin its progress: culture, policy and practice. Interviews, focus groups and school visits were organised to gather detail about each priority area; initial findings were discussed with key policy makers and tailored recommendations were made.

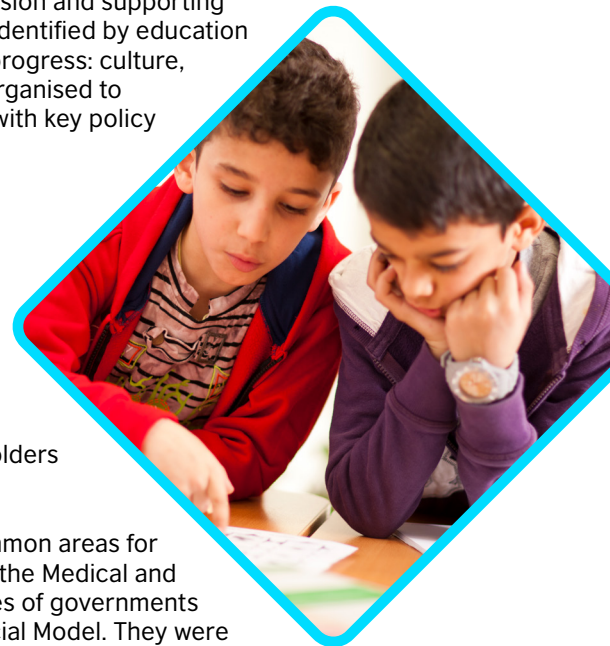
## So what? Key emerging themes

Reviews identified plenty of shared strengths on which to build, most significantly the:

- High level of commitment of all involved to improve outcomes for children with SEND
- Depth of shared knowledge about this group
- Strength of support from government ministers, donors and stakeholders
- Potential to develop programmes at scale

The purpose of this chapter, however, is to share key insights into common areas for development. Many of these areas emerged from the co-existence of the Medical and Social Models of Disability in each context. At the macro level, attitudes of governments and societies (especially in urban areas) were moving towards the Social Model. They were developing equitable expectations for children with SEND and acknowledging it was culture, policies and practice that needed to change to meet these expectations, not children. However, the Medical Model was still prevalent in a variety of areas, including:

- Language used to talk and write about children with SEND
- Needs assessment and diagnostic procedures
- School placement systems
- Undergraduate and postgraduate course curricula





- Reliance on specialist teachers for children and young people with SEND
- Service provision, including responsibility for children with complex needs, lying with ministries of social development and health
- Low collaboration levels between ministries and between governments, NGOs and private schools

## Now what? Areas for action

Based on evidence gathered, tailored recommendations were made for each context. From these, five common areas for action emerged:

### 1 Shared responsibility and collaboration

Given its core role in successful inclusive practice, building opportunities and structures for collaboration and partnership working was identified as a thread that needed to run through all activities. Feedback from key stakeholders indicated that involving them at all stages of discussions about, alongside planning and implementation of, vision and policy would increase collective understanding and shared responsibility, and enable wider dissemination of key policy messages.

Recommendations in this area echoed requests in all contexts from experienced NGO and public and private school leaders. They wanted more opportunities to work in collaborative partnership with governments and were looking to ministries of education to facilitate opportunities. Recommendations also covered inter-ministry collaboration, which the reviews showed are a prerequisite if children with SEND are to receive an equitable, quality education.

### 2 Vision, policy and language

In most contexts, language and policy about children with SEND trailed current thinking both in ministries and society. Recommendations in this area therefore suggested key stakeholders should collaborate to consider:

- Revising language for talking and writing about children with SEND to reflect changing cultural attitudes
- Renewing and disseminating the context's vision for these children
- Revising, or creating, policy in line with revised language and vision
- Devising a communication strategy to disseminate key messages and changes

### 3 Policy into practice

Given that bridging the policy-practice gap is a challenge in all contexts and most teachers in all four MENA contexts reviewed had received little or no professional development regarding working inclusively with children with SEND, there were many recommendations in this area. These were divided into two strands:

#### (a) A framework for practice

No context had developed a comprehensive framework for SEND practice. A common recommendation was therefore to develop a framework bridging policy and practice, setting out the model of support, roles and responsibilities, expected practice, lines of accountability, services and children's pathways through them, and systematic opportunities for involving parents/carers in the child's education.

#### (b) Supporting practice development

Developing effective practice among general education classroom teachers was identified as a priority in all contexts. The following points outline the main areas for action:

- Professional development: Each context had successful pockets of transformational continuing professional development (CPD) and most had potential to develop these at scale. The reviews suggested contexts focus on updating CPD in line with revised policy and language, coordinating the approach to CPD and looking for existing structures that could assist with scale-up.
- Initial teacher education (ITE): Most contexts identified that ITE inclusive education course material and structure needed reviewing. Collaboration between ITE institutions and governments was identified as key here, as well as drawing on and contextualising quality international practice.



- Empowering and motivating schools: Some schools were self-motivated to improve practice. To build on this motivation it was suggested contexts develop structures that enable schools to share quality practice via mentoring, networks, conferences at regional and national level, and developing a cadre of inclusion leaders.
- Education for children with complex needs: Provision for this group was a priority in all contexts. Pilot projects were suggested to establish and develop cross-ministry collaborative approaches and, where helpful, include external input from experienced national/international organisations.

#### 4 Monitoring, evaluation and accountability

In most contexts, formal structures that would enable progress monitoring, evaluation and accountability did not exist or were not functioning efficiently. The level of tenacity required for multi-level change underpinning successful inclusion means consistent monitoring and evaluation is essential. Ensuring this consistency was suggested as a relatively small change with a potentially substantial impact.

It was also suggested strengthening these structures would clarify and improve stakeholder accountability. In addition, accountability for school-level practice needed further development and clarification, as dual, overlapping systems – both regional and national – were often running simultaneously.

#### 5 Strategic leadership

Every action area needed leaders at all levels able to keep the long-term vision and objectives for children with SEND central. The reviews showed some leaders needed support to build this capacity and suggested contexts consider, for example:

- Equipping leaders appointed for their specialist SEND knowledge with additional leadership skills through coaching or mentoring models
- Equipping leaders at regional level with the skills to facilitate CPD with classroom teachers about inclusive practice for children with SEND
- Reviewing leadership structures for SEND in schools with a view to increasing distributed leadership at school leader level and introducing a specific role in schools to lead on improving outcomes for children with SEND

Contexts have used recommendations in these five areas as a basis for tangible action. Egypt, for example, has identified 180 regional inclusion leaders and are training this group as face-to-face CPD facilitators in areas already shown in-country to improve outcomes for children with SEND. At the same time, they are developing three online courses in inclusion that will include live sessions, which will be made available to all teachers. In addition, Egypt have launched a social media campaign to support the growth of inclusive environments in schools. Lebanon is formulating a plan to develop specialist Hub schools for SEND, who will lead and support the development of quality practice in surrounding schools. We continue to support the MENA region with their ongoing commitment to children with SEND and look forward to sharing further progress.



# Inclusive education

**Hilda El Khoury, Director of Counselling and Guidance,  
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## Introduction

Inclusive education lacks a universal model due to its dynamic nature, influenced by diverse cultural, social and institutional contexts worldwide. Educational approaches, resources and philosophies vary according to the country, preventing a one-size-fits-all solution. Incorporating students with special needs and disabilities (SEND) into regular schools and classrooms, a concept known as inclusive education, is steadily becoming more widely embraced, although its implementation varies. Legal frameworks, funding, teacher training and societal attitudes play crucial roles; as a result, each country views inclusive education in a different way. Some countries categorise it in a medical way while others follow a pedagogical approach. However, every country that has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) should abide by the guidance of this convention. Also, it is important to note that to be able to provide the required support there are some individual interventions and approaches that need to be implemented based on the diverse special needs that students present.

## Global perspectives on inclusive education

The absence of a singular model underscores the need for tailored support in this multifaceted field. Overall, all individuals in the field agree the importance of inclusive education, specifically in Lebanon to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) and provide access to quality education for all students.

## Models and initiatives for inclusive education

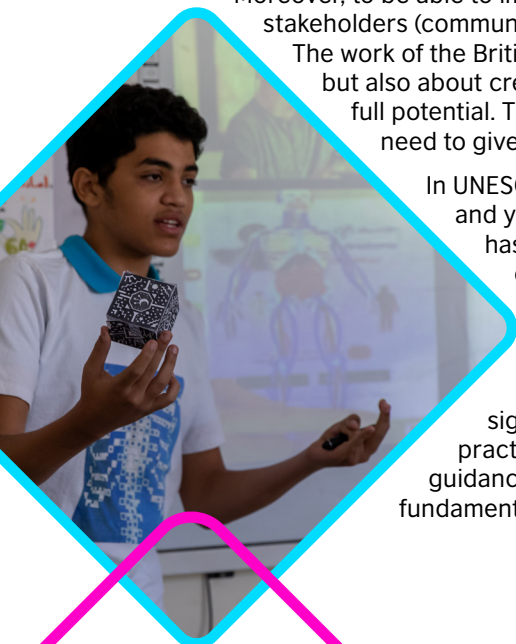
Before developing an inclusive education model, it is crucial to conduct research on the various existing models available globally as well as the reports available by renowned organisations such as UNESCO, the British Council or UNICEF.

Since 2013, the British Council has promoted research on inclusive education, emphasising the importance of providing quality education for all, regardless of individual differences and abilities. Their research supports the view that inclusive education is not just a matter of policy but a fundamental human right. It encompasses the belief that all students, including those with special needs, should have access to educational settings and benefit from a diverse and supportive learning environment to therefore become included in the heart of their communities. The British Council's research emphasises the need for comprehensive policies, teacher training and collaboration among stakeholders to ensure the successful implementation of inclusive education.

Moreover, to be able to implement inclusive education efficiently, it is essential for all stakeholders (community, school, parents) to understand the concept of inclusive education.

The work of the British Council underlines the idea that inclusion is not only about access but also about creating an environment where every student can thrive and reach their full potential. This is directly linked to the objective of SDG4, which states there is a need to give access to quality education for all students in an equitable manner.

In UNESCO's report shared in 2022 entitled Promoting the inclusion of children and young people with disabilities in education in the Arab region, research has shown that "children with disabilities have the right to receive their education in mainstream settings" (UNESCO, 2022:14). This has sparked a challenge to efficiently create an inclusive education system in mainstream settings for children with special needs to be able to pursue their education. Consequently, inclusion has evolved from being a discretionary choice to an imperative, and nations that have signed the UNCRPD should strive to realign their policies, structures and practices in accordance with the principles of inclusion and equity. UNESCO's guidance suggests that inclusion and equity should be regarded as fundamental principles that underpin all educational policies, rather than being



treated as separate policies in themselves. As per the report, enhancing educational systems necessitates fostering partnerships and collaboration among all stakeholders involved in the education of all learners, with the goal of optimising the utilisation of existing resources, whether they are human, physical or material.

## Social model of disability and global challenges

This necessitated the development of a national education strategy at country level that leverages existing resources to reform educational systems at the governmental, community and school levels. A well-known, evidence-based model is the social model of disability. It aims to modify society to be inclusive of individuals living with disabilities, rather than expecting individuals with disabilities to conform to societal norms. It advocates the belief that people with special needs deserve the right to fully participate as equal citizens alongside others. By employing the social model of disability, we can examine the external obstacles that individuals with special needs face, which can directly affect their inclusion or exclusion from education. This, in turn, should influence how we address the challenges confronting individuals with special needs and other vulnerable groups, as well as the way we approach individuals with special needs in policy and documentation. Furthermore, the language we use has a significant impact and reveals our understanding of where these barriers are located. Nevertheless, central to any progress is the availability of data and information that support the measurement of progress and it is essential that the available data accurately reflects the reality of the population it represents.

