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Approaches to inclusive education

A review of the literature on inclusive education for children and youth with disabilities in low-income countries in Africa and Asia

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Preface

This report responds to an assignment commissioned by Norad to review peer reviewed literature on inclusive education in ten selected countries in Africa and Asia: Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Malawi, Mali, Myanmar, Nepal, Niger, Palestine, South Sudan, and Uganda. In the report we seek to show how the global vision of inclusive education is formulated, approached, and practiced in education systems at national and local levels and in schools, and to identify challenges and enablers for inclusion in these ten countries. We hope the report will contribute to a timely discussion on inclusive education among development partners and in countries that strive to achieve inclusive education.

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Oslo, August 2024

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Executive summary

The purpose of this report is to present research on inclusive education published in peer reviewed publications after 2010, specifically paying attention to how the global vision on inclusive education is formulated, approached, and practiced in education systems at national and local levels, and in schools. Ten countries in Africa and Asia were selected by Norad for the review: Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Malawi, Mali, Myanmar, Nepal, Niger, Palestine, South Sudan, and Uganda.

The global focus on inclusive education became a priority with the historic Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education and continued with subsequent agreements like the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006). Despite considerable progress, there is a long way to go to make education systems inclusive for all learners.

A recent Global Education Monitoring report underscores the ongoing challenges involved in achieving inclusive education worldwide, highlighting that globally millions of children remain out of school, with girls, the poorest children, and children with disabilities facing the highest risk of exclusion due to stigma, stereotypes, and discrimination (UNESCO, 2020).

Tracing the concept

Inclusive education developed as a political and ideological alternative to a marginalising school structure in West-European countries and the United States from the mid-1980s. In 1994, UNESCO developed a strategy focusing on "education for all" and within this framework education was linked to gender, poverty, and class issues. To avoid a conflict with the focus on "education for all", inclusive education was placed under the umbrella of special education. Hence, inclusive education has from the early 1990s been linked to the area of special education.

In the literature on inclusive education there are two distinct approaches to inclusion. The first focuses on how inclusion is organised and the second debates how inclusive education should be transformed into teaching practice. The criticism levelled against placing children with disabilities in separate institutions was central in the development of inclusive education and one result was a strong focus on teaching of children with disabilities within the mainstream school setting. Many countries have retained this focus on placement in their approach to inclusive education. The second focus, on teaching practice, developed next. A leading framework in the Nordic countries was to view the classroom as a teaching community driven by democratic processes, participation of all children in the teaching activity and where all children should benefit from the learning process. This framework challenges the traditional role of the teacher, and the way knowledge and learning are developed among students. In the Norwegian context the framework of the "wide perspective of adapted education" is probably the most widespread and commonly accepted description of an inclusive didactics.

Within research on inclusive education, there is an ongoing debate about placement. One argument is that placement might reduce quality of education and that the framework for inclusion is society and not the school context, hence, the challenge for education is to create inclusion in society and then placement in mainstream educational settings is less important. Another ongoing debate is on the role of special educational knowledge when teaching children with disabilities. The core of this debate is whether there exists a special education field with a particular body of knowledge that teachers need to have competence

on to support the learning of disabled children, or if general educational knowledge is enough to support all learners.

Special education knowledge has historically been linked to categorical descriptions based on the medical tradition, and practice has developed accordingly. The main categories being used are perceptual impairments, intellectual disabilities, and relational and social challenges (i.e. behaviour). Over the past sixty years, a fourth group of children with special education needs has emerged. This special education category focuses on problems linked to the ability to learn basic skills and specific school subjects, such as reading, writing and mathematics, hence dyslexia and dyscalculia have grown into distinct fields within the domain of special education.

Regarding how to achieve inclusive education, how might the historically developed knowledge in the field of special education be applied to support children within an inclusive education framework. Must a process towards inclusive education go through the historical steps starting with special education? In other words, does a country need to develop a special education field of knowledge to support people with disabilities within a context of inclusive education? This has been the case in all Western countries.

Several of the countries in this review suffer from conflict, war and poverty, education plays a role that is different from its role in the West, and democratic traditions may be weaker. These differences in context lead to the question of whether countries in the global south, also coined third-generation countries of inclusive education, must go through the same developmental path as the first and second generations, or if they could create their own unique, socially, and culturally responsive understanding of inclusive education. Such a developmental path might integrate core principles of inclusive education with local values and traditions that support and enrich contextually based ways of inclusive education.

The potential conflict between culture, tradition, education, and inclusion when countries adopt western models is discussed in a few research papers on inclusion on the African continent that theorise the concept of Ubuntu. Ubuntu is a philosophy of social interaction that values solidarity, compassion, respect and so forth. Drawing on the concept of coloniality, authors warn against an uncritical transfer of inclusive education models and ask for approaches that incorporate the values of Ubuntu. Authors also warn of the coloniality of knowledge because the field of inclusive education is dominated by Western scholars, external funding agencies could potentially impose their agenda because they contribute funding, and finally, what kind of school systems are children included into?

Methodology and description of the literature

Publications were obtained by 1) searching commonly used scholarly databases for literature reviews, specifically EBSCOhost, Education Source, ERIC, Academic Search Ultimate, Web of Science, World Bank eLibrary, UNESCO digital library, and ProQuest, and 2) complementary Google scholar searchers for the countries where the first search resulted in less than ten articles. The first search resulted in 84 scholarly works and the second in 18 works. A notable feature of the searches is the large variation in the number of publications across countries.

The review indicates that a national research community working on inclusive education is present in only a few of the countries, and the identified research communities have links with universities abroad. Most of the reviewed publications have treated students with disability as one category and have thus not examined specific categories of students with disability. Authors who have collected data on specific categories have mainly had an interest in visual and hearing impairments and some on physical disabilities. Most of the

studies have used interviews to collect data. The voices of the children with disabilities are presented through statements made by teachers, parents, politicians, and administrators.

Legal frameworks, policies, and regime change

Every country covered in this review has signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities committing governments to deliver on inclusive education. Authors agree that the impetus for national legislation, policies and strategies on inclusive education has been driven by the international human rights regime. This global legal shift was inspired by the Salamanca Statement of 1994. All the reviewed countries have addressed inclusive education in national programmes or strategies, and authors argue that many of these ten countries have solid legal and policy frameworks in place.

The literature on Nepal and Myanmar shows how new, democratic, and inclusive constitutions and democratic elections have paved the way for changes towards more inclusive educational policies, and conversely how the 2021 coup in Myanmar led to a reversal of inclusive processes. In the last five years Afghanistan, Mali, and Niger have experienced abrupt regime changes that have reduced access to schools, however, the impact on inclusive education has not been documented in the scholarly literature.

Development partners

UN organisations, including UNICEF, UNESCO and UNWRA, and international non-governmental organisations, such as Sight Savers, have collaborated with governments on inclusive education in all the countries reviewed. This engagement has only to a limited extent been documented in the scholarly literature on inclusive education reviewed for this report.

Inclusive education approaches and practices

Discussions mainly highlight ways of ensuring access to education for children with impairments. No clear distinction is made between special education and inclusive education. Only a few articles discuss teaching strategies in detail, however, the general argument is that teaching must be linked to the specific impairment of the child, hence a traditional special education argument. Many authors focus on the role of the teacher and teachers' knowledge and attitudes. Yet very few articles address the actual teaching practice. Most authors argue that teachers have little knowledge on how to practice inclusion, teachers harbour negative attitudes, and practices in regular schools are generally not inclusive.

Authors agree that persons with sensory disabilities and physical disabilities are easier to include than persons with intellectual disabilities. It is well known that if physical adaptations are made available, for example hearing aids, lighting, braille print, and other learning equipment, children are better able to access the curriculum. Children with intellectual disabilities, on the other hand, require an adapted curriculum and adapted teaching methods. Consequently, the type of disability influences access for students with disabilities, how it is organised, and the teaching strategies that are used.

Four models four inclusive education

Table 1:   The following table provides an overview of the four models

The mainstream structural model

- children with disabilities placed in the "regular" or "mainstream classroom".
- no support or adaptation
- low expectations regarding learning outcomes

The integrated school model

- separate classes/groups within the administrative structure of a mainstream school
- often targeting a particular impairment (visual or auditory)

The support centre–satellite school model

- itinerant teachers support satellite schools with expertise, assistive devices and teaching and learning aids
- itinerant teacher – school-teacher collaboration

The special school model

- separate schools with their own administrative structure
- admitting children with particular impairment and/or with moderate to severe disabilities
- no ambition of including the children into mainstream school system

In the mainstream structural model, all children are placed in the same classroom, which is defined as the "regular" or "mainstream classroom". Children are placed in the classroom without any expectations about how they will benefit or about learning outcomes. These practices reflect a simplistic view of inclusive education and combined with weak teachers' competency, an unsuitable classroom environment and limited room for teachers to take independent action, produce unfavourable conditions for inclusive education. In some cases, it is reported that children receive some help from peers to understand the teaching. Literature that reports lack of knowledge among teachers as a barrier to inclusion mostly refers to this mainstream structural model of inclusive education. The research literature reviewed suggests that most school-going children with disabilities attend mainstream classrooms with no adaptation and with no extra teaching support.