## Inclusive education initiatives in Lebanon

In Lebanon, prior to 2018, there were several schools (public and private) along with partners who were trying to implement inclusion. However, there was no unified model for the inclusive schools. In 2017, a desk review was undertaken to unify the efforts and begin with the inclusive education project at The Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE). This included reviewing published research, all reports previously completed by the MEHE and the Centre for Educational Research and Development (CERD), as well as holding several meetings with relevant stakeholders in the field.

In 2018, MEHE and CERD, in collaboration with UNICEF, launched the pilot inclusive education programme with 30 public schools across Lebanon. The goal of the programme was to raise awareness of the right to inclusive education, the variety of opportunities via inclusion and the necessity of school–family partnerships among families, caregivers, decision-makers and community leaders, in addition to keeping children in schools. Through the inclusive education project, MEHE aims to encourage autonomy and independence through education for children with special needs, paving the road for a more economically productive future. The project was based on the MTSS theoretical model (Multi-Tiered System of Support) and was implemented based on the following approach: a special educator was to be present in the school full-time and a team of paraprofessionals was to visit the school twice a week. Meanwhile, CERD, a key partner to MEHE in this project, was to train the entire staff. Furthermore, educational materials were made available in schools to raise awareness. In parallel, DOPS (Department of Counselling and Guidance in MEHE) had meetings with parents and school staff to promote community involvement in the inclusive education. During the 2021–22 academic year, the number of inclusive schools in the pilot programme was increased from 30 schools to a total of 60 public schools.

To implement SDG4 and develop the vision of inclusive education in Lebanon, MEHE contacted and visited other countries that had already worked on this topic such as the UK, Portugal, France and the USA. The aim was to contextualise the vision of inclusive education already present in the world.

The training of the team and school staff was a major component of the project implemented by CERD and some workshops were completed with the support of the British Council. Moreover, two universities are key partners in this project: Université Saint Joseph (USJ) tasked to train the multidisciplinary teams and Haigazian university to conduct research in parallel with the pilot project in the 30 initial public schools and provide MEHE with key insights. In 2023, after several scale-up processes, the number of inclusive public schools reached 110.





Based on the achievements and challenges from the stages described, MEHE, with the technical support of UNICEF, developed the National Policy on Inclusive Education for Children with Special Needs alongside an implementation roadmap to provide a comprehensive framework for further implementation of inclusive education. The policy was developed through a consultative process involving a wide range of stakeholders working in inclusion. The process began in February 2022 with the support of national and international consultants. From March to December 2022, a series of in-depth consultations, both in person and online, were organised to collect detailed information on the status of inclusive education in Lebanon, develop a general vision for the policy, reach agreements on the aim, commitments and intervention areas, develop a framework for the policy and co-write sections collaboratively. Sections of the Inclusive Education Policy document were shared and discussed in-depth with various stakeholders based on their mandates with respect to inclusion in education. As a result, modifications were made in the document to ensure that the policy reflects the visions and commitments of stakeholders and government partners and is contextualised and realistic. A further updated draft of the policy was presented in December 2022 and then finalised through a series of consultative workshops, focus group discussions and stakeholder reviews between January and May 2023. The policy was launched in June 2023.

Despite the progress achieved in inclusive education, significant challenges remain apparent both in Lebanon and at global level, especially because each country would attempt to implement the inclusive education model based on their country context. The debate surrounding inclusive education persists, yet there are notable instances of challenges in relation to the placement of children with more complex needs. In some countries, the MEHE team observed that students with complex needs have been placed in dedicated departments within inclusive schools or specialist institutions. This challenge is a major discussion point where several countries exchanged expertise and benefited accordingly.

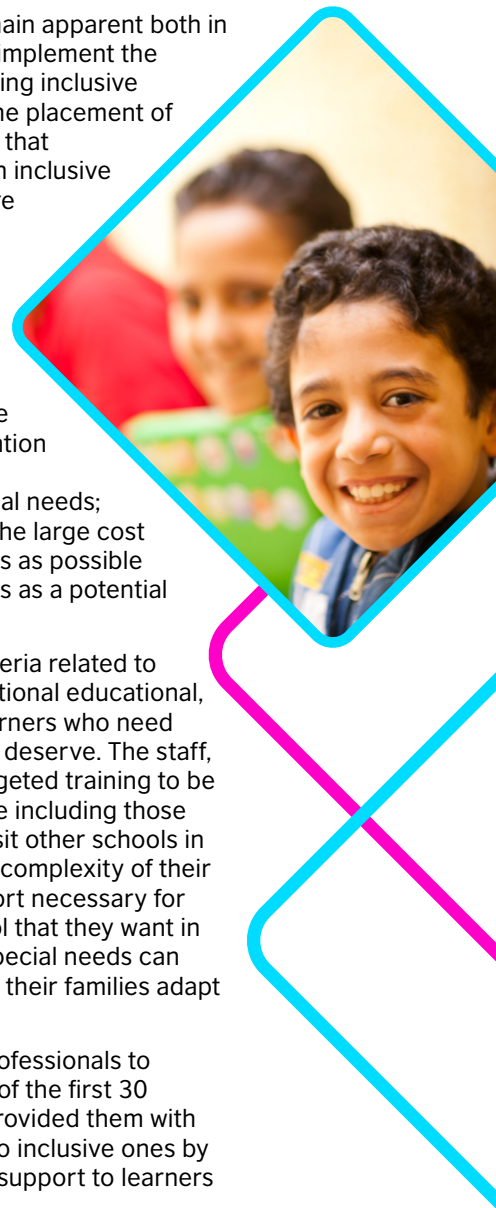
### Innovative solutions in Lebanon: hub school concept and curriculum reform

Based on the pilot study, from 2018 until 2022, it was apparent that the support in the inclusive schools was being provided for all learners with mild to moderate special needs. Children with severe learning difficulties required additional attention in terms of human resources or other resources available. MEHE considered transforming all the schools in Lebanon to welcome children with complex special needs; however, after thorough consideration, this was not considered feasible due to the large cost it would entail. Therefore, since the plan was to be able to support as many cases as possible given the available resources, MEHE is currently seeking to establish hub schools as a potential solution. The following describes the hub school and how it will work.

One inclusive school will be selected in each caza (region) based on specific criteria related to technical and logistic specifications. MEHE will provide this hub school with additional educational, human and financial resources to be able to cater for complex cases and for learners who need additional targeted support to ensure they receive the quality education they deserve. The staff, including the multidisciplinary teams in these schools, will receive additional targeted training to be able to support a larger number of learners with a variety of needs, including those with significant disabilities. The team in these hub schools will then be able to visit other schools in the caza and provide support. This will ensure that all children regardless of the complexity of their need are enrolled in an inclusive public school and are able to receive the support necessary for them to access quality education. In this case, all children can choose the school that they want in the caza close to their home. MEHE aims to ensure that the children who have special needs can attend a school that is adapted to their needs instead of having the children and their families adapt their place of residence to find a suitable school.

The hub school concept was shared within the education sector and relevant professionals to validate the idea. The hub school pilot is currently being tested in Lebanon. Out of the first 30 inclusive public schools, MEHE has selected three schools as hub schools and provided them with additional resources. With the aim of transforming all the schools in Lebanon into inclusive ones by 2030, MEHE seeks to have at least one school in each caza providing additional support to learners with complex needs.

MEHE is also collaborating with CERD on the curriculum reform to ensure that it is an inclusive one. The process has already been initiated by CERD and different experts were selected to participate in 13 committees tasked with developing guidelines for the major parts of the curriculum in relation to





different subjects. The inclusion committee developed guidelines on inclusive curricula, inclusive assessments and inclusive school criteria. This will ensure all children are in school and no child is excluded.

### Fostering a global culture of inclusivity and conclusion

To help implement quality education for all, a global culture of inclusivity should be fostered at different levels. The main aim is to promote an inclusive nation. This journey begins with fostering inclusivity within our educational community to ensure the provision of quality inclusive education for all.

It is essential not to have the learner adapt to the school, but rather have the school be adapted to the learners and their needs.

Inclusion isn't merely a fixed goal; it is an ongoing process. As MEHE works to establish inclusive settings, a process of continuous learning and evolution in understanding inclusion is underway.

Although each country will adapt and implement its inclusive education system based on a specific context and there is no secret recipe (but rather continuous research in the field of inclusive education), there is always a need to exchange experiences and effective practices to be able to provide quality inclusive education for all learners.

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# Enhancing inclusion and academic performance for disabled students (Eltahrir Official School, Menofya Governorate, Egypt)

**Shaimaa Al-Banna, Director Education, Egypt, British Council**

There is clear presidential support for promoting equality for people with disabilities in Egyptian society. Egypt has signed and ratified the UN Conventions on the Rights of the Child and the Rights of People with Disabilities. Nationally, both Decree 252 (2017) and Law no. 10 (2018) enshrine the right of learners with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) to education in Egypt. Decree 252 specifies categories of SEND as:

- Visual impairment
- Hearing impairment
- Physical disability
- Intellectual disabilities
- Cerebral Palsy
- Down's syndrome
- Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
- Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)

As with all contexts, there is a gap between intention, legislation and practice. Changing the historic situation for learners with SEND across the country is an enormous task. Egypt has over 58,000 government schools in 27 governorates. There are approximately 1.6 million teachers and 22 million learners in the public education system, with 294 staff working across the country to support the SEND system and a central Ministry of Education and Technical Education (MOE) team of five people.

The British Council and the MOE in Egypt share a common belief that the inclusion of children and young people with SEND into the regular education systems of their respective countries is an entitlement and a fundamental human right, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, ability, language of choice, socio-economic background, health or medical condition.

As a result of this shared belief, the British Council, at the request of the MOE, carried out a scoping and needs assessment visit to Egypt in March 2023. One of the recommendations focused on teaching and learning and the knowledge and skills teachers and school leaders need to have to deliver high-quality inclusive provision. The importance of creating a unified approach to continued professional development (CPD) for school leaders and teachers was therefore highlighted.

As a result, an ambitious programme of CPD on inclusive pedagogies was established, providing comprehensive educational training for school principals to increase awareness of issues related to the inclusion of pupils with SEND, with a focus on acquiring practical strategies to create more inclusive practices and build the capabilities of trainees.

This case study focuses on one of the school leaders who attended this CPD. This school leader manages a public school that includes ten students with SEND. These pupils were disengaged from the learning process and found it difficult to take part in classroom activities. The school principal firstly cascaded the knowledge he had learnt from his training to his teachers and, as a pilot phase, the school initiated a comprehensive plan to improve the academic performance of two disabled students in Arabic language and Mathematics while fostering inclusion and creative teaching methods.



The primary challenges faced by the school included:

- **Lack of engagement:** ten disabled students were disengaged from the learning process and found it difficult to take part in classroom activities
- **Resource limitations:** the school faced infrastructure and resource limitations, hindering their ability to effectively support disabled students
- **Resistance to change:** there was resistance to change from teachers, students and parents, making it difficult to implement inclusion measures

In pursuit of fostering inclusive education within the school, a strategic series of actions was meticulously undertaken. Initially, a purposeful selection process identified two students with disabilities, marking the inception of a focused intervention to amplify their engagement in classroom dynamics and augment their academic performance in Arabic and Mathematics. The groundwork commenced with a comprehensive school evaluation using a SWOT analysis, effectively pinpointing the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats pertinent to inclusion. Subsequently, a tailored pre-assessment of the selected students illuminated their unique needs and paved the way for the formulation of individualised educational plans (IEPs). This personalised framework, co-constructed by subject teachers and the school's psychology specialist, served as a cornerstone for the subsequent phases.

Concurrently, a conscientious drive to instigate awareness was cascaded among educators, specialists and parents, clarifying the vital significance of inclusion. This concerted effort propelled collaborative synergy and fostered an environment where all stakeholders collectively engaged in the inclusive project. Implementation ensued, characterised by the deployment of innovative pedagogical approaches that were woven into everyday classroom practice to bolster active participation. Rigorous monitoring by the head teacher tracked the progress of the two students, methodically documenting the execution and effectiveness of the devised plans. Furthermore, a reflective post-assessment punctuated the semester, gauging both the students' advancement and the efficacy of the inclusion strategies, complemented by invaluable parental feedback garnered through satisfaction surveys.

Resource constraints and infrastructure limitations were navigated by leveraging support from the educational department and actively engaging parents. Overcoming entrenched resistance to change necessitated multifaceted approaches, from comprehensive awareness sessions and tailored training to tangible examples and the inclusion of impassioned individuals during the project's inception. These concerted efforts coalesced, heralding a successful trajectory toward inclusive education despite the initial hurdles.

The results speak volumes: there was a notable improvement in the academic performance of the two students, showing a 20–40 per cent leap in Arabic Language and a 10–30 per cent rise in Mathematics. Importantly though, the impact was not simply related to grades, but also included a newfound awareness of and support for inclusion among teachers and fellow students, fostering a more supportive atmosphere. Innovative teaching methods took centre stage, involving disabled students more effectively and boosting their involvement in class activities. Importantly, these methods demonstrably impacted positively, on both the disabled students and their classmates.

The ripple effect was tangible: more students, parents and teachers joined hands to shape a more inclusive school environment. Collaborations flourished, linking the school with societal entities and NGOs supporting inclusion, fortifying their joint efforts. Knowledge became a beacon: experiences and effective practices were shared, not just within the school but with other educational institutions and the authorities. By utilising various tools such as images, videos, meeting documents and individual educational plans, alongside fostering a culture of inclusion, this case study brilliantly illustrates the potential for significant improvements in disabled students' academic performance and the broader promotion of inclusion within the educational landscape in Egypt.



# Girls' education and gender-sensitive schools

**Alice Wekesa, Senior Consultant, Gender and Inclusion, British Council**

Educating girls has been recognised as a powerful investment with multiple social and economic benefits beyond the moral value. This recognition has been a critical impetus for education stakeholders who champion the positive outcomes that communities derive from schools and education systems that are responsive to the learning needs of diverse girls and boys. Sadly, the multiple crises currently experienced (climate change, cost of living crisis, conflict and the recent Covid pandemic) risk reversing gains made in girls' education. In some of the regions where the British Council works, girls are disproportionately represented in the number of out-of-school young people: female out-of-school rates in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) stood at 4.2 percentage points higher than that of males, while there are gaps of up to 15 percentage points in Uganda and Zambia (UNESCO, 2022). Girls with disabilities, those in rural areas and adolescent girls are particularly affected. In East and South Asia, the number of out-of-school children is gradually reducing and gender gaps are now in favour of girls with a female out-of-school rate at 3.1 percentage points lower than their male counterparts (Ibid.); however, gender norms and poverty still mediate retention and learning outcomes for girls from the poorest households (ReliefWeb, 2019). Beyond access, gender disparities in attainment and learning outcomes persist and gender stereotypes continue to influence career choices for girls and boys; a fact attributed to teaching and learning environments that reinforce gender inequitable norms and attitudes (UNESCO, 2022).

## Our approach

The British Council contributes to girls' education priorities by addressing gender inequality in education as part of interventions that drive up overall education performance as well as through programmes focused specifically on girls' education. We promote a holistic and multi-pronged approach to girls' education that involves working at the school and classroom level with teachers, school leaders and educators – as well as at the systems level with policy makers – to enhance the quality of education and learning outcomes for all children. We also recognise that education institutions and processes do not exist in a bubble, and that without intentional efforts they are likely to recreate and replicate prevailing gender stereotypes and norms in the communities they serve (Marcus, 2018). We therefore also engage with communities to enhance support for girls' education and tackle social norms that limit girls' educational potential.

At the school level, teachers and school leaders are at the core of our efforts to promote girls' education in the countries we work. Our research (British Council, 2021, 2023) has shown that teachers and school leaders can be powerful change agents in creating gender-sensitive schools that enable girls and boys to reach their full potential. As such, supporting them with pedagogical development, as well as tools and frameworks that include a particular focus on tackling gender barriers embedded in classroom and school processes, can have a positive impact on both learning outcomes and gender equality. Our in-service continuous professional development (CPD) initiatives include a focus on empowering school leaders and teachers to employ inclusive and gender-sensitive approaches in classroom teaching, challenge gender stereotypes in their schools and promote positive gender norms and behaviours among girls and boys. An example of this is our Leading Learning for Gender Equality (LLGE) programme; this provides school leaders and teachers in primary and secondary schools with the opportunity to enhance their knowledge and skills to recognise gendered barriers that affect girls' and boys' access to education and quality learning while supporting them to create gender-sensitive schools that enable girls and boys to thrive and





realise their full potential. At the school level, our approach also includes a focus on addressing gender gaps in learning outcomes. For instance, as part of the Building Learning Foundations (BLF) programme in Rwanda, we provided CPD to lower primary English teachers to help embed gender-responsive and inclusive strategies into daily practice. The CPD was delivered alongside a robust monitoring process that enables the use of gender disaggregated data to identify any gendered differentials in learning outcomes that require remedial action.

At the systems level, we recognise the important role of national and institutional policies that support the delivery of gender-sensitive and responsive education. Our partnership with education ministries around the world is built on an evidence-based approach to examining and strengthening policy implementation with a gender-sensitive lens that enables an in-depth understanding of how education policies impact differently on girls and boys as well as women and men in the system. This evidence-based approach also enables the identification of entry points in existing education policies to strengthen national capacity for gender equality within the education sector. We provide technical assistance, convene policy dialogues, support learning visits and broker relationships between policy makers and experts to enable the sharing of lessons learned, experiences and find common ground on policy solutions to girls' education challenges. This approach is being used in the Empowerment and Development for Girls Education (EDGE) in Zambia where the British Council is working with the Government of the Republic of Zambia to deliver political and economic commitments to meet the needs of the most vulnerable secondary school students, especially girls and learners in hard-to-reach rural areas. It uses research and evidence, learning visits and policy dialogues as levers for strengthening the Free Education Policy implementation.

Our approach also includes engaging with communities to address some of the non-educational barriers that impede educational access, participation and attainment for girls and boys in schools. We recognise that social norms, though varied across different contexts, have a profound impact on the decisions made on educational investments for girls and boys as well as entrenching gender stereotypes that constrain the long-term aspirations for girls and boys (UNGEI, 2022). Inequitable gender norms that promote early child marriage and expectations on supporting family income have particularly adverse impact on adolescent girls' education, making their transition to secondary education more challenging (Marcus, 2018). Our approach is focused on building partnerships with local organisations and community leaders to address harmful social norms and negative attitudes with a view to enhancing community appreciation of the value of girls' education and shifting negative attitudes that impact on household decisions on which child should access education. For instance, in Pakistan where over 22 million children are out of school (UNICEF, 2023), we delivered the ILMPOSSIBLE Take A Child to School (TACS) programme that deployed a rights-based and participatory community engagement approach to address harmful gender norms and attitudes towards girls' education, developing a network of support for out-of-school girls and boys across the country.

With seven years to go to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the challenge to achieve gender equality in and through education and eliminate disparities at all levels of education remains an important priority for the British Council. We believe the work we do in partnership with governments, ministries of education, school leaders, teaching professionals, students and non-government educational organisations across the globe will make a meaningful contribution to addressing the multiple barriers to girls' education, while improving access to gender-sensitive schools where girls are supported to learn and reach their potential.





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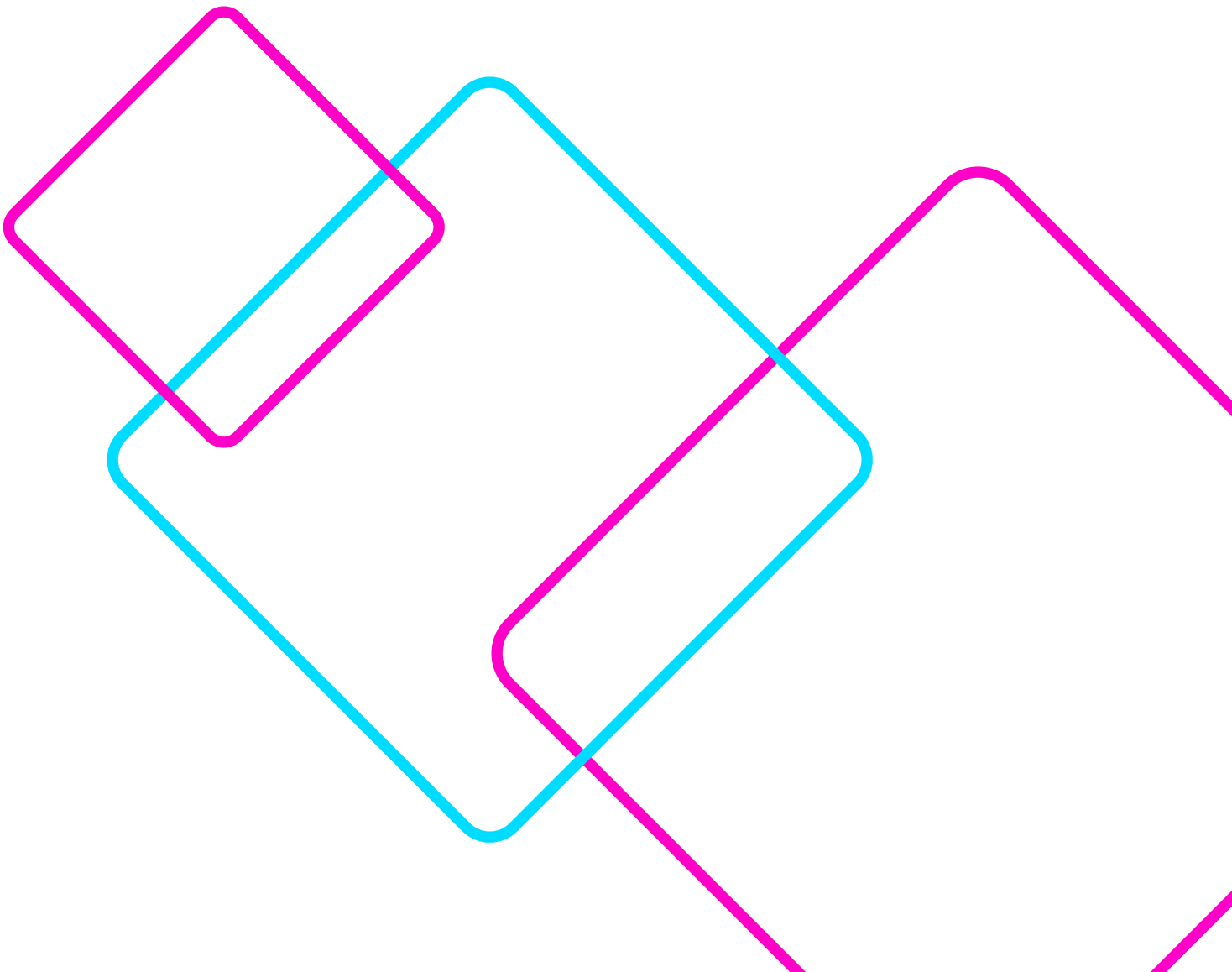
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# Challenging barriers to girls' education

**Bukola Oyinloye, Faith Mkwanzani and Patience Mukwambo on behalf of the British Council**

Education systems foster equity when they intentionally create equal opportunities and provide equitable resources for all learners, regardless of their personal characteristics or background. They move beyond equity and towards inclusion when they recognise and address the diverse experiences and needs of different types of learners and foster their wellbeing (OECD, 2023), while they also provide quality when they are equitable, inclusive and attuned to the attitudes, norms and power dynamics that influence girls' education.