A similar approach to providing education for children with disabilities in mainstream classrooms is the resource or support centre model, also referred to as the satellite school model. Such centres are established to support schools and teachers by providing necessary expertise, teaching, and learning equipment, as well as assistive devices such as hearing aids and braille equipment to improve the learning process. One support centre supports several satellite schools by providing itinerant teachers who visit schools regularly.

A third model for ensuring access to education for children with special needs is the organisation of separate units or classes within the administrative and often also the physical structure of a mainstream school, the integrated school model. These groups or classes often target students with a particular impairment such as visual or auditory impairments who should be supported by specially trained teachers and extra resources. In some countries, the goal is for children from these groups and classes to participate in some of the general school activities in the mainstream school, or to make the transfer to the regular classrooms.

The fourth model is the special school model. These schools have their own administrative structure and there is no clear ambition of including children from these schools into the mainstream school system. They admit moderate to severe disability groups. The development and organisation of the special schools are closely linked to the historical focus on special education in the respective country. Most schools cater for blind, deaf, or mentally disabled children.

Classroom strategies and practices

Classroom strategies and practices can be divided into two broad categories: pedagogical strategies and didactics. Moreover, didactic strategies can be further divided into the didactics of teaching and the didactics of learning materials and technology. There is very little research on these topics in the reviewed literature, except for a few studies where teachers reported on their practices, and where peer-tutoring emerged as one strategy frequently mentioned. One concern found throughout was the lack of learning materials.

Pedagogical strategies in an inclusive classroom are based on a belief in the transformability of the students' capacity to learn. This belief challenges ideas about the child's learning capacity as fixed or predetermined and asserts that learning and development can be influenced by the teacher's facilitation and actions. Children's voices must be acknowledged, respected, and considered in the formulation of pedagogical strategies to build inclusive learning environments. While students' perspectives are crucial, other publications stress the importance of fostering teachers' confidence in their ability to educate students with special needs. Generally, teachers' competence and understanding of the role of being an inclusive teacher are essential elements in fostering learning in an inclusive classroom.

Another category is the didactics of teaching and the utilisation of learning materials and technology. These approaches might challenge the notion that a child's learning capacity is fixed. Visually or hearing-impaired children have communication needs that often exceed the teacher's competency. To address such challenges, it is essential to provide the students, the teacher, their families, and the communities with support such as communication tools and learning material. Additionally, minor adjustments regarding teaching strategies can be made by all subject teachers.

Regarding technology, computers, smart phones, and printers offer new possibilities for teaching and learning. Reports and observations show that students with disabilities find innovative ways to use the technology. Smartphone technology, known for its user-friendly nature, can provide support for teaching.

Teacher education and training

The need to build teacher competency in special education/inclusive education is reported to be significant in all the countries reviewed, and building the competence of teachers is a recommendation that echoes throughout the reviewed articles. A key concern is whether national regulations and strategies adequately prepare mainstream teachers to educate learners with disabilities alongside their peers. When reflecting on their own situation, teachers say they are not equipped to teach students with disabilities due to large classes and cohorts, lack of teaching aids and lack of training in inclusive pedagogy.

Accessibility

The goal of ensuring access to school for every child has been driving the international education agenda and has led to strong progress in enrolment globally. Such accessibility has two main elements:

1) Travel to school: Students must often travel far to school, especially in rural areas. There may be no roads, roads may be inaccessible due to rains or violent conflict, or there may be no public transport.
2) The importance of school infrastructure adapted to the needs of children with disabilities is a crucial issue highlighted in the literature. Studies show that infrastructure tends to be inadequate in all the countries reviewed. This applies specifically to water and sanitation facilities. Authors who have written on Malawi and

Uganda have found that children with disabilities may be burdened or even prevented from attending school when toilets are not clean or not private. Another aspect regarding school infrastructure is national or regional conflicts. In countries experiencing violent conflicts, schools may be destroyed, damaged, closed or taken over by military forces, and temporary school facilities that serve as replacements may be more inaccessible to students with disabilities compared to other children.

Gender

Despite the strong focus on girls' school enrolment and attendance in the generic literature on education, there are no articles in this review that systematically examine gender differences in inclusive education. Several of the articles suggest that girls with disabilities are less likely to attend school compared with boys but without substantiating this argument with statistics. Girls in general are subjected to sexual violence and harassment, and girls with disability may be more vulnerable.

Groups of disability

Despite a very limited focus in the literature on specific groups of disabilities, it is possible to present a few findings related to the use of categories:

- The western understanding of disability categories dominates in this literature. The main categories used are blind, deaf, hard of hearing, and physical and intellectual disabilities. Despite variations in cultural and social contexts, these categories remain the focal points of the discussions.
- There is a clear emphasis on disabilities that are "visible". These disabilities create social challenges both within and outside the school context.
- Disability tends to be described and analysed as a disabled person's only identity, and there is hardly any discussion on how disability intersects and interacts with other identities, such as gender, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status and so forth.

Enablers and challenges for inclusive education

Authors list inclusive policies and plans, teachers' attitudes, motivation, and competence, parents' awareness and attitudes, and technology as factors that enable inclusive education. Overall, there is little focus on enabling factors in the literature on inclusive education. Most of the literature pays much attention to barriers and challenges.

- School systems have characteristics that are not conducive to inclusion, such as an inflexible and demanding curriculum, exam-oriented teaching, teacher centred as opposed to child centred teaching, and so forth.
- Communities, governments, and education professionals often display negative, discriminatory, or ignorant attitudes that prevent mobilisation of human and financial resources for students with disabilities and that may force families to keep their disabled children at home.
- Children with disabilities, in particular girls, are according to research from several of the countries in this review vulnerable to violence and sexual abuse. Concerns among parents about the safety of children with disabilities while travelling to and from school, as well as while at school, lead to hesitation when it comes to sending their children to school.
- There is weak coordination among actors in the education sector, and between the education sector and other sectors.
- Funding for inclusive education is not sufficient. Many challenges are a result of poverty and/or conflict which reduce available financial and human resources.

- Non-governmental initiatives are small and unsustainable.
- There is a general lack of trained teachers in several of the countries reviewed and there is a significant gap of teachers trained in special needs and inclusive education in all the countries reviewed.
- Often there are few teachers with limited competence and large student cohorts with classes of 60 to 200 students. Schools lack the basic infrastructure and devices that facilitate learning for students with disabilities.
- Schools lack the basic infrastructure, such as accessible toilets and water taps, ramps, and other devices that facilitate access and learning for students with disabilities, such as glasses, hearing aids, braille books.

Key issues emerging from the review

<u>From policies to practice.</u>

The review highlights that one of the major challenges on the journey towards inclusive education is the translation of international agreements into national policies and practices, while navigating the tension between global standards and local contexts. Implementation processes are complex, and the introduction of inclusive education require profound changes in educational systems and social institutions. The idea of many countries in the global south being 'third generation countries' implies that school systems and social conditions are less conducive to the adoption of western models of inclusive education. Importing inclusive education standards and discourses into national and local contexts without consideration of the cultures and specific needs of these contexts has resulted in a persistent focus solely on integration (placement) in mainstream schools. The result is an incomplete implementation of inclusive education that does not address the complex educational challenges faced by several countries. Most children with disabilities in the global south who have been able to access school, sit in mainstream classrooms, with no or very little additional support. Only a small minority of children with disabilities attend resource classrooms, separate schools for children with special needs, or benefit from itinerant teachers who support teachers in regular classrooms.

<u>The need to define national approaches to inclusion.</u>

Defining the quality of teaching is important. The publications reviewed indicate limited teacher competency to meet disabled children's needs and few opportunities for the teachers to reflect on and become more inclusive in their practices. While policies encourage inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream education, there has been little focus on the nature of inclusion and on how to prepare the teachers to meet the challenges. The authors reviewed hardly pay attention to the core processes of learning, the relations between the teacher, the environment, the subject matter, and the learner.

The debate on organisation of inclusive education is characterised by a spectrum of positions. At one end of the continuum, inclusive education requires fundamental changes to enable all children to be educated in mainstream schools where teachers should be flexible and able to respond to differences. This perspective remains an ideal and a vision in legislation and policy documents. Located at the other end of the continuum, is a perspective that sees inclusive education primarily as providing an optimal education, with schools providing additional and special support to meet children's individual needs.

Finally, to the question of the overall purpose of education. One way of approaching the discussion on how to define inclusive education in national and local contexts is to ask questions like: What is education for? What is the role of education? Why should people be

educated? What values should education be grounded in? How could education ensure safety and impart meaningful qualifications?

<u>Research and knowledge production.</u>

Only a few of the publications are written by academics from a higher education institution in their home country. The reviewed articles highlight the need for more knowledge on the prevalence of disabilities, more focus on inclusion in teacher education and an increased awareness of what inclusive education is, and how to best achieve it. These demands are difficult to meet due to the narrow national knowledge base that exist on how to understand and provide inclusive education. Moreover, the research we have reviewed in the ten countries is highly influenced by a western understanding of inclusive education.

<u>Countries affected by crisis and conflict.</u>

As shown above, there is hardly any literature on inclusive education in crisis and conflict affected countries that might have informed a debate on inclusive education in these countries. The conflict affected countries included in this review are among the world's poorest and have scarce financial and human resources to spend on the regular education system. The literature review also documents how education becomes a battleground in political crises and conflicts. It should, however, be noted that there is a literature on education for refugee populations that has not been included in this review.

Recommendations

The areas that we believe need urgent attention are listed below and flow from the above discussion on key issues:

1) Creation of spaces for a national dialogue on inclusive education informed by research and a national knowledge base.
   a. Funding for research on inclusive education (themes are proposed in the final section on recommendations).
   b. Support for arenas for discussion and dialogue on inclusive education in the global south.

2) Translation of international agreements into national policies and practices while navigating the tension between global standards and local contexts.
   a. National inclusive education plans and strategies should be formulated based on a deep understanding of the country context and opportunities and risks that exist within the national school system and the broader society.
   b. Key issues need to be addressed, such as the purpose of education in the country, the risks and benefits involved in different educational models, the balance between specialised and generalised knowledge in teacher education, the potential for change in educational institutions through a broad-based social mobilisation etc.

3) Efforts to achieve inclusion should preserve diverse educational opportunities and institutions that work well.

4) Collaboration between schools, research institutions and teacher education institutions should be encouraged by:
   a. Linking the knowledge field of inclusive education to the field of teacher education
   b. Supporting centres of competence development on inclusive education that collaborate with research communities and schools.
   c. Incorporation in teacher training courses of a substantial component of teaching

practice in schools.

5) School leader and teacher education, pre-service and in-service, should be strengthened.
   a. Degrees/courses in inclusive education and special needs education for in-service and pre-service training should be established.

   b. Development of teacher training material, such as textbooks, on inclusive education and inclusive practices for different categories of disabilities adapted to country contexts is required.

6) Strategies for supporting inclusive education in countries in crisis and conflict should be developed.
   a. Strategies and plans should consider whether rebuilding after conflict offers opportunities to reform education systems, not only at the constitutional and policy level, but also in practice.
   b. Development partners should consider providing support for small scale initiatives/pilot projects in geographical areas where this is feasible, while carefully considering financial and human resource sustainability challenges.

7) Awareness, attitudes, and knowledge
   a. Development partners and other funding agencies should ensure that project and programmes are based on dialogue, participation, and representation by persons with disabilities and their organisations on issues that are of concern to them.
   b. Development partners should support effective awareness building programmes on inclusive education, for example by collaborating with in service-teacher training institutions, radio channels, health and social services and so forth.

8) Guidelines for funding in the inclusive education field.

   Funding agencies should:

   a. Ensure that all education initiatives, regular and inclusive, address, measure, report on, and evaluate the impact on inclusion of children with disabilities. Efforts should be made to collect data on disabled children's own views and to disaggregate information by gender and disability category.
   b. Require partners to evaluate risks and benefits associated with the four different models of inclusive education (mainstream, integrated, support centres and special schools). This analysis should include information on the impact on the children with disabilities and their families.
   c. Consider ways in which universal human rights could be reconciled with local and national inclusionary practices. One way forward is to ensure participatory and inclusive processes when inclusive education policies, plans and practices are developed, to commission research when data is wanting, and to document and build on low-cost, locally adapted models for inclusive education.

1   Introduction

A recent Global Education Monitoring report underscores the ongoing challenges involved in achieving inclusive education worldwide, highlighting that globally millions of children remain out of school, with girls, the poorest children, and children with disabilities facing the highest risk of exclusion due to stigma, stereotypes, and discrimination (UNESCO, 2020). Among children with disabilities, girls with sensory and intellectual disabilities often face the most significant barriers when attempting to access education. A report from the Global Partnership for Education (GPE, 2018) concludes that access to school improved significantly in the first 15 years of this century. Since then, progress has stalled, and around 258 million children of school-going age (up to 17 years) are out of school and nearly 60 million of them are primary school children[1]. Around one-third of these children have some kind of disability. Estimates for sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia, suggest that fewer than five per cent of children with disabilities are enrolled in school. Even for children with disabilities who are enrolled in school, the learning environment often fails to accommodate their needs, and many teachers lack the capacity, time, or expertise to provide the necessary individualised support and assistance. Consequently, children with disabilities are far more likely than their non-disabled peers to drop out (Sæbønes, 2015). The figures referred to above are estimates as reliable, global data on education for children with disabilities are not available. This lack of data not only contributes to reinforcing exclusion but also hinders efforts to address the challenges children face in accessing and participating in education.

Inclusive education is grounded in the belief that every child has the right to be part of mainstream educational settings, to the fullest extent possible. The benefits accrue not only to students with disabilities, but inclusive practices contribute to the overall academic and social development of all students by promoting understanding, empathy, and acceptance of differences.

The purpose of this report is to present research on inclusive education published in peer reviewed publications since 2010, specifically paying attention to how the global vision of inclusive education is formulated, approached, and practiced in education systems at national and local levels, and in schools. The analysis includes information on different groups of disabilities. Much of the literature is concerned with challenges, and we refer to these, as well as enablers for inclusive education. Ten countries situated in Africa and Asia were selected by Norad for the review: Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Malawi, Mali, Myanmar, Nepal, Niger, Palestine, South Sudan, and Uganda.

The first section of the report briefly traces the concept of inclusive education and its use in Western countries followed by a presentation of alternative perspectives on inclusive education drawing on traditions from the global south. The second section looks at how the international human rights regime has inspired legal and policy development in this field. The third section provides an overview of the approaches and practices that scholars have found in the ten countries being reviewed. We examine organisational models for inclusion of children with disabilities, pedagogical and didactic practices in the classroom, and teacher education for inclusive practices. The fourth section reviews findings from the scholarly literature disaggregated by type of disability. The fifth section lists enablers and challenges for inclusive education identified in the literature. In the final section, we discuss some of the key themes that have emerged from the review, such as i) the gap in implementing the

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[1] UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Sustainable Development Goals. Fact Sheet no. 56. September 2019. UIS/2019/ES/FS/56

relatively robust legal and policy frameworks that have been put in place ii) the critical importance attached to teacher competency and teacher education for inclusion in the reviewed literature, iii) the need for national competence in inclusive education, and iv) the huge challenge that violent conflict, wars and authoritarian regimes represent to achieving the objective of inclusive education. Finally, we present recommendations for furthering the inclusion agenda based on our findings.

1.1   Inclusive education in a western context[2]

Inclusive education developed as a political and ideological alternative to a marginalising school structure in Western European countries and the United States from the mid-1980s. The ideological framework for inclusion was developed by interest group organisations and academics from the United Kingdom and the United States as part of the debate on what a normal life means for people with disabilities. The political goal and framework for inclusive education was adopted by UNESCO through the Salamanca statement in 1994. In 1994 UNESCO had two central focus areas, one focusing on education and a second on special education. As pointed out by Kiuppis (2014) UNESCO had already developed a strategy focusing on "education for all" as part of the general scope of education, and within this framework education was linked to gender, poverty, and class issues. To avoid a conflict with the focus on "education for all", inclusive education was placed under the umbrella of special education. Hence, inclusive education has from the early 1990s been linked to the area of special education. Today the two conceptual frameworks of inclusive education co-exist, one understanding is closely connected to the education of people with sensory, physical or mental impairments and is closely associated with the special education tradition, and a second links inclusive education to the general goal of creating a school for all (Hausstätter and Jahnukainen, 2014).

Inclusive education as part of special education is the predominant understanding of this concept in the academic discussion in central Europe and the United States. The use of inclusion as a concept linked to mainstream education and education for all is favoured mainly by British academics and academics in the Nordic countries. In this latter understanding, people with disabilities are one out of several marginalised groups that inclusion should focus on.

1.2   Inclusion as organisation and as pedagogy

In the literature on inclusive education there are two distinct approaches to inclusion. The first focuses on how inclusive education is organised and the second debates how inclusive education should be transformed into teaching practice (Vislie, 2003).

Much focus has been directed towards the placement of children with disabilities. Historically, in the West, children with disabilities were placed in separate schools or institutions where they were educated and/or lived for the rest of their lives. The philanthropic argument underpinning this model was that children with disabilities had a better life inside these institutions, and that they were shielded from a brutal life in society. This perspective dominated the western strategy until the 1970s when human rights groups advocated for the inclusion of marginalised groups in society (in addition to persons with disabilities, race and gender were in focus). This criticism was central in the development of inclusive education

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[2] In this report, we refer to Western countries or the West to mean countries of the European Union as well as the U.K., Norway, Iceland, Switzerland, the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand

and one result was a strong focus on placement as part of the strive towards inclusion. Teaching of children with disabilities within the mainstream school setting was therefore a central concern when introducing and evaluating inclusive education. Many countries have retained the focus on placement in inclusive education.