However, despite significant progress in improving girls' access to education, challenges remain around the quality of the education girls receive once they secure access (Unterhalter et al., 2014; Sperling and Winthrop, 2016; UNESCO 2020; Psaki et al., 2021, 2022). Addressing constraints in relation to girls' education therefore remains a priority for governments and development actors globally. However, to do this successfully it is essential that there is a thorough understanding of the intrinsic, pedagogic, systemic and societal barriers that girls face in accessing equitable, inclusive, quality education (British Council, 2017).

Drawing from the British Council's work in Africa, including research conducted with teachers and school leaders in Ethiopia, Sudan, Nigeria and Tanzania and a stakeholders' report from Kenya, this chapter aims to contribute to that understanding. It outlines the key barriers to equitable, inclusive, quality education in four key areas that influence children's development and learning: the classroom; the school environment; households and communities; and the policy and legal environment.

## Key findings

### 1 Inclusive classrooms

Inclusive classrooms provide positive intellectual, social, emotional and physical spaces for children to learn (Ambrose et al., 2010). They are characterised by supportive pedagogy and classroom management, with teachers avoiding gender stereotyping in their actions and stereotypes removed from the curriculum and learning materials. Evidence from the research in Africa suggests that teachers have mixed views about the creation of inclusive classrooms.

Most wanted to have an inclusive classroom and sought to create an inclusive atmosphere; however, some were unable to do so because their own attitudes and beliefs unconsciously reinforced gender stereotypes or because they lacked resources to enable different teaching and assessment practices.

### 2 Inclusive school environment

Inclusive schools promote gender parity in enrolment and achievement, eliminate gender stereotypes and provide girl-friendly facilities, curricula and processes (Sperling and Winthrop, 2016). This includes specific practices such as providing girl-friendly spaces, adequate hygiene and sanitation, support for menstrual hygiene management, sex and life skills education, adequate childcare arrangements for teenage mothers and initiatives to address school affordability. The research evidence suggests that teachers and head teachers value the provision of

environments like these, but often this does not translate into practice. Generally, teachers and head teachers were unaware of government sexual and gender-based violence guidelines and there was little training in gender mainstreaming. Budget was limited for provision such as girls' sport and toilet facilities, while school documents rarely contained explicit gender equality statements. Teachers, head teachers and students all knew about school-related, gender-based violence, but there were limited mechanisms, such as safeguarding, in place to address it.

### 3 Inclusive households and communities

Inclusive households and communities hold supportive attitudes and cultural practices around girls' education and make educational decisions that advantage girls. The research evidence reveals that girls' schooling is constrained by a combination of intersectional challenges relating to poverty and cultural perspectives and practices, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. High poverty levels meant a lack of money for school fees, uniforms, school supplies and, in extreme cases, hunger and famine. Sometimes, girls supplemented family incomes through hawking and petty businesses. Specific to rural and semi-urban areas were cultural perceptions that girls' education is of less value than that of boys, parental neglect and child marriages. These challenges resulted in absenteeism and lower completion rates for girls.

### 4 Inclusive policy and legal environments

Legislation underpins frameworks for inclusive systems (UNESCO, 2017), while policies attempt to guide what happens in classrooms, schools, households and communities. The research evidence highlights the existence of legislation and policy demonstrating the importance of supporting girls' education in the classroom (e.g. in relation to gender discrimination), the school environment (e.g. physical safety) and households and communities (e.g. culture, safety). However, the findings suggest that, although considered important, the creation of inclusive schools and girl-friendly spaces is hampered by a lack of knowledge, resources and, in some cases, policies.

## Recommendations

#### (a) Clarifying understanding

Evidence of mixed perceptions of inclusive practices suggests limited understanding among educators of terminology used in relation to girls' education and inclusion, which in turn highlights limited training around gender and education. There is a need for greater clarity in the way gender and education are discussed in policy documents, guidelines and documents by international development actors. Relevant classroom or school-level examples of what specific terms mean in practice should be included in such documents.

#### (b) Collective reflection on gender and education

The findings highlight the challenges teachers and school head teachers face when creating inclusive school environments, not least because teachers are often working on their own. Collective reflections around gender and education should be mainstreamed at the school level, into everyday conversations between teachers (both female and male) and school head teachers, as well as with communities. This will show teachers that the work they are doing is part of a collective action, potentially encouraging them to persist with their efforts. The integration of gender and education issues into school policies and codes of conduct could also help address school-related, gender-based violence, the elimination of which increases girls' participation rates and enrolment (Sperling and Winthrop, 2016). In contexts where children undertake paid work or have family responsibilities, flexible learning schedules can encourage girls' enrolment.

#### (c) Providing training and support on policies

Evidence suggests limited knowledge and understanding of existing national policies and limited school-level implementation. For new policies or updates to existing policies, governments should provide training for school head teachers and, where possible, teachers, who can then sensitise other teachers at the school level. It is important that training is accompanied by adequate and relevant resources, as well as support on how best to apply these resources in a way that promotes



inclusive, girl-friendly schools and classrooms. In contexts where school-level policies exist, these should be integrated with national policies.

#### (d) Building strong school community relationships and partnerships

The findings highlight a range of household and community barriers to girls, including poverty, cultural practices and sexual and other forms of abuse, with some teachers attempting but failing to address issues on their own. Authentic, continuous engagement with communities will help schools to identify ways in which they can better support communities to address barriers to girls' education. Developing relationships with trusted community leaders and working in partnership with them to sensitise communities about practices that adversely affect girls' education can help transform existing power dynamics that currently deprioritise girls' education (GEC, 2023).

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# Empowering school leaders to deliver equitable education

**Zanele Mukwedeya, Schools Project Manager, British Council**

In Zimbabwe, just like most low-income countries, girls and boys face multi-dimensional barriers in their quest to realise their right to quality education. These barriers vary between contexts and are recognised as a complex combination of economic and socio-cultural issues. These include school location, absent parents, religious beliefs, inadequate resources, irrelevant curriculum, poverty and teenage pregnancies – which skyrocketed during the COVID pandemic (Mukwambo, 2021; Girls Education Challenge, 2021; [zimeye.net](http://zimeye.net), 2022). Furthermore, adolescent girls from poor families in rural areas are also more likely to drop out of school into child marriages to enable families to receive financial recompense (the bride price). Such challenges require school leaders and teachers to develop innovative skills that will create learning environments that are responsive to the needs of diverse girls and boys.

In an inspiring collaboration, the British Council Zimbabwe and the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education jointly launched the Leading Learning for Gender Equality Programme (LL4GE). Initiated in 2021 and ongoing, the programme aims to strengthen the abilities of school leaders in Zimbabwe's primary and secondary schools, with particular focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning while addressing challenges faced by girls in their respective schools. Piloted in three districts, including Uzumba-Maramba Pfungwe, Muzarabani and Beitbridge, with support from the Higherlife Foundation, the programme has since expanded to cover 21 districts and 3,000 school leaders.

Using a combination of face-to-face workshops, online learning and school-based projects, LL4GE worked with school leaders to develop school visions and plans that promote an inclusive, gender sensitive school culture as well as facilitate a gender-sensitive school culture. This was achieved by encouraging teachers to explore and develop their attitudes and values on gender equality and take on gender-responsive pedagogies. The programme also equipped school leaders with the skills to use gender-disaggregated data to monitor, evaluate and improve the quality of teaching and learning and take actions to address gender disparities through school-based projects. This programme therefore seeks to address some of the underlying values and norms that support gender inequality and promote gender-sensitive and gender-responsive institutional policies, practices and pedagogy across targeted schools.

As a result of participating in the LL4GE programme, school leaders became more assertive and teamwork was greatly improved, with school leaders and teachers planning and delivering lessons as a team. Both parties were able to give each other feedback and, as a result, the quality of teaching and learning greatly improved. School leaders and teachers are now more intentional about giving learners room to excel in various clubs and sports. The gender-sensitive and inclusive school culture has led to girls becoming more confident to take on Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) without fear. Female teachers were also teaching science subjects that previously were male dominated. The programme has been described as a 'game changer' by educational leaders in the system, proving that it has potential to improve teaching and learning outcomes in schools. As an example, the education inspectors indicated that they can actually differentiate between school leaders that participated in the programme and those that have not. The programme is significant to all stakeholders, including school leaders, teachers and learners. The school-based projects revealed the pivotal role that school leaders play in creating teaching and learning environments that support safe, equitable and quality education for girls and boys in Zimbabwe.





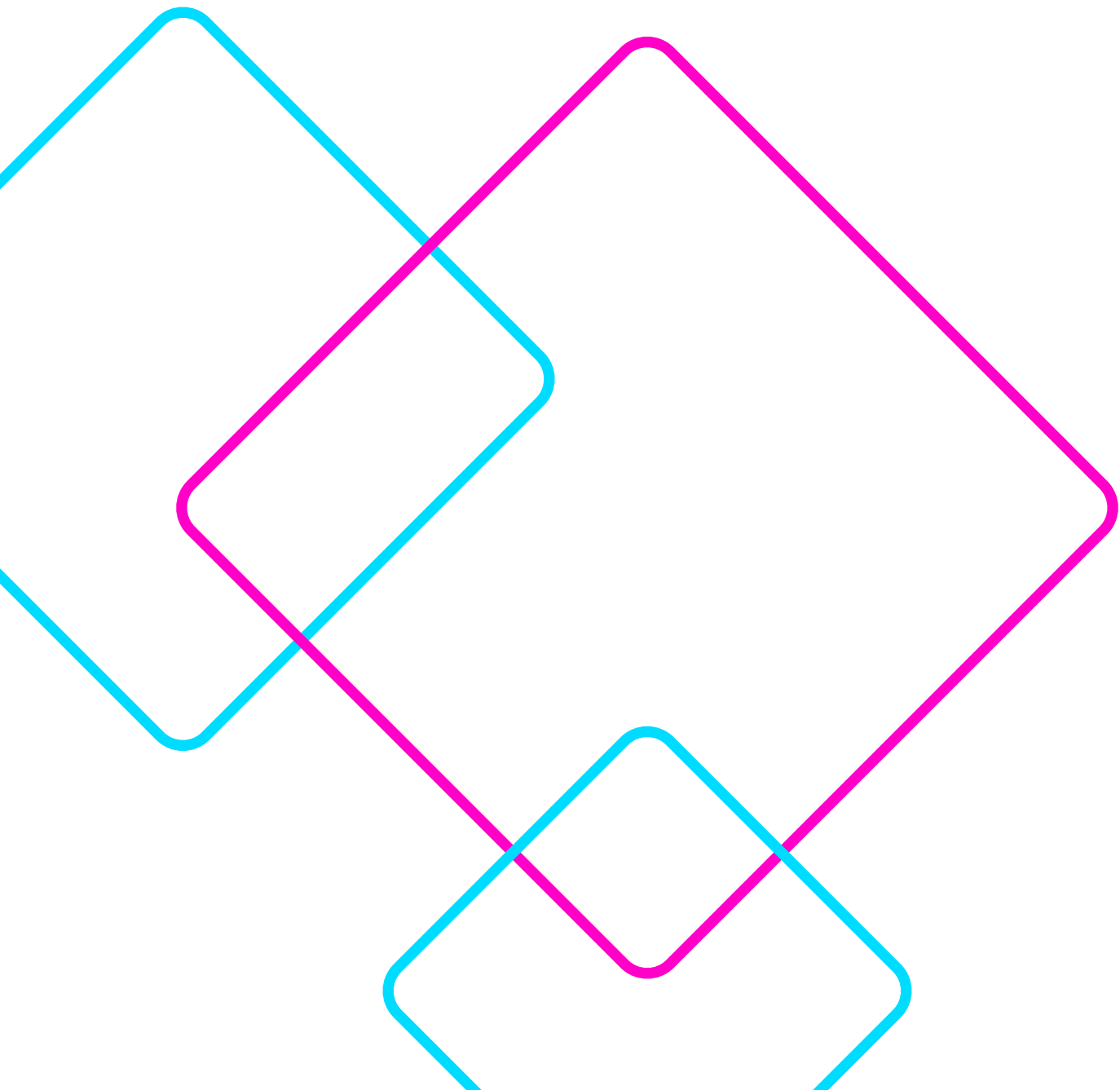
In summary, the Leading Learning for Gender Equality Programme is making significant strides in enhancing educational leadership, promoting gender equality and raising the quality of education in Zimbabwe's primary and secondary schools. Through a holistic training approach, ongoing support and hands-on projects, school leaders are empowered to drive positive change within their educational communities. This initiative represents a significant step towards a brighter future for Zimbabwean education.