The second focus, on teaching practice, developed next. Firstly, an ideological basis for inclusive education had to be established, and several models were proposed. A leading framework in the Nordic countries was to view the classroom as a teaching community driven by democratic processes, participation of all children in the teaching activity and where all children should benefit from the learning process. This, and other similar, ideological frameworks were proposed as the educational platform for classroom activities, a framework that challenges the traditional role of the teacher and the way knowledge and learning is developed among students (Bachmann & Haug, 2006). A few attempts have been made to transform this ideological framework into actual teaching practice, but no complete universal model has been developed.

Within research on inclusive education, there is an ongoing debate about placement. One argument is that placement might reduce quality of education and that the framework for inclusion is society and not the school context, hence, the challenge for education is to create inclusion in society and then placement in mainstream educational settings is less important. Another ongoing debate is on the role of special educational knowledge when teaching children with disabilities. The core of this debate is whether there exists a special education field with a particular body of knowledge that teachers need to have competence on to support the learning of disabled children, or if general educational knowledge is enough to support all learners (Hausstätter, 2023). Despite different understandings of the role of placement and the need for a special knowledge and special didactics, authors agree that inclusion essentially is about fighting exclusion and giving all learners the best possible foundation for development and participation in society.

1.3   Inclusion and the development of special education

The origin of special education as a discipline is influenced by the existence of categories of disabilities. Special education knowledge has historically been linked to categorical descriptions based on the medical tradition, and practice has developed accordingly. The main categories being used are perceptual impairments, intellectual disabilities, and relational and social challenges (i.e. behaviour). These three fields of disabilities have different roots and are linked to different practical solutions, however, after the second world war these three areas were placed under the common field of special education (Rix, 2015).

The area of perceptual impairments is clearly the oldest and most developed field within special education. For more than 500 years, strategies for teaching blind and deaf people have been developed. Schools for people with visual and auditory impairments were established in the eighteenth century, and in most Western countries schools focusing on perceptual impairments was the first sign of a special educational system. Children with relational and social challenges were from the beginning of the nineteenth century organised into child-care institutions, with special training to reduce behavioural challenges and in most cases given vocational education and training before they came of legal age. The third group of people, those with intellectual disabilities, became the focus of education during the nineteenth century, first and foremost directed towards enabling them to behave in similar ways to the majority population by the learning of basic functional skills and in some cases basic academic skills. This area of special education was in the early years related to psychology and the field of abnormal psychology. Historically these three areas have

dominated the development of the special education tradition. Some scholars have described a trajectory in the development of special education within a country, starting from an initial concern with impairments, followed by social challenges and then intellectual disabilities (Hausstätter & Thuen, 2015). This trajectory can be linked to a debate on the use of resources and the moral view or political ideology of how much value to place on different groups of children in a national cost-benefit analysis. In this logic, there is a perception that educating children with intellectual disabilities may yield less benefit, which risks implying that children with intellectual disabilities are considered less important when prioritising support for special education.

Over the past sixty years, a fourth group of children with special education needs has emerged. Due to the increased focus on education in national policy, the category of children with specific learning disabilities evolved. This special education category focuses on problems linked to the ability to learn basic skills and specific school subjects. Skills and subjects often included are reading, writing and mathematics, hence dyslexia and dyscalculia have grown into distinct fields within the domain of special education. The development of these special need education categories has challenged previous understandings in the sense that children who struggle to learn to read, write, and solve mathematical tasks are no longer seen as dumb, lazy, or unwilling to learn.

Regarding inclusive education, the question is how the historically developed knowledge in the field of special education can be applied to support children within an inclusive education framework.

Much of the knowledge evolved in a segregated context, where groups of children within the same category were taught in institutions separate from mainstream society (Richardson & Powell, 2011).

1.4   Inclusion and a school for all

As stated, inclusive education was mainly for pragmatic reasons placed under the umbrella of special education by UNESCO (1994). The ideological goal of inclusive education is to promote quality education for all. From this perspective inclusive education encompasses education for children being excluded due to poverty, race, gender, and class. There is a complex interplay of these factors. Hence, a girl with disability from an economically poor background is less likely to access education than girls from a well-off background having the same disability. This complexity can be even more challenging if we add other factors to the equation.

The link to special education is relevant when inclusive education is discussed as a strategy for a school for all. One question raised is if the development of inclusive education must go through the historical steps starting with special education. In other words, does a country need to develop a special education field of knowledge to support people with disabilities within a context of inclusive education (Hausstätter and Jahnukainen, 2014)? This has been the case in all Western countries, however, there is an argument within the field of inclusive education that countries with no special education support system can "jump" directly to inclusive education. The perspective being that there is no distinct type of education that is "special" and that quality mainstream education is in most cases sufficient for all learners. The focus should be on developing a better regular education. This has been a dominant argument, for example, in the Norwegian discourse on education.

The choice of model has resource implications. To develop and run a system of special schools and teachers with specific knowledge for specific disabilities and learners is a costly

strategy. Hence, in western societies, policy makers have argued for reducing financial support to special education by saying that general education is education for all. This argument has been picked up by less wealthy nations as an efficient way to save money, and perhaps even more importantly to politically present the country as a modern society with an up-to-date school system. In other words, inclusive education is a cheap way of fulfilling the expectations in international conventions (UNESCO, 1994).

As argued in this short description of the global development of inclusive education, the field contains several tensions and challenging questions that have been debated for the last thirty years in western societies. The idea of inclusive education has been developed within the context of western societies and associated with the advancement of education for all and shifting attention to individuals with disabilities. How this goal of education for all is formulated in non-Western countries is, according to

Walton (2018), dependent on the role of education in each country, the idea of democracy, the idea of participation and the fundamental understanding of why people should be educated. This transfer of knowledge and practices is described in terms of first and second countries of inclusive education.

First-generation countries are the countries that played an active part in the development of the Salamanca statement by developing theoretical and practical strategies for inclusive school environments based on the educational culture in their home countries. Second-generation countries of inclusive education are countries that adapted and implemented first countries' understanding of inclusive education into the framework of their academia and the school system. According to Walton, first and second-generation countries of inclusive education have established an academic field of special and inclusive education, and a school system with potential for inclusion. It could be argued that several of the countries that are presented in this report represent a third-generation countries of inclusive education. These are countries with none or limited academic activity on inclusive education and where other challenges (e.g. conflict, war, and poverty) are the priority when education and inclusion is on the agenda. Furthermore, following Walton, ideas of the role of education, democratic practices and ways in which people participate may differ significantly between third generation countries and first and second generation.

The idea of first, second, and third-generation countries raises the question of whether third-generation countries of inclusive education must go through the same developmental path as the first and second generations, or if they can create their own unique, socially, and culturally responsive understanding of inclusive education. Such a developmental path might integrate core principles of inclusive education with local values and traditions that support and enrich contextually based ways of inclusive education.

1.5   Alternatives to a western framework for inclusive education

As presented above, inclusion was part of the debate of education in the West, and a reaction to marginalisation processes in western school systems. This criticism was framed by central values such as participation, democratisation, and equity. These values might have universal elements, however, when they are transformed into educational practice they are constrained by social and cultural traditions. Since the model of inclusive education has been developed by Western countries and models from these countries are used when inclusion is implemented in non-Western countries, convergence of educational cultures may

introduce an element of colonialism into the concept of inclusion (Muthukrishna and Engelbrecht, 2018).

This potential conflict between cultures, tradition, education, and inclusion is discussed in research papers on inclusion on the African continent using the concept of Ubuntu. Ubuntu is one of many names of a philosophy of social interaction (Mutanga, 2022). Several core values describe Ubuntu.

Table 1:   Conceptualisation of Ubuntu

Mbigi (1997)	Survival, solidarity, compassion, respect, dignity.
Murithi (2007)	Equity, fairness, reciprocity, inclusivity, shared destiny
Msila (2008)	Humanness, caring, sharing, respect, compassion, warmth, empathy, giving, commitment, love, care, sympathy, sensitivity, respect patience, consideration, kindness
Mulaudzi et.al. (2009)	Caring, compassion, unity, tolerance, respect, closeness, generosity, genuineness, empathy, hospitality, conscience, conformity, sharing, communitarianism

The philosophy of Ubuntu describes values of human interaction that must be learned, developed, and kept alive in societies. This can be linked to the struggle for collective survival (Sigger et. al. 2010), emphasising that humans are dependent on each other to create a positive environment for families and communities. Looking at table 1, the concepts used to describe Ubuntu are clearly relevant for inclusion. However, there is a fundamental difference between inclusive education and Ubuntu. When inclusive education was introduced in the Salamanca statement (1994) it was presented as a right to education for every individual. Hence, the statement formalises the relationship between the individual and the institutions that provide education (Hausstätter, 2007). Thus, inclusive education is founded on the individual's right to education, and as such, it is not a collective right (Mutanga, 2022; Hausstätter, 2011).