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# Inclusive education: unlocking potential, embracing diversity

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Inclusion assumes diversity. Pakistan has started acknowledging the importance of the inclusion of all pupils, regardless of differences of gender and disability, geographical and economic background, in relation to their constitutional right to education (Constitution of Pakistan, 1973). There is an acknowledgement however that there are many challenges in achieving this inclusion, including a lack of resources and inadequate teacher training and support (despite investment in training students, the resulting quality of these teachers does not reflect this investment) (Punjab Examination Commission, 2022), low enrolment rates and gender disparities. One of the most pressing issues in Pakistan's education system is the high dropout rate, with approximately 40 per cent of children not attending school (Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, Government of Pakistan, 2021). This problem is more pronounced for girls, as they face access and equity issues (as societal norms tend to favour boys being sent to school rather than girls) in addition to there being a lack of facilities such as separate toilets. Additionally, many children with special needs are also out of school because of inadequate access, assistance and a similar lack of special facilities such as toilets.

One definition of inclusive education is 'all children in the same classrooms in the same schools' (UNICEF, 2024). It recognises the importance of equity as opposed to equality (Schaeffer, 2019). It involves strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach out to all learners and lessen barriers to learning and participation. The British Council's Schools Connect programme has led by example, emphasising the importance of school leadership, training teachers, adapting curriculum and assessment methods and creating an inclusive school culture.

The provincial, high-quality public sector teacher training institute Quaid-e-Azam Academy for Educational Development (QAED) is contributing in inculcating ideas and techniques for making school education much more inclusive than it is at the moment. A landmark in this direction was the training of 15,000 head teachers of elementary, high and higher secondary schools on Developing Inclusive Schools and Classrooms. The module is a part of QAED's mandatory Promotion-linked Training (PLT). In the last four years QAED has trained approximately 8,000 education managers in PLT. Currently, QAED has developed training modules for the primary school teachers of two districts, Jhelum and Multan, and trained 5,500 teachers as a pilot project, Transformation in Access, Learning, Equity and Education Management (TALEEM). QAED has recently run a successful phase of instructional leadership training in South Punjab with 600 schools' head teachers. Every head teacher had to choose one activity based on an inclusive education concept. During reflection days, QAED witnessed the impact of training on inclusive education, as wonderful case studies were shared by the head teachers. This training improved head teachers' understating about inclusive education, enhanced their leadership skills and enabled them to undertake advocacy for inclusive education.



Dr Shahid, a passionate head teacher, started the Instructional Leadership course in May 2023 in Bahawalpur. Despite being transferred to another school during the summer break, he carried his passion for change to his new school. Focusing on the theme of 'acceptance of diversity and change', Shahid's school, situated in an underdeveloped area with a marginalised community, showcased a remarkable transformation. By fostering understanding and respect for diverse cultural, economic, social, religious and financial backgrounds, he engaged staff, faith leaders and parents in creating activities that promoted cohesion and interfaith harmony. These efforts resulted in improved teaching quality, marked by enhanced professionalism, teacher dedication and a better grasp of students and their learning environment. The positive outcomes for students included a heightened sense of honour, responsibility and respect for their peers, as well as a deeper understanding of social norms and culture.

Another contribution to schools becoming more inclusive is QAED's collaboration with the British Council in designing a continuing professional development (CPD) framework for school leaders to provide an inclusive and enabling environment in schools and classrooms. This framework requires a comprehensive approach, including policy and legal frameworks, curriculum and assessment adaptations, teacher training and creating an inclusive school culture. A significant development in this regard was the creation of School Leadership Standards for Head Teachers in collaboration with the British Council. These standards include a focus on leading inclusive teaching and learning practices by using an enabling and instructional leadership approach followed by ongoing collaboration with the Special Education Department for the development of standards for teachers of special schools.

Recently Ms Mehnaz Aziz Akbar (Member of National Assembly), Ms Sarah Rashid (Director General, Quaid-e-Azam Academy for Educational Development), Mr Rana Saleem Ahmed Khan (Secretary SED South Punjab), Mr Mohtasim Billah Shah (Secretary Primary and Elementary Education Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) contributed to Developing Inclusive Schools, a conference in South Africa involving delegates from 15 countries. The learning and insight picked up from the visit to Cape Town, in visiting a public-run inclusive school as well as ideas of how inclusivity in education is practised in India, South Africa and other African countries, were inspirational. One particularly interesting concept that may have relevance to the Pakistani context was to form hubs of special and mainstream schools to support each other in technical as well as financial issues, instead of creating a new structure of schools. In the Pakistani context, this economical yet pragmatic idea could turn the world around for students with different abilities.

Community engagement is a must for effective inclusive schooling. In Punjab, Pakistan, School Councils were established in the 1990s. The latest policy (Government of Punjab, 2007, 2013) envisions a greater role for these councils and SED is planning to empower them further – not only for the recruitment of teachers locally, but to execute development works to provide support facilities such as toilets or new classrooms as well as repair and maintenance locally. In this developing scenario, QAED is leading a scoping study on the School Councils with technical support from the British Council with the purpose to empower and engage them with inclusive schooling and building their capacities to be able to fulfil future responsibilities.

By addressing these challenges and including all stakeholders, such as academic and non-academic members of the school council, in managing the school services and ensuring a conducive environment for students of gender and different abilities, Pakistan aims to achieve not only 100 per cent enrolment but a level of education to compete with rest of the world on an even playing field.

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# Why is language important for inclusive education?

**Ann Veitch, English in a Multilingual World Programme Lead, British Council**

Language, as the means through which information and knowledge is transmitted, is key to unlocking learning. It is also critical to quality and inclusive education. Children cannot learn in a language they do not understand. Despite this, it is estimated that 37 per cent of students in low- and middle-income countries are not able to use or understand the language in which they are taught and through which they are required to learn (World Bank, 2021).

Language in Education policy choices are driven, influenced and determined by a complex web of perceived economic development needs, political and geopolitical interests and historical factors, as well as evidence. The use of international languages, particularly English, as languages of learning and teaching in environments where these languages are not the language used every day by the majority of the population has grown over the past decades. Learning and teaching in English is perceived as a means to improve English proficiency and thereby build competitive advantage in a globalised and interconnected world, opening up opportunities and access for social and economic mobility. The promise, however, rarely lives up to reality. Poorly planned and implemented Language in Education policies can result in poor learning outcomes, academic failure and drop out, depressed performance in high-stakes exams, engagement and access issues and the loss of language, culture and knowledge. Those already marginalised through economic or social status, linguistic and cultural background, gender or disability are particularly vulnerable to the risks posed by poor Language in Education policy. Research shows that English-medium education, for example, can, if not well planned, resourced and implemented, exacerbate existing inequalities in low- and middle-income contexts. English-medium education may additionally disadvantage vulnerable girls who may already struggle to attend school, participate in class and study at home (Milligan and Adamson, 2022; Hultgren et al., forthcoming) and lead to a widening social and economic divide (Simpson, 2019).

It is estimated that in 2023, 70 per cent of ten-year-olds in low- and middle-income countries lack age-appropriate literacy skills (World Bank, 2023). Better, more appropriate and context-specific Language in Education policies, alongside other features of inclusive and quality education such as teacher capacity and skills, infrastructure, curriculum and school leadership, are needed to address this issue.

## How can Language in Education be more inclusive?

In low- and middle-income contexts, the British Council advocates for evidence-based approaches to Language in Education that support the teaching of young students in their own or a familiar language. English fluency is best developed through quality English language learning experiences that are accessible to all. Students need between six and eight years of learning English as a subject before they can learn effectively though or in English (Simpson, 2019). Research shows that early years mother tongue-based multilingual education (i.e. education in a students' own or familiar language that incorporates multilingual pedagogies and builds on the foundations of a student's own or familiar language) increases the likelihood that children will enrol and succeed in school (Cummins, 2000; Kosonen, 2005; Thomas and Collier, 2002), engages parents in their children's education (Benson, 2002; Thomas and Stakhovich, 2010; Truong, 2012), enables teachers to use active, student-centred strategies that foster inclusion (Heugh et al., 2007; Chick, 1996; Williams, 2014) and is potentially a successful model for marginalised children and girls and children living in rural areas with less exposure to a dominant language to have better learning outcomes (Hovens,





2002; UNESCO Bangkok, 2005; Benson and Kosonen, 2013; Yiaoumettu, 2012).

The British Council promotes context-specific multilingual approaches to teaching and learning of, in and through English in multilingual and multicultural contexts as a means to improve access and inclusion. This includes the use of purposeful and simultaneous use of two or more languages in the classroom through code-switching, translation, translanguaging and bi/multilingual pedagogy (Heugh et al., 2019; Erling et al., 2016). Multilingual approaches can be one aspect of supporting transitions from one language of learning and teaching to another. The British Council also believes that a cohesive approach to language in curriculum, resources and assessment, reflecting the language of learning and teaching, is vital to inclusive education. Recent research has also shown that improving teaching is the most effective way of improving girls' learning (Evans and Yuan, 2022), reinforcing evidence that the professional development of teachers plays a key role in inclusion.

While language is central to successful learning outcomes, it is just one of a number of components of quality, inclusive education. Effective and appropriate Language in Education policy and practice must be accompanied by careful attention to other features of quality, inclusive education such as leadership development, teacher capacity and deployment and infrastructure.

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# Language for Resilience projects: the links with inclusive practice

**Marie Delaney, Educational Consultant and Fiona Robertson, Language for Resilience Global Lead, British Council**

Research suggests that language proficiency can be both a barrier and a vehicle for inclusion. It can be a barrier in obvious ways; for example, where students in the classroom cannot understand the language of their host country and less obviously, as UNICEF argued, language, as an expression of identity, can be a factor in conflict (UNICEF, 2016). Language can also be a powerful tool for communication, creating opportunities to connect with others and to become part of a community.

This chapter looks at the work on inclusion that has grown out of the British Council's Language for Resilience research project started in 2015, in particular the ways in which these projects link to inclusive pedagogical principles.

## The background

The British Council Language for Resilience project has grown from research conducted in 2015–16 on how language learning could enhance the resilience of Syrian refugees in their host countries of Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and the Kurdistan region of Iraq. The research looked at resilience as defined in the Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP), namely 'the ability of individuals, households, communities and institutions to anticipate, withstand, recover and transform from shocks and crises' (UNHCR/UNDP, 2015:17) and also the meaning of individual resilience as defined in the PERMA model of Seligman (Seligman, 2011), the need for expressing of emotions, having purpose, meaningful engagement, relationships and achievement.