> Inclusive education → individual right to education

> Ubuntu → social responsibility

Today, human relations are a central element of theories in inclusive education and a lot of emphasis is placed on human attitudes, respect, and responsibility. However, there is still a difference between the core concept of Ubuntu and inclusion. In Ubuntu, a core element is the philosophy, whereas in inclusive education, relationships are a core strategy and a means of creating institutions that support individuals facing barriers in the educational system. The risk of colonisation through inclusive education is thus a real challenge that needs to be highlighted when principles of inclusive education are introduced into school systems of countries with a stronger focus on social responsibility.

Muthukrishna and Engelbrecht (2018) describe the challenges of implementing inclusive education in countries where strong social relations are a core value. They argue that a western education framework that places individuals at the core of inclusive education has been adopted on the African continent and ask for a critical approach that incorporates the ideas of Ubuntu. According to them, achieving social justice and human rights should be the main purpose of education, and the teachers and the school system must strengthen their

ethical responsibilities and strategies both within and against the cultural dominant tradition of their home country.

1.6   Critical Inclusion

Walton (2018) points at three critical elements of inclusive education that need to be addressed when the concept is transformed from the western framework – that is the coloniality of knowledge, of power and of being. Coloniality is defined in this context as the patterns of social structures that underpin the conceptual framework that dominates the debate and understanding of a field.

The coloniality of knowledge is based on the dominance of western scholars in the academic environments of the non-Western countries. In education and in special education this is seen through the adaptation of textbooks, theories of learning and programmes for inclusion made in first-generation inclusive education countries and used in second-generation countries without any adaptation of content and framework. This leads to a copy of the knowledgebase of disability categories and educational models being adopted in non-Western countries. Walton (2018) points to the use of inclusion handbooks and the use of western diagnosis as examples of the coloniality of knowledge.

There is a clear relationship between the coloniality of knowledge and the coloniality of power. The power element manifests itself when resources are linked to knowledge. For inclusive education this can be seen when international agencies and donor institutions use the knowledge developed in the first countries of inclusion to support projects financially. As stated by Kalyanpur (2016): "The international standards for inclusive education policy and practice [...] emerge from a predominantly western-centric, resource-rich model of service provision that is often incompatible with the lived realities of people with disabilities in non-Western contexts' (p. 16). The resources needed for implementing a western understanding of inclusion might potentially be high, hence, donor organisations therefore find themselves in the position of colonial power when supporting the development of education for children and youth with disabilities in low-income countries.

Coloniality of being is the third critical element of the implementation of inclusion. In this perspective the problem is framed in the tradition of Freire (1999) and the pedagogy of the oppressed. The original purpose of inclusion was to give groups of people who were marginalised the possibility of participation in society. Looking at the challenges of inclusive education in countries described as third-generation countries of inclusion, there is a reasonable possibility for inclusion to become the next step of colonialism. "Inclusion into what?" is the crucial question when the coloniality of being is raised. Does inclusion refer to inclusion into a school system more like the western school system, or is inclusion part of the definition of the country's own traditions and culture (Pather, 2019)?

The coloniality of knowledge, power and being is the framework presented by Walton (2018) to explore the potential for a critical inclusion framework. By drawing on local cultural elements, e.g. Ubuntu, this approach has, according to her, the possibility to frame the goals of human rights and social justice into an emancipatory strategy for inclusive education. These elements should be addressed:

- Standards of mainstream education: education providing meaningful learning experiences, relevant content, a conducive learning environment, and equitable outcomes for all learners.

- Standards of inclusive education: inclusion and exclusion must be measured according to local educational and cultural standards.
- Standards of categories: local voices must be heard and their experience of living as marginalised people are central in developing an inclusive education strategy.
- Standards of society: structures of power must be analysed, and the role of "normalisation" and "deviance" must be clarified and critically engaged with.

2   Method - search procedure

The review of research on how the policy and practice of inclusive education are understood, referred to and described in the ten selected countries was conducted from December 2023 to February 2024. The review focused on publications published in English after 2010. The selected countries are Malawi, Ethiopia, Nepal, Niger, Uganda, South Sudan, Mali, Myanmar, Palestine, and Afghanistan.

Figure 1:   Map displaying the included countries in red.
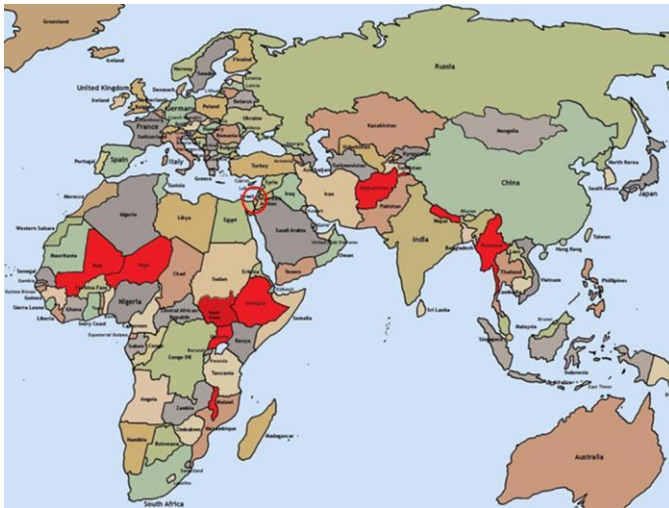
Initially, publications were obtained by searching commonly used scholarly databases for literature, specifically EBSCOhost, Education Source, ERIC, Academic Search Ultimate, Web of Science, World Bank eLibrary, UNESCO digital library, and ProQuest. To target publications of interest, the following keywords were used: "special education" AND "school" AND ("primary education" OR "secondary education" OR "basic education") AND "inclusive education." No design criterion was included. Accordingly, theoretical empirical, quantitative, and qualitative studies have been included to learn from a broad body of publications. The searches resulted in a total of 1,387 publications. From these, 85 duplicates were removed.

A title-abstract review was carried out on the remaining 1 302 publications to determine whether the publications were focusing on understandings and descriptions of the policy and practice of inclusive education. Exclusion criteria were used to eliminate publications not aligned with the focus of the review. For example, publications without any explicit focus on inclusive education, as well as publications focusing on kindergarten, education for adolescents above 18 years, and higher education, were excluded. Examples of excluded publications are studies focusing on the alignment of curriculum standards or examinations, subject teaching in local languages, gender and power, caste, and religion as exclusion mechanisms in the school community, as well as vocational education and training.

The initial title-abstract review resulted in 68 publications for full-text review and 30 publications labelled "for consideration". A second title-abstract review carried out by a fellow theme member resulted in additional 16 publications for full-text review. The final body of publications included full- text review comprises 84 publications, of which 67 represents Malawi, Uganda, Ethiopia, and Nepal. During the full-text review, 5 of the publications were removed. It is common to find a high number of hits when searching scholarly databases due to adjoining keywords and themes. Subsequently irrelevant hits are eliminated after scrutinising the abstracts.

Figure 2:   Overview of the scholarly databases searches
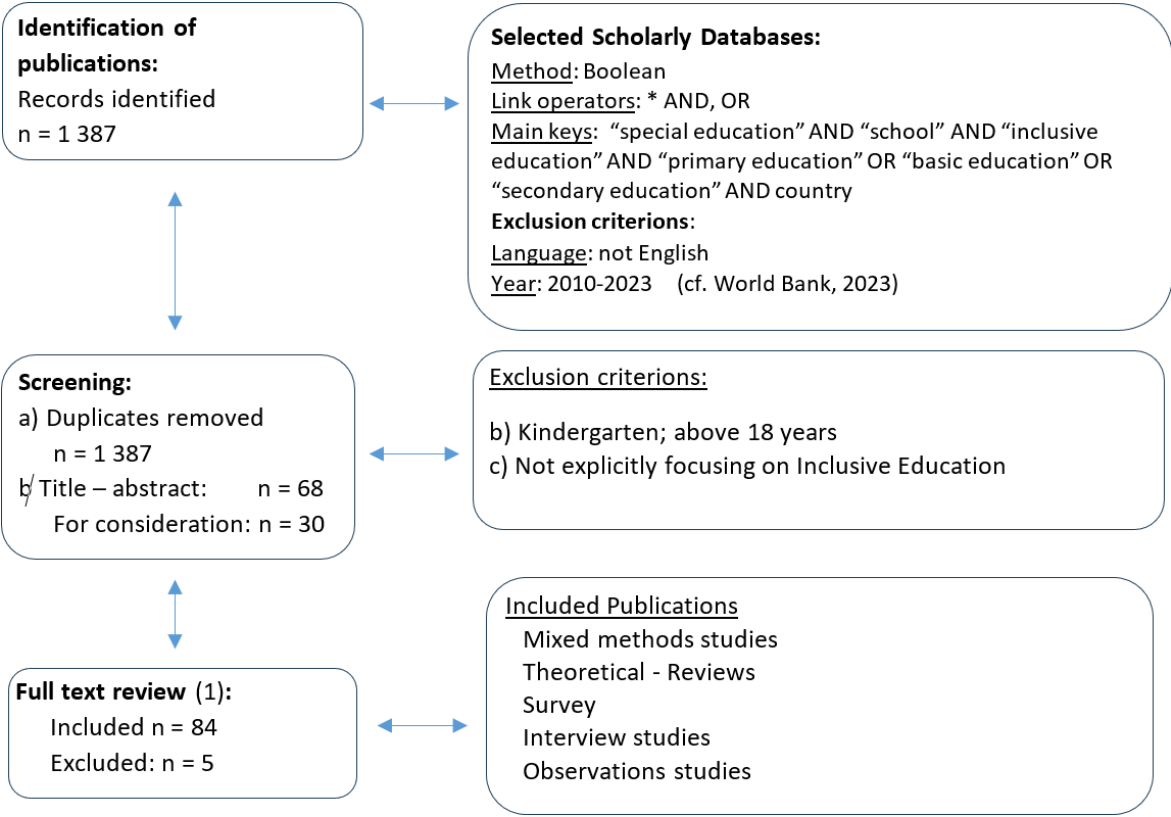
Follow-up searches were carried out to obtain additional information from the countries with fewer than ten publications (Niger, South Sudan, Mali, Myanmar, Palestine, and Afghanistan). The follow- up searches were conducted by "Google Scholar" using the same search terms and inclusion/exclusion criteria as in the scholarly database searches. The aim was to obtain additional international and national publications that were not disseminated through academic channels. The "Google Scholar" searches showed several publications that had been identified in the first scholarly databases searches, in addition to a few new relevant publications.

In total, 1838 publications were identified through the Google Scholar search procedure. After removing duplicates/triplicates from the first scholarly database searches, and scanning relevant abstracts, an additional 18 (Mali 5 + South Sudan 7 + Niger 1 + Myanmar 2, + Palestine 3, + Afghanistan 0) publications from the six countries were included.

A notable feature of the searches is the variation between countries in terms of the number of publications. Some possible hypotheses that might explain the low number of publications in several of the countries are that 1) inclusive education has not been on the political or development agenda to any significant extent, 2) weak research institutions, poor financial resources, and limited focus on inclusive education provide significant challenges for international research and collaboration 3) few foreign education research teams show interest in these countries, and 4) research is published in French (e.g. Mali and Niger).

The six countries with limited scholarly literature on inclusive education, share a history of violent conflict. Furthermore, the Human Development Index (HDI) ranks Afghanistan, Mali, Niger, and South-Sudan among the ten poorest countries (all ranked between 180 and 191). Access to school for girls remains a predominant concern in several of the countries, and

general enrolment in schools is relatively low. Thus, the governments face enormous challenges and their allocation of financial resources for education and research is low. As for Palestine, it is a special case, with UNRWA and private service providers having played a central role in delivery of education, and with the ongoing war, the education system in Gaza has collapsed.

3   Description of the literature

In the following, we concentrate the discussion on the four countries where the literature searches resulted in ten or more articles. The number of articles from each of the countries is as follows: Malawi is on top with 14, Ethiopia 11, Nepal 10, and Uganda 10[3]. The number of articles from each country is similar. This may be an indication that the research interest and the research communities in the four countries have similarities, and perhaps also that the status of the inclusion debate and the progress made in implementation of inclusive education in the four countries have shared characteristics.

The table below provides a description of the literature from these four countries. We have compiled figures on author affiliation, target groups for the research and the research design.

Table 2:   Description of the literature: author affiliation, target groups and data collection method

Country	Author affiliation						Target group				Data collection tools			
	Home country	EU, UK	Asia	Africa	US etc	Nordic	HI*	VI*	Other	All	Survey	Inter-view	Obser-vation	Theo-retical
Ethiopia	12	6	2			5	1	3		8	5	5	1	
Malawi	21	6		11	9		3	3	2	14	3	14	3	1
Nepal	3	6	1		3	1	6	3	1	10	3	5	1	1
Uganda	6	11	3	2	4	1	5	3	2	10	2	3	2	
Total	42	29	6	13	16	7	15	12	5	42	13	27	7	2

Firstly, there is a large variation across the four countries in the number of researchers who are involved in research on inclusive education in their home country. Malawi displays the highest number, with 21 researchers. This high number is likely to reflect the contributions of two institutions, Montfort College, and the Catholic University, in educating both students and researchers in the field of inclusive education over many years. Ethiopia has 12, Uganda six and Nepal three researchers who have contributed to the literature that we reviewed in the first two searches. Many of the national researchers in the four countries have links with universities abroad, either through research collaboration or through having studied abroad. Some of the researchers are national researchers who are based at universities outside of their countries.

Second, most of the articles have treated students with disability as one category and have thus not examined specific categories of students with disability. Authors who have collected data on specific categories have mainly had an interest in visual and hearing impairments. The category "other", includes albinism, cerebral palsy, intellectual disabilities etc. This means that there is little knowledge on specific categories of disability and how they are included, except for students with hearing and visual impairments.

Third, most of the studies have used interviews to collect data. Such data has been collected from students, teachers, parents, school authorities and professionals in the school sector.

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[3] This number was reduced from 54 mentioned above for reasons such as lack of relevance, publications were not accessible due to publication in journals that are not accessible for an international audience etc.

This means that much of the material reflects the views of these different stakeholders in the education sector, and many of the stakeholders have been concerned with pointing to the *challenges* of achieving inclusive education. Others have used surveys to elicit the views of specific groups, mostly teachers, on inclusive education. There are few observational studies, which suggests that information on what goes on in classrooms is based on teachers' views, and not on direct observations by researchers.

Fourth, there are only two theoretical studies. This indicates that there have been few efforts to theoretically grapple with the concept of inclusive education, to challenge the international regime on inclusive education, or to develop nationally based approaches to inclusive education drawing on histories, tradition, and practices in the global south. Critical views of the concept of inclusive education have mainly come from researchers based in South Africa.

Finally, the voices of the children with disabilities are presented through statements made by teachers, parents, politicians, and administrators.

4   Legislation and policies

Every country covered in this review has signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities committing governments to deliver on Education for All and Inclusive Education. Authors who write on this topic agree that the impetus for national legislation, policies and strategies on inclusive education is driven by the international human rights regime. This global legal shift was inspired by the Salamanca Statement 1994, and authors often refer to this statement.

Table 3:   Ratification of CRC and CRPD by the review countries

Countries	Adoption of CRC in 1989 Ratification year	Adoption of CRPD in 2006 Ratification year
Afghanistan	1994	2012
Ethiopia	1991	2010
Malawi	1991	2009
Mali	1990	2008
Myanmar	1991	2011
Nepal	1990	2010
Niger	1990	2008
Palestine	2014	2014
South Sudan	2015	2024
Uganda	1990	2008

*Source: The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR.org) 2024. United Nations Treaty Bodies.

Ratification is only the first step in a process of translating the vision of inclusive education expressed in international conventions into practice. Having ratified international conventions, governments are required to formulate concrete policies and strategies. While some of the ten countries included in this review have developed comprehensive policies, strategies and/or programmes, others have much less explicit frameworks. All the countries have formulated a stand-alone inclusive education programme or strategy, or incorporated inclusion in a general strategy or plan for the education sector. The table below lists national level frameworks for inclusive education.

Table 4:   National level frameworks for inclusive education

Country	Inclusive education/special needs in policy/legislation	Strategies and/or programmes for inclusive education[4]
Afghanistan	2014	2017-2021
Ethiopia	Reference in the Constitution only	2006, 2012, 2016
Malawi	2016	2017
Mali	no	2019-2028
Myanmar	2014	2017
Nepal	2017/2019	2022-2032
Niger	2015	2014-2024
Palestine	2015	2017-2022
South Sudan	2014, 2020	2017-2022
Uganda	no	2017-2020

4.1   Solid national legal and policy frameworks

Authors argue that Malawi (Banks, et al. 2022; de Souza 2022a), Uganda (Musenyente, et al. 2022; Okech, et al. 2021), Ethiopia (Ginja and Chen 2023), Palestine (MacKenzie, et al. 2020), Myanmar (Lall 2023) and Niger (Mandrilly-John 2010) have solid legal and policy frameworks for addressing the needs of children with disabilities. For the other countries, Mali, South Sudan and Afghanistan, the literature reviewed does not specifically address this issue. Disability inclusion in education is furthered not only by legislation and policies in the education sector but also by disability policies that refer to mainstreaming of disability across all sectors. Authors refer to this broader disability agenda in studies from Malawi and Uganda. In the following, we present frameworks developed in Malawi, Uganda, and Palestine as examples of such solid frameworks.