## Key themes

Five key themes emerged in the research, each of which has a link to key inclusive pedagogical principles.

### 1 Language and identity

Every language used by refugees helps them to build resilience at the individual, family and community levels. Home languages are closely intertwined with identity, making it vital that they are valued and given a place in the classroom. Developing home language and literacy not only lays the foundations for the learning of new languages but also future learning in general. The Accessing Education project in Lebanon trained teachers to make use of the students' home languages in their English and French foreign language classrooms, creating multicultural, rich learning environments that gave all learners a chance to belong, feel heard and respected. By including lessons where all learners shared and discussed something of their language and culture (for example, a discussion on food, the similarities and differences in local dishes), the learners had a real reason to communicate and hear each other's stories.

The principles of the Language for Resilience research have been developed further in other countries, notably in Uganda. Uganda has an open-door policy to welcoming refugees from neighbouring countries such as Sudan DRC, Ethiopia and Rwanda. Teachers have classes where students speak a variety of local Ugandan dialects as well as other languages spoken by the refugees. English is the language of instruction from grade P4 though lessons are conducted in the



most prevalent home language in the earlier grades. The British Council is delivering a project for primary English and subject teachers, which gives them language support strategies for the multilingual classroom. Handbooks have been developed to provide practical ideas for working with a variety of home languages in very large classes. Ideas such as developing peer learning through buddying up with students of the same home language and using non-verbal methods to explain concepts are all proving successful in furthering inclusion in schools in Uganda.

### Link to inclusive pedagogical principles

The examples above, though specific to the refugee context, are clearly linked to more general inclusive pedagogical concepts such as the need to see the student as a whole person, not 'just' a refugee, and of giving them a real voice.

## 2 Access to education, training and employment

Learning a language creates opportunities to access education and training programmes as well as the labour market. The research showed that the right kind of functional language programmes need to be provided, specific to the needs of the community and dominant language.

Syrian women in Turkey, for example, wanted to learn Turkish for shopping, visiting doctors and supporting their children in school. They were provided in some cases with academic language programmes that did not consider their specific needs. These programmes were developed from a 'top-down' approach and not in collaboration with the participants.

The British Council projects, LASER and HOPES English language courses, recognised that there was a desire for some students to continue their studies in non-Arabic-speaking countries or to access international courses delivered through English. Programmes were designed specifically to focus on the English skills needed in these contexts.

### Link to inclusive pedagogical principles

The learnings from this area of the research clearly link to a general concept of inclusion, the need to be person-centred, focused on meeting the real needs of the students through listening to them and building a collaborative curriculum rather than a 'top-down approach' to programming.

## 3 Social cohesion: language learning as a basis for bringing communities together

Bringing communities together to learn a language in an interactive way has been a key focus of many of the language for resilience projects. For example, Syrian refugees, Iraqi Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and Kurdish learners came together in a project in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq to learn English in community centres funded by Mercy Corps. These groups already took part in other skills workshops in the centre but always in separate language groups. Through a shared desire to learn English, they were able to learn about each other, gain a better understanding of each other's situations and celebrate their similarities and differences.

In Lebanon, the researchers heard about a woman who would only hang out her washing at night when her neighbours would not see her. By joining an English class in the community with other women from her neighbourhood, she was able to relax, get to know them and reduce her isolation.

In the Ugandan English for Resilience project, children from communities who were often in conflict with each other are learning English together. A key element of the project has been to include parents, suggesting ways they encourage their children to continue their learning outside school, perhaps with other students who want to practise English or by encouraging older siblings to help younger siblings. The impact has been remarkable, with an increase in school attendance and a decrease in inter-tribal conflict.

### Link to inclusive pedagogical principles

For inclusion to work, we need to focus on finding opportunities for communities to come together and learn on an even playing field, learning with and from each other, building social capital and reducing isolation.



## 4 Addressing the effects of trauma on learning: language programmes as support and as a means to address the effects of trauma

The language classroom can provide a safe space for learners to have a voice, express their emotions and tell their stories. Creative activities such as play, drawing, drama and storytelling can provide a safe metaphor to explore feelings and experiences. This can be particularly powerful in the space of a second or third language. The British Council project SWITLO (which means both 'understanding' and 'light' in Ukrainian language) working with teachers from Ukraine, has been training Ukrainian and host community English teachers about the impact of trauma on learning and behaviour. The project recognised that teachers also need a safe space to process their own feelings and the impact of trauma on themselves. Support groups are now being created for this. Similarly, the English for Resilience project in Jordan, in collaboration with Mercy Corps, showed that participation in training that was interactive, communicative and creative allowed the teachers to explore their own feelings in a safe way. They gained as much benefit, if not more, from the activities as their learners eventually would.

### Link to inclusive pedagogical principles

These projects have shown that there is a need to provide real support, both practical and emotional, for staff working with vulnerable students. This type of support is essential for all teachers striving to create inclusive classrooms with a myriad of competing needs. Support networks need to be created so that staff have safe spaces to process the impact of their work on themselves.

## 5 Building the capacity of teachers and strengthening educational systems through professional training programmes

It was apparent from the research that teachers needed to be provided with training and development opportunities in methodologies that allowed language learning to be a protective factor and not a potential vulnerability factor. These methodologies relate strongly to general inclusive pedagogical principles, in particular the need for training on techniques that:

- Promote social interaction and intercultural exchanges
- Focus on student-centred learning
- Give practical ideas to promote connection and belonging
- Support teacher and student wellbeing

The Ugandan Language for Resilience project offers practical methodology training to support these principles. It actively, for example, trains teachers to learn something of their learners' home language. Teachers with different home languages work in small groups to agree on key concepts and local expressions that are important in the classroom environment so that every teacher can communicate with the refugees and IDPs in their classes at a basic level. Handbooks have been developed for both teachers and school leaders to provide support at all levels of the system.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, language learning can be seen as a protective and facilitating factor of inclusion, reducing isolation and exclusion at an individual and community level. The projects that have developed from the original Language for Resilience research are based on solid inclusive pedagogical principles and offer practical examples that could help teachers of other subjects to develop their own inclusive practice.

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# How do we embed inclusive education techniques into teacher training, increasing advocacy and changing mindset? A policy perspective from the recent Indian policy initiatives

**Professor Rishikesh Shanker, Professor and Associate Director, School Education, Azim Premji University, India**

## Inclusivity and education in the Indian policy context

Inclusivity begins with identifying what and who are excluded. In India, the National Education Policy 2020 (Government of India, 2020) identifies those excluded from education as members of the 'socio-economically disadvantaged groups' (SEDGs).

'Socio-economically disadvantaged groups can be broadly categorised based on gender identities (particularly female and transgender individuals), socio-cultural identities (such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, OBCs and minorities), geographical identities (such as students from villages, small towns and aspirational districts), disabilities (including learning disabilities) and socio-economic conditions (such as migrant communities, low-income households, children in vulnerable situations, victims of or children of victims of trafficking, orphans including child beggars in urban areas and the urban poor)' (ibid.).

To enable the country to meet UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 4.5, to 'eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous people and children in vulnerable situations' (United Nations, 2012), would mean all the categories under SEDG as defined above is to be accounted for and included.

The policy direction in this regard has been unambiguous, and in the most recent Education Policy documents, the Draft National Education Policy, 2019 (Government of India, 2019) and The National Education Policy 2020, the emphasis in this regard is very strong. In the DNEP 2019, Chapter 6 is titled Equitable and Inclusive Education and the 20 pages cover eight sub-sections focusing on different and unique 'under-represented groups', from the girl child, children from tribal communities and minority groups, to transgender children and children with special needs. The NEP adds that 'inclusive and equitable education – while indeed an essential goal in its own right – is also critical to achieving an inclusive and equitable society in which every citizen has the opportunity to dream, thrive and contribute to the nation' (Government of India, 2020).

In this manner, inclusivity as a principle is present through many specific policy documents as well as legal frameworks in the country. For instance, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act 2016 defines inclusive education as a 'system of education wherein students with and without disabilities learn together and the system of teaching and learning is suitably adapted to meet the learning needs of different types of students with disabilities' (Government of India, 2016). This legal



framework is aligned to what the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 (Government of India, 2009) states to ensure there is inclusive education.

However, to effectively see inclusion in educational settings, the role of the most important stakeholder in the process is critical: the teacher. This truth has been acknowledged by the DNEP 2019 and NEP 2020, thereby providing many specific action points to ensure that teachers are playing the crucial role required of them.

## Teachers as 'champions of inclusion'

In the DNEP 2019 section titled 'what makes for outstanding teachers and teaching', the document states that 'the schools in which teachers work must have a caring, collaborative and inclusive school culture, which encourages excellence, curiosity, empathy and equity' and that 'a large part of this school culture must be set by school principals, school complex leaders and SMCs and School Complex Management Committee (SCMCs)' (Government of India, 2019). It further states that 'to help ensure that schools have positive learning environments, the role expectations of principals and teachers will explicitly include developing a caring and inclusive culture at their schools, for more effective learning for all and for the benefit of all in their communities' (ibid.). The emphasis is on creating an inclusive culture and providing support for the teachers.

The above is crucial as it suggests the creation of culture of inclusivity and the support teachers require to ensure they create an inclusive environment.

Therefore, not only is it important to acknowledge the truth of the critical role teachers play in this regard, but to also put in place the support mechanisms and clearly define the roles that other stakeholders ought to perform such that the teacher is enabled to play the role of creating inclusive environments effectively. Invariably, the teacher support and roles of other stakeholders such as the school leaders, supervisors and community members are not given enough attention.

## Action plan for ensuring inclusion in schools

Learning from past experiences, the new education policy proposes a comprehensive action plan on the specifics of how an inclusive school culture could be developed by schools. Broadly, it entails these four action areas with each requiring specific action points:

1. Specify the role expectations of the head teacher/principal and teachers to ensure that the primary focus is on building inclusive educational environment in the schools.
2. Re-orient the functioning of the officials of the Directorate of School Education (Education bureaucracy) to support such a culture by explicitly mentioning their role expectations in this regard.
3. Sensitise the School Management Committee (SMC) about the need for creating a caring and inclusive school culture on a continuing basis.
4. Ensure that the pre-service teacher education and continuous professional development of in-service teachers makes 'development of the dispositions and capacities for caring and inclusive culture as an integral part of their goals' (Government of India, 2019).

As stated in the final point above, to include inclusive education techniques in all forms of teacher education is indeed a crucial aspect. However, it is important that the ground is set for this through a comprehensive approach that addresses all the corresponding issues that support teachers in the learning environment. This is expected to help in the journey of creating inclusive learning environments for all our children.

Once the ground is set, the next key step in this regard is to work towards having all teachers internalise the spirit behind inclusive education and why it is critical for any educational setting; this, indeed, is the toughest part. Before 2016, only seven types of disabilities were officially recognised; however, under the RPWD Act 2016 a total of 21 types of disabilities are now recognised. So, to go about helping teachers to not only identify the various disabilities but also appreciate the spirit behind including children with the disabilities in the regular learning environment is a very challenging aspect. Past experiences have shown that merely presenting inclusive education as a concept is ineffective, and instead teacher capacity has to be developed in a more holistic manner.



In the Indian context, the massive scale adds to the complexity of achieving the objective of teacher capacity development in inclusive education. More than 300 million children are being educated in almost 1.5 million schools and in one million early childhood care centres called anganwadis. Together these employ more than ten million teachers. There are around 26.8 million disabled people in India, of which almost 30 per cent are children; with a spread across 0 to four years (five per cent), five to nine years (seven per cent) and ten to 19 years (17 per cent).