Malawi has drafted and adopted several policies and strategies on education and inclusive education, including the National Education Policy (2016) and the National Strategy on Inclusive Education (2017–2021) to facilitate implementation of inclusive education. The National Education Policy aspires to ensure that "equitable access to quality and relevant special and inclusive secondary education is enhanced". The National Strategy on Inclusive Education indicates that "the goal of the strategy is to ensure that learners with diverse needs have equitable access to quality education in inclusive settings at all levels through the removal of barriers to learning, participation, attendance and achievement" (de Souza 2022b). According to Singal et.al. (2021), the right of children with disabilities to education is promoted in various other official policies and legislative frameworks in Malawi, such as the Childcare, Protection and Justice Act, 2010 and the Disability Act, 2012. The Disability Act, 2012, calls on the national government to "make sure that the schools provide an environment where learners with special needs can access education unhindered" (GoM/UNICEF 2013, 43). The Act defines inclusive education as "a process of addressing and responding to the diverse needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning" cultures and communities and reducing exclusion from and within education" (de

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[4] The list does not provide a complete historic overview but offers an indication of the status of inclusion in recent sector programmes

Souza 2022b). The Act was followed by the National Disability Mainstreaming Strategy and Implementation Plan 2018–2023 (Visagie, et al.

2017). The Malawi Growth and Development Strategy, 2017–2022 acknowledges that people with disabilities are vulnerable and in the need of interventions which can empower them through education, vocational training, employment opportunities, health services, and other enabling resources for participating in society. This strategy included several disability-specific education goals (Banks, et al. 2022).

The Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES) within the Ugandan government developed both a curriculum, which was released in 2007 and is still relevant, as well as the most recent Education and Sports Sector Strategic Plan, which covers the period 2017–2020 (MOES 2017). Both the curriculum and the Sector Strategic Plan determine ways of operations and standards for schools in Uganda to follow and accomplish. These documents closely reflect the models of the UN Convention, setting the bars high for high-quality and inclusive education. Uganda has established their own Department of Special Needs and Inclusive Education as part of the Ministry for Education and Sport. This department is responsible for supporting schools with technical and practical guidelines (Musenyente et al, 2022). Under those guidelines, the department developed operating principles and objectives to meet the set standards, stating: "It is all about changing attitudes, behaviour, teaching methods, curriculum, environment and allocation of human, material, and financial resources to meet the educational needs of all learners' (Musenyente et al, 2022 p. 2). Okech argues that inclusion is the core of the reform agenda for disability development under the National Vision 2040 (2000 – 2040) (Okech, et al. 2021). The National Planning Authority (NPA) has developed National Disability Inclusive Planning Guidelines to provide direction for the planning, budgeting, and monitoring of harmonised disability interventions across all sectors and at all levels (national and local) (Okech, et al. 2021).

The Palestinian National Authority (PNA) has formulated legislative and policy initiatives that demonstrate its commitment to advancing the rights of persons with disabilities. Since being recognized as a non-member state with observer status in the United Nations' General Assembly in 2012,[2] the PNA has signed and ratified several international conventions, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 2014, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) also in 2014. The PNA's 2003 *Basic Law* recognizes the right of all Palestinians to equality before the law and judiciary "without distinction based on race, sex, colour, religion, political views, or disability" (Article 9). Article 22 commits the PNA to providing education services, health and social insurance to "the families of martyrs, prisoners of war, the injured and the disabled"; and Article 23 guarantees that "Every citizen shall have the right to education" (MacKenzie, et al. 2020). In its Inclusive Education Policy 2015, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education states that "Inclusive education is about making fundamental changes to the entire education system, following a principle of universal design. This means making changes to policies, resource allocation, teaching practices, curricula, assessment, infrastructure, and so forth, so that education/schools become flexible and able to adapt to the needs of every learner. The policy follows a "twin-track" approach by seeking to make systemic changes as well as providing support on an individual basis. It acknowledges that both tracks are needed simultaneously for inclusive education to become a reality".

4.2   Regime change and inclusive education

The literature on Nepal, Myanmar and South Sudan shows how new, democratic, and inclusive constitutions and democratic elections have paved the way for inclusive education

legislation and the formulation of new policies. The new, federal, democratic constitution of Nepal of 2015 based on the principle of inclusion of formally marginalised groups and followed by democratic elections in 2016 and 2017, was followed by the first Nepalese policy on inclusive education in 2017. In Myanmar, the more open, inclusive, and democratic Constitution of 2008 and the inauguration of elected governments in 2010 and 2015, was accompanied by Myanmar's ratification of CRPD in 2011 and a new and inclusive policy in 2014 and a strategic plan in 2017. The Constitution of the newly established country of South Sudan of 2011 referring to the principle of inclusive education, laid the basis for a policy on inclusive education that was adopted in 2014. The South Sudanese government underscored the significance of education in building the nation, strongly emphasising free and compulsory primary education (Rohwerder 2018).

The link between regime type and education policy is perhaps most clearly documented in Myanmar (Lall 2023), where the 2021 coup that followed the emerging democratic developments of the previous decade, led to a steep decline in the number of school-going children. Myanmar had developed a comprehensive framework for inclusive education in the decade before the coup in 2021. Myanmar ratified CRPD in 2011 following the adoption of a new Constitution in 2008. The process of educational reform was initiated in 2012, resulting in the National Education Law of 2014, and later the National Education Strategic Plan of 2017 (NESP). Inclusion and equality were emphasised in a significant shift from previous plans. The NESP aimed to "promote access for children with special educational needs" in primary schools and stressed that "efforts will be made to promote a transition from special needs schools to mainstream schools". It aimed to encourage "a number of existing basic education schools to become resource schools for inclusive education" (Maber and Aung 2019). On 1 February 2021, Myanmar experienced its third coup d'état that represented a reintroduction of Burmanisation and elite control of the school system. The new regime's policy stands in direct contrast to the reforms that had been undertaken in the decade prior to the coup. Before the coup, 9.8 million children were in school and after the coup, enrolment officially fell to 5.2 million with actual attendance probably lower (Lall 2023).

In the last five years, Afghanistan, Mali, and Niger have experienced coups by the military in Mali and Niger and a religious take over in Afghanistan. The changes have led to less access for girls to schools in Afghanistan and to closure of schools in Mali in areas taken over by the Jihadists. How the new regimes have addressed inclusive education has not been documented in the scholarly literature.

The discussion above on characteristics of regimes and implications for inclusive education suggests that inclusion in education is facilitated by democratic and inclusive regime transitions. The findings also lend support to the contention that in contexts of poverty, crisis, and conflict that children with disabilities are at the bottom of a list of groups who are excluded from the school system.

4.3   The role of development partners

UN agencies, including UNICEF, UNESCO and UNWRA, and non-governmental organisations such as Sight Savers have collaborated with governments on inclusive education in all the countries reviewed. This engagement has only to a limited extent been documented in the scholarly literature on inclusive education reviewed for this report. The literature refers to extensive donor involvement in the reform processes in Myanmar and details the role of donors in the reform process from 2011 onwards (Lall 2023). The literature also refers to close collaboration between several United Nations agencies and the Palestinian National Authority represented by the Palestinian Ministry of Education in

formulating programmes for inclusive education (MacKenzie, et al. 2020). UNRWA has run eight per cent of schools in the West Bank and 48 per cent in Gaza and adopted a comprehensive policy for inclusive education (MacKenzie, et al. 2020; Rodriguez and Dieker 2018a). Authors have addressed the role of donor agencies in supporting inclusive education policies in Ethiopia, and refer to the engagement of Austria, The United States, the Czech Republic, and others (Siska et al 2020). There is one article from Malawi on a collaborative effort between the Ministry of Education and an international non-governmental organisation, Sight Savers, on the "integration" of children with visual impairment in mainstream primary schools in Malawi, supported by itinerant teachers. This effort became increasingly difficult to sustain due to a lack of government support for the model (Lynch et al 2014).

Authors of a few articles have been critical of donor involvement, arguing that national voices have not been heard to the extent necessary to formulate policies that are sensitive and responsive to national conditions (de Souza 2022).

The report "Costing Equity—the case for disability-responsive education financing" (Global Partnership for Education, 2018) identifies an emerging commitment in donor agencies programmes towards inclusive education, including proposals that have the potential to enhance disability- responsive education. However, the literature indicates a critical need to establish close links between the agencies' initiatives and state policies to establish sustainable inclusive strategies and practices.

5 Inclusive education: approaches and practices

Most of the reviewed publications approach inclusive education with reference to international conventions and policy documents and research within a western context. A few authors have been critical of their countries' legal and policy frameworks and have argued that policy-making processes have not been inclusive of diverse voices or have not considered national knowledge and national approaches to inclusion, such as the African concept of Ubuntu referred to above. As a result, they argue, policies are not sensitive to local realities and do not speak to local concepts and understandings (Ohajunwa 2022).

The challenges described in the research literature on approaches and practices are well placed within the dominant western discussion of inclusive education addressing themes such as placement, policy implementation, teachers' knowledge and attitudes and parents' role. When practical strategies of inclusive education are discussed, the solutions are linked to standard models of special education such as the discussion of mainstream schools versus special schools, the organisation of diagnostic categories, and the focus on a particular set of knowledge to solve the challenges faced when educating people with disabilities. However, the reference to witchcraft and superstition is distinct in the literature from the global south where researchers referring to African countries and Nepal have found that parents and communities sometimes believe disability is due to witchcraft or is a religious punishment. Historically, witchcraft and religion have been part of the western understanding of disability, but this explanatory model plays a very limited role in western societies today.