Grasping the Indian context presented above is crucial to plan any embedding of inclusive education techniques into teacher education. Whenever such complex situations exist, experience has shown that simplifying things is the foremost step; in this case if we are to meet the objective of teachers appreciating the spirit of inclusive education and creating such environments in their respective classrooms, then it is imperative that inclusive education is broken down to simple action points. In this process to simplify, the first step is to get to the core aims of education. The innermost core of the aims is made up of three critical interlinked aspects, i.e. all children can learn, children learn in different ways and the last child matters as much as (and, at times, more than) the first. NEP 2020 expands it further and lists the following:

1. Every child is capable of learning
2. **Care is central to learning**
3. Each child is different and grows, learns and develops at their own pace
4. Children learn through observation, imitation, collaboration and concrete experiences
5. Children learn best when they are respected, valued and fully involved in the learning process
6. Play and activity are primary ways of learning and development
7. Continuous opportunities for children to experience, explore and experiment with the environment are important for learning
8. Families and schools are partners in children's learning

#### **The hope and way forward – to strengthen the IE journey in India**

The above simple ideas, if appreciated by the teacher, would go a long way in changing the teaching learning environment and teachers' and other's mindsets; it would also enable the right platform to advocate on matters related to inclusive education.

Inclusive education is a process that every education system in the world is currently deeply engaged in, and the way to fast track it is to have as many teachers as possible become champions in this journey to ensure that no child is excluded. The immense teacher support required for this needs to come from all quarters (immediate supervisors playing the role of a head teacher/principal, the education bureaucracy from the block to state level, the community including the SMCs and the Gram Panchayats and district offices) and via all kinds of educational material (curriculum load, pedagogic strategies, timetable).

This is the roadmap towards creating more inclusive schooling in India through activities around teachers; this Indian experience sharing is expected to present lessons of what to do and what to avoid to everyone who cares about inclusive education.

End Note: The content and opinions expressed are that of the author and are not necessarily endorsed by/do not necessarily reflect the views of Azim Premji University.

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# Teaching for All: A collaborative partnership to build inclusive teaching capacity in the Western Cape

**Berenice Daniels, Director: Inclusive and Specialised Education Support Western Cape Education Department and Joanne Newton, Regional Schools Director, Sub-Saharan Africa, British Council**

## What was the project trying to achieve?

Since 1994, South Africa has, through its constitution, legislation, policies, guidelines, international declarations and frameworks, committed to building an inclusive education and training system that ensures full access, presence, acceptance, participation and achievement for every child, to aid in the development of a just, equitable, safe and productive society for the benefit of all. In 2016, the Government of South Africa and the European Union announced a suite of projects that would work to this end, and the Teaching for All project was one. The Teaching for All project aimed to develop responsive quality teacher development programmes in inclusive teaching and learning at both initial teacher education (ITE) and continuing professional development (CPD) level. This included the development of a new conceptual model for inclusive education in South Africa, as well as a new curriculum with comprehensive supporting learning and teaching materials that could be embedded into university and provincial in-service programmes across the country.

## What we did

The Teaching for All project began with a country-wide research project conducted by researchers from five partner universities that examined the capacity of the system to provide inclusive education, to inform the design of curriculum and materials at ITE and CPD levels. This resulted in the development of a 240-hour course with comprehensive supporting open education resources (including study guides, LMS, video, facilitator and lecturer notes, assessments, etc). Starting in 2019, the Teaching for All course was embedded at 12 universities and piloted within one provincial education department, which is the focus of this case study.

To support the development of a single, inclusive system of education in South Africa, the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) implemented a strategy to convert a number of ordinary schools into full-service, inclusive schools. These schools would be resourced more favourably, and their capacity built regarding inclusive teaching and learning practices. It was expected that the first cohort of full-service schools would become examples of good practice and chart the way for all schools/institutions to ultimately become inclusive institutions. The majority of teachers in these ordinary schools, however, had not been exposed to pre-service training in teaching inclusively. The ethos in these schools was not always welcoming of diversity and there was a tendency to over-refer learners who were struggling academically to Special Schools or, once they were created, to the outreach teams. These teams felt overwhelmed with the volume of requests for their support.

During 2019, the WCED was exposed to the pre-service Teaching for All course and offered to pilot excerpts from the course with teachers at selected full-service schools and the Inclusive Education teams. Feedback was given to the British Council, which was contributing to the re-versioning of the pre-service course into an in-service course. Rollout of this training in person was expected to start in April 2020 but with schools closed for months due to the Covid-19 lockdown, the development of an online version was accelerated. The Western Cape Provincial Education Department began





project implementation in late 2021 with a unique blended model that responded to Covid-19 challenges and opportunities, and which increased possibilities for remote teacher development. With the assistance of the WCED's eLearning directorate, an online version was offered to teachers at the 64 schools, one school per circuit, which were the first cohort of designated full-service schools. The Inclusive Education outreach team members were trained by the British Council as lead trainers who facilitated in-person and virtual support to the schools.

### What did the project achieve?

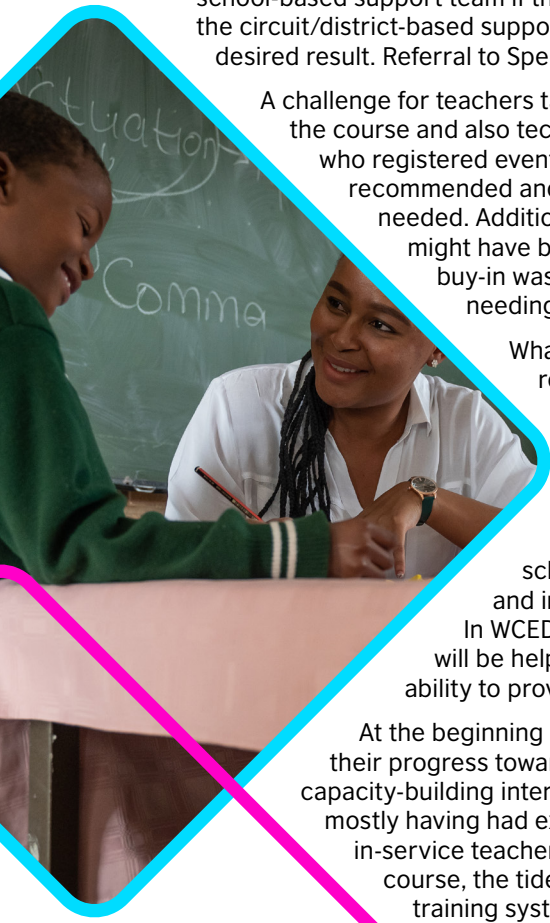
The response of both the teachers and lead trainers to the course was very positive. The course was described as academically sound, relevant and thought-provoking, even with prior knowledge and understanding giving everyone a common understanding of inclusion and a shared language to talk about it. The case studies were found to be contextually relevant and useful for classroom practice and encouraged meaningful behavioural change. The use of the Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) tool was strengthened, while the WCED Support Pathway (which advocates classroom-based intervention as a first step) was used, followed by consultation with the school-based support team if that intervention was insufficient; only requesting the assistance of the circuit/district-based support team when school-based interventions were not achieving the desired result. Referral to Special Schools or other external agencies would be a last resort.

A challenge for teachers taking the course was the length of time needed for completion of the course and also technical challenges due to lack of digital literacy. About half of those who registered eventually completed all four modules. At least one academic year was recommended and more assistance for those struggling with technical challenges was needed. Additional follow-up post-course sessions by the outreach/district teams might have been helpful to see how practice had changed. School senior leader buy-in was absolutely key, with either the school principal or deputy principal needing to do the course with the teachers.

What worked well was when lead trainers matched school needs to relevant parts of the course and used that as an introductory hook with senior leaders, or with whole staff in workshops. Visits to these schools showed a significant positive change in the attitudes and competency of teachers to manage the diversity found in their classrooms.

The most successful model, in terms of participation rates, was when schools put aside whole-staff study time every week. This kept status and interest high, was motivating and less daunting than individual study. In WCED, moving the course to be hosted by the provincial training institute will be helpful, as teachers have a lot of respect for the institution regarding its ability to provide quality in-service teacher training.

At the beginning of 2024, the pilot full-service schools will be assessed regarding their progress towards inclusivity. This will provide another measure of the success of capacity-building interventions such as Teaching for All. With newly qualified teachers mostly having had exposure to the initial teacher education version of the course and in-service teachers becoming more capacitated to teach inclusively through the course, the tide may be turning regarding building an inclusive education and training system in South Africa.



# Author biographies

## Shaimaa Al-Banna

Shaimaa ElBanna is the Director of Education at the British Council Egypt. She manages the education portfolio including higher education, TNE, science, international partnerships and schools. She started as a researcher and gained direct experience in development and empowering marginalised categories of society such as women and youth.

She has more than 20 years' experience in international portfolio management, leading large-scale and complex multi-million contracts and programmes. She managed EU-funded projects as Head of Training at ADEW, followed by establishing the Women Entrepreneurship and Leadership programme at AUC in partnership with Wharton University, funded by Goldman Sachs. She then Managed a 12 million USAID-funded project as Internship Programme Manager before joining the British Council. She also worked as a technical consultant for UNDP, Save the Children, the Arab league and USAID.

She received a BA in Political Sciences from Cairo University with honorary degree and received a diploma in Public Administration with focus on transparency. She also earned a Master's degree with distinction on Gender and Development from Cairo University and Sussex University, with her thesis on The Lived Experience of Women in STEM Careers: analysis for the Egyptian Context.

## Muhammad Ali

Ali is an experienced and transformative leader in the education and development sector, with over 15 years of experience. He is currently the Senior Education Manager at the British Council Pakistan.

He has led and managed large-scale projects across primary, secondary, higher education and skills sectors, which have had significant impact across the sector.

He is currently spearheading the Schools Connect Programme in Pakistan, providing technical support to federal and provincial governments and driving capacity development and policy reforms. He has a proven track record in cultivating strategic alliances and his influence extends to ministries, universities and skills institutes.

Ali embraces his passion for cultural diversity and inclusion as he brings fresh perspectives to the field, trusting his knowledge to ignite positive change.

## Zahida Batool

Zahida Batool is a dynamic and dedicated education professional currently serving as the Deputy Director Planning and Coordination at the Quaid-e-Azam Academy for Educational Development (QAED), Government of Punjab. With a rich and diverse background in both public and private education systems, Zahida has emerged as a multifaceted leader in the realm of education.

Zahida brings a wealth of experience to her role, having served in various capacities within the education sector, including as a visionary education leader – a teacher, trainer, material developer and advocate for sustainable development. As a validated trainer, Zahida has played a pivotal role in shaping the professional development of educators. Her expertise extends beyond the confines of traditional classrooms, as she actively engages in running projects related to Foundational Literacy and Numeracy, Inclusive Education, Schools Connect and School Council's CPD Framework.

Zahida's passion for creating a positive impact extends beyond her professional responsibilities. As a committed advocate for Sustainable Development Goals, Zahida actively volunteers on projects that align with these global objectives.

Her involvement in policy dialogues and panel discussions on education-related matters showcase her thought leadership and commitment to contributing to the ongoing discourse surrounding educational policies and reforms.

## Berenice Daniels

Berenice Daniels is the Director of Inclusive and Specialised Education Support in the Western Cape Education Department in South Africa, responsible for specialised support services, inclusive education support, special schools and the Care and Support Programme.

She has a combined BA–BSc degree and a Higher Diploma in Education and Honours in Clinical Psychology. She was awarded a British Council Technical Cooperation Scholarship in 1993 and studied at the University of Manchester where she obtained a Masters' degree in Educational Psychology. The topic for her research was Policy to Practice in Inclusive Education – exploring the continuum of provision in the United Kingdom in relation to the South African context.

In 1997, she was seconded to the South African National Department of Education as a coordinator of the National Commission on Special Needs and Education Support Services, which investigated the current situation and researched policy options for the new democracy. The Commission report led to the development of the Inclusive Education and Training policy document in 2001.

In January 2023, she was appointed to the Ministerial Task Team, which is reviewing the Special Educational Needs/Inclusive Education policy in the country.

## Marie Delaney

Marie is a Director and Co-Founder of Trauma Responsive Education. She is a teacher, educational psychotherapist, trainer and writer based in Crosshaven, Cork, Ireland. She focuses on finding practical ways to promote inclusion and an understanding of the impact of trauma on teaching and learning. She has extensive experience of working with students and teachers affected by traumatic experiences, having worked in non-formal education, mainstream and special school settings. This has driven her interest in bringing insights from fields outside education into schools, notably ideas from positive psychology, neuroscience, attachment and trauma theory. She is co-author of the British Council Report on Language for Resilience and has worked on several follow-on projects, developing resources and training for teachers and school counsellors, most recently in the post-conflict areas of Iraq.

Her publications include *What can I do with the kid who?* (2010), *Attachment for Teachers* (2017) and *Into the Classroom: Special Educational Needs* (2016) for Oxford University Press. She is co-author of the British Council teachers' course materials on inclusion.

## Susan Douglas CBE

Since leaving school headship in 2006, Susan has held several key roles with a variety of national and international organisations. She currently shares her time between the Eden Academy Trust and the British Council.

As CEO of the Eden Academy Trust, Susan is responsible for its strategic vision and direction. The Trust comprises ten schools and settings in West London and the north of England, all of which have been judged as good or outstanding. Susan was instrumental in the founding and development of the Trust, which provides education for children aged three to 19 with a range of complex needs.

In her position as Senior Adviser at the British Council, Susan provides sector expertise and advice to a wide number of educational programmes involving ministries of education, school leaders and teachers across approximately 40 countries in Asia, the Middle East and Africa. She has particular interest in leadership and professional development, and inclusion.

Susan is a Trustee of the National Federation of Educational Research (NFER) and the Confederation of School Trusts (CST). She was awarded a CBE for Services to Education in the Queen's Birthday Honours in June 2021.

## Hilda El Khoury

Hilda El Khoury is the Director of the Directorate of Guidance and Pedagogical Counselling in Schools (DOPS) at the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE). DOPS takes part in educational strategy and policy making and oversees the promotion of quality education in public schools.

Ms El Khoury was previously the Head of the Official Exams directorate at MEHE for three years. She achieved the digitalisation of the official exams system and the accommodation of the official exams to the needs of learners with disabilities.

At DOPS, Hilda established the Child Protection Unit and led the development, launch and roll-out of the Child Protection Policy. She manages the inclusive education project in public schools and the development of the National Policy for Inclusive Education. Furthermore, she has improved health

education and led the School Health Guide development. During the COVID-19 pandemic, she represented MEHE in the committee established by the Cabinet and led the development of The COVID-19 Preventive Measures Guidelines in addition to coordinating the shift to remote and hybrid learning, the safe return to school and supervising the launch of the call centre to receive all complaints for disasters and school wellbeing topics, following up on all cases. Hilda supervised the establishment of a coaching system and the development of observation tools to ensure qualitative follow up.

Ms El Khoury is a trained maths teacher and holds M1 in Mathematics, M1 in informatics and a Master's degree in Education. She is currently finalising her PhD in the Science of Education and has previously held a range of positions, including teacher trainer, mathematics coordinator and education consultant in a variety of schools.

## Mark Herbert

Mark Herbert is Global Head for Schools, TVET and Non-Formal Education. He leads the British Council's work with school and TVET systems and non-formal education across its network in 100 countries. He has a particular interest in how education systems can be improved through international collaboration around quality and inclusion and in creating opportunities for young people to gain skills. Mark joined the British Council in 2006 and was initially Director of Communications with responsibility for communications and marketing strategy. He holds a BSc in Economics and Management Studies from Cardiff University.

## Dr Faith Mkwanzani

Dr Faith Mkwanzani is a researcher at the Centre for Development Support at the University of the Free State, South Africa. She is interested primarily in [higher] education, migration, youth and international development in Sub-Saharan Africa. Also, she has researched education in emergencies, girls' education and peace education. Specifically, she is interested in operationalising human 'development' and applying more creative participatory methodologies. Her work seeks to bridge the gap between researchers, development practitioners and civil society organisations. As a co-founder of the African Early Career Researchers in Education (AECRE) initiative, Dr Mkwanzani is helping to build the next generation of African (education) scholars who will collaborate, become global thought leaders and drive evidence-based decision making on education in Africa.

## Zanele Mukwedeya

Zanele has a 29-year working history in the British Council, with career progression from library assistant, project officer roles, arts, governance and education to Programmes Manager Education and, since 2006, to Schools Project Manager, Zimbabwe. She has managed flagship British Council programmes at national, regional and international levels. Specifically in education, she managed the Connecting Classrooms programme, training an average of 800 teachers per year and facilitating school partnerships between the UK and Zimbabwe between 2006 and 2019. She has managed the Instructional Leadership and Leading Learning for Gender Equality programmes since 2020. The programmes aim to improve teaching and learning with a particular focus on gender equality. She has managed key relationships with policy makers, school leaders and teachers in the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE). Her role involves supporting the Minister of Education, Permanent Secretary and Chief Directors to attend the Education World Forum in the UK. She has developed key relationships with various stakeholders such as CAMFED, the Education Development Trust and Higherlife Foundation. She worked with the University of Nottingham on the comprehensive M&E programme for the Leading Learning for Gender Equality programme. She has also managed the Commonwealth and Chevening Scholarship schemes. Zanele worked closely with Professor Tudor on The Lost Ark of the Covenant, with the project featuring widely, as the Ark was found in Zimbabwe and handed to the National Museum there.



## Joanne Newton

Joanne Newton is an education and partnerships specialist working for the British Council in Sub-Saharan Africa. She has 25 years' international experience as an educator and education leader, and has special interests in inclusive education, digital inclusion and foundational learning. From 2016 to 2020 she led the Teaching for All project, which was a career highlight for her.

## Dr Patience Nyamunda

Dr Patience Nyamunda is a lecturer at the University of Glasgow's School of Education. Prior to joining the University of Glasgow in 2023, Dr Nyamunda was a lecturer at the University of Pretoria in South Africa. Informed by Amartya Sen's capabilities approach, Dr Nyamunda is interested in how universities foster human development and create more just, inclusive and sustainable societies. She focuses on the experiences of marginalised groups such as migrants (documented and undocumented), students from low-income backgrounds and girls in different (higher) education contexts. Her areas of interest are conceptions and operationalisation of quality in higher education, with a specific focus on teaching and learning; and higher education access, participation and employment/ employability.

## Dr Bukola Oyinloye

Dr Bukola Oyinloye is a researcher at the University of York where she examines the doctoral recruitment and selection landscape for British applicants from minoritised ethnic groups. Alongside this, she researches family-school partnerships and the educational experiences of adolescents in African contexts. Her research spans equity and diversity in access to higher education; childhoods and youth in low- and middle-income contexts; informal apprenticeships; research ethics; indigenous epistemologies; and school leadership and management. She also has several years of experience in the research, monitoring and evaluation of large-scale education interventions in low- and middle-income contexts.

## Sarah Rashid

Ms Sarah Rashid is an alumna of University of Melbourne and currently undertaking her LLM in Human Rights at the University of London. Sarah graduated from Kinnaird College for Women, Lahore, and was awarded the Qazi Saeed Medal for Geography. She topped in both Provincial and Central Civil Services, joining the civil service as the youngest officer in her batch.

She started her career as Assistant Commissioner in Gujranwala District and then went to Gilgit-Baltistan as the first woman Assistant Commissioner of Shigar.

Ms Rashid strongly believes in female empowerment and in creating synergies with networking and mentoring among women. She works to fabricate a productive environment in her organization, trying to influence changes in mindsets. For her, being human is about being inclusive in all fields of life. She is an avid follower and practitioner of Dale Carnegie's principles of leadership and self-improvement and believes in the innate goodness of all people. Her interests include literature, nature, history, education and human rights.

## Fiona Robertson

Fiona Robertson graduated from Edinburgh University in English Literature and Language before training as a secondary teacher in Scotland. She then moved to Italy and worked as an English language teacher and trainer at all stages of education. In Rome she worked with adolescents with special educational needs and school dropouts. She has been working for the British Council since 2011, mainly in countries where conflict and marginalisation negatively impact quality education. She managed projects with Syrian and Iraqi refugees in Jordan, Kurdistan and Iraq, with Sudanese refugees in Egypt and marginalised adolescent girls in Pakistan. She is currently the British Council global Language for Resilience Lead, overseeing projects involving English language teachers worldwide, including Ukraine, Uganda and OPT.

## Professor Rishikesh Shanker

Professor Rishikesh is the Associate Director at the School of Education, Azim Premji University and leads the Hub for Education, Law and Policy at the University. He has 20 years of research and teaching experience, 15 years of which has been at Azim Premji Foundation. His research interests are in the domains of educational policies, learner assessments and teacher education.

He has worked closely with the Dr K Kasturirangan Committee, which wrote the Draft National Education Policy 2019. Subsequently, he has been a member of sub-committees that have provided inputs for implementation of the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP) in school and higher education to state governments. Currently he is a member of the Technical Secretariat to the Steering Committee for drafting the National Curriculum Frameworks (NCF) based on the NEP.

He writes regularly on educational policy-related issues in Indian national dailies and magazines, to help make laws and policies accessible to all stakeholders.

## Ann Veich

Ann is the British Council's global lead for English as a language of learning and teaching and English within multilingual education, responsible for the British Council's global programme English in a multilingual world. She is author of the British Council's perspective on English in Higher Education – English Medium and co-author of a Global Mapping of English-medium Instruction in Higher Education. Her interests are in inclusion and equity within English as a language of learning and teaching contexts, multilingual pedagogies and global Englishes. Based in Scotland, Ann has worked in English language teaching, teacher education, academic and programme management for 23 years. She has worked in Poland, Egypt, Qatar, Tanzania and the UAE.

## Alice Wekesa

Alice has been actively involved in social development for over 20 years and has extensive experience in gender equality, women's empowerment and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Her work at the British Council involves providing teams and projects with technical input, specifically related to gender equality and inclusion as well as ensuring minimum standards of gender sensitivity in programme design and delivery are achieved. Alice serves as the gender lead on the Girls Education programme within the British Council, a role that draws on her experience in the education sector and areas of interest. Alice has a keen interest in adolescent girls and has published a book chapter on how young mothers from low-income households disengage and re-engage with schooling as learners and as mothers. She has a Master's degree in Development Studies, majoring in Women, Gender and Development.

## Siân Williams

Siân Williams worked for ten years in inner London secondary schools, where she developed a deep commitment to working inclusively with diverse groups of young people. She then spent eight years as an education officer, specialising in inclusion, in a London local authority. Siân became a freelance educational adviser, facilitator and trainer in 2010. Since then, she has worked both in the UK – with schools, NGOs and arts organisations – and internationally to promote and support inclusion.

Internationally, Siân worked extensively for the British Council in Malawi, where she lived between 2013 and 2016. Her subsequent role as an inclusive education consultant for the British Council has taken her to a variety of contexts, working with and learning from policy makers, academics, school leaders and teachers to support quality inclusive practice.

Siân's work in the MENA region for the British Council has been ongoing since 2018. Here, she has been working in partnership with Ministries of Education to review inclusive education provision for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities. Learning from these reviews led to a series of online regional policy dialogues brought together by Siân, which focused on shared thematic areas for development. She is looking forward to continuing her work in the MENA region in 2024.