Discussions are mainly dominated by arguments highlighting ways of offering access to education for children with impairments. No clear distinction is made between special education and inclusive education. Only a few publications discuss teaching strategies in detail, however the general argument is that teaching must be linked to the specific impairment of the child, hence a traditional special education argument. Several articles focus on the role of the teacher when approaches and practices of inclusion are discussed. Very few articles focus on the actual teaching practice, however teachers' knowledge and teachers' attitudes are a central part of the discussion. Most authors argue that there is a lack of knowledge, and teachers harbour negative attitudes (an argument often seen in western literature also) and based on data from teachers, that practices in schools often are not inclusive.

5.1 Four models for inclusive education

Authors agree that persons with sensory disabilities and physical disabilities are easier to include than persons with intellectual disabilities. It is well known that if physical adaptations are made available, for example hearing aids, lighting, braille print, and other learning equipment, children are better able to access the curriculum. Children with intellectual disabilities, on the other hand, require an adapted curriculum and adapted teaching methods. Consequently, the type of disability influences the provision of education for students with disabilities, how it is organised, and the teaching strategies that are used.

The international literature on models of inclusive education debates two central fields: i) the organisation of education, and ii) the need for specific teaching strategies for students with disabilities. Models for organisation and teaching strategies are often part of the same discussion. Four models have been described in the literature reviewed.

The following table provides an overview of the four models:

The mainstream structural model	The integrated school model
- children with disabilities placed in the "regular" or "mainstream classroom". - no support or adaptation - low expectations regarding learning outcomes	- separate classes/groups within the administrative structure of a mainstream school - often targeting a particular impairment (visual or auditory)
The support centre–satellite school model	**The special school model**
- itinerant teachers support satellite schools with expertise, assistive devices and teaching and learning aids - itinerant teacher – schoolteacher collaboration	- separate schools with their own administrative structure - admitting children with a particular impairment and/or with moderate to severe disabilities - no ambition of including the children into mainstream school system

In the mainstream structural model, all children are placed in the same classroom, which is defined as the "regular" or the "mainstream classroom". In most of the literature reviewed, authors find that this model is organised with no extra teaching support. Children are placed in the classroom without any explicit expectation from the teachers and the school of their learning outcomes.

Phiri (2021) reports from Malawi that disabled children are placed in mainstream education settings without any kind of support or adaptation where they are expected to participate and learn alongside everyone else. These practices reflect a simplistic view of inclusive education which, combined with a significant lack in teachers' competency, an unsuitable learning environment and limited potential for teachers to take independent action, produce unfavourable conditions for inclusive education. In some cases, it is reported that children receive some help from peers to understand the teaching. Literature that reports lack of knowledge among teachers as a barrier to inclusion mostly refers to this mainstream structural model of inclusive education.

A similar approach to provide education for children with disabilities in mainstream classrooms is the support or resource centre–satellite school model. The objective of the centres is to support schools and teachers by providing necessary expertise, teaching, and learning equipment, as well as assistive devices such as hearing aids and braille equipment to improve the learning process. One resource centre supports several schools by providing itinerant teachers who are tasked with visiting satellite schools regularly. Lynch et al. (2014) elaborates on this model in Malawi, Gedfie and Negassa (2019) and Siska et al. (2020) document experiences in Ethiopia while Maber and Aung (2019) discuss a similar approach used in Myanmar. Maber and Aung also discuss how special schools are transformed into resource schools that are also being used for teacher education and for in-service training. For Ethiopia, Gedfie and Negassa (2019) argue that this model provides local teachers with access to educational resources, support for classroom adaptations, and enhances teachers' competencies through in-service training that supports their teaching and improves students' learning outcomes. A mixed-methods evaluation of the "Inclusive Education Resource Centre" (IERC) model in three major Ethiopian regions indicated that the IERC model significantly contributed to achieving national goals in inclusive education and improved equity and access to education in general (Siska et al., 2020). One highlighted advantage was the impact on teachers' attitudes and roles in the classroom. The model promotes a shift in focus from teachers viewing the class as a homogeneous unit to recognizing that pupils have "different abilities and needs". Additionally, collaboration with itinerant teachers

influenced teaching in the classroom by shifting teacher behaviour from "humiliating students" to "providing support".

One challenge with the resource centre model and itinerant teachers serving multiple schools, is the practical difficulty of commuting between the resource centre and the schools. Another challenge is to ensure active and sustained involvement of local government members and to manage the high turnover of school administrators to ensure continuous support for the schools. Additionally, concerns are raised regarding the costs of teaching and learning materials, along with costs of assistive devices. The teachers report being worried about using resource materials due to their potential financial responsibility for loss or damage. The scarcity of qualified human resources is also a factor that significantly influences the efficiency of the resource centre model in addressing the needs of disabled learners in regular schools (Gedfie and Negassa, 2019).

A third model for ensuring access to education for children with special needs is the organisation of separate classes or groups within the administrative and often also the physical structure of a mainstream school, the integrated school model. These integrated groups or classes often target a particular impairment such as visual or auditory impairments. The groups are organised with teachers and resources that are specifically designed to support a particular group of children. In some cases, the goal is that children from these groups and classes will be able to participate in some of the general school activities in the mainstream school. In Nepal, resource school classes have been set up to provide students with the required skills to transition fully to regular classrooms after some time.

The last type of organisational model is the special school model. These schools have their own administrative structure and there is no clear ambition of including children from these schools into the mainstream school system. They admit moderate to severe disability groups. The development and organisation of the special schools are closely linked to the historical focus on special education in the respective country. Established schools are schools for blind, deaf, and mentally disabled children.

Models one, two and three require changes to teaching practices in ordinary classrooms. Such changes could result in tension between an inclusive education teaching culture and the traditional teaching culture. This is because the literature on inclusive education places emphasis on the use of a student- centred teaching strategy whereas a teacher centred teaching strategy has been more common traditionally. The idea of adaptation of teaching methods to individual learners - a central tenet of inclusive education - may also require teachers to spend more time on teaching some learners for them to achieve their potential. This method stands in contrast to the idea of standardised teaching for all that is commonly practised in the traditional model.

Some authors have compared the strengths of the different models informed by the experiences and viewpoints of various stakeholders within the education system. There are, however, no systematic comparisons in the literature reviewed on how these models compare on variables such as student satisfaction, drop out, learning outcomes etc.

5.2   Classroom strategies and practices

Classroom strategies and practices can be divided into two broad categories: pedagogical strategies and didactics. Moreover, didactic strategies can be further divided into the didactics of teaching and the didactics of learning materials and technology. In the following, such strategies and practices will be elaborated. There is a scarcity of literature on this topic in the countries reviewed.

5.2.1 Pedagogical strategies

Pedagogical strategies in an inclusive classroom are based on a belief in the transformability of the students' capacity to learn. This belief challenges ideas regarding the child's learning capacity as fixed or predetermined and asserts that learning and development can be influenced by the teacher's facilitation and actions. Kurtz and Shepherd (2011) argue for the importance of a common understanding of the services to be provided to children with special needs. Their ethnographic study at Opportunity House, a residential facility for children with special needs in Ethiopia, indicates that staff and teachers were eager to try new strategies and ideas for engaging and interacting with children who had moderate to severe disabilities. The aim was to empower the children regardless of ethnic or cultural background or disability. A similar study was done by Lous (2012). Her field report emphasises the importance of in-service support, co-teaching, and on-the-job training. Hui et al. (2018) argue for including the voices of children in the process of teaching and learning. The children's perspectives must be acknowledged, respected, and considered in the formulation of pedagogical strategies to build inclusive learning environments. However, traditional thinking is often characterised by a "bell-curve" mentality, labelling some children as "not suitable for education" and thereby creating barriers to more dynamic views on ability.

While some scholars argue that the students' voice and perspectives are crucial, others stress the importance of fostering teachers' confidence and their ability to educate students with special needs. Accordingly, teachers must be prepared to support the learning needs of any student. To support these assumptions, teacher collaboration is a central element. Timberly and Shepherd (2011) emphasise the importance of collaboration in their study of the Opportunity House Centre in Ethiopia. Gedfie and Negassa (2018) analysed the resource centre model with satellite schools in Ethiopia and found that itinerant teachers collaborate by organising dialogues, meetings and workshops for teachers, principals, supervisors, and local stakeholders on topics like special needs/inclusive education, method of teaching, assessment, and other issues. Thus, authors argue that collaboration among stakeholders at all levels is vital for the development of appropriate and sustainable policies and practices on inclusive education (Adugna, Ghahari, Merkley & Rent, 2022).

Generally, teachers' competence and understanding of the role of being an inclusive teacher are essential elements in fostering a fruitful learning environment in an inclusive classroom. Teaching strategies such as student collaboration, peer learning, ongoing evaluations of students' learning and development, responsive teaching, and students' choice of activities can further cultivate an inclusive classroom. These strategies can be implemented through whole-classroom activities, group, pair, and individual learning, based on a clear structure, a predictable schedule, and routines. Fellowship is developed through whole-class activities like singing songs, storytelling, dancing, music, and drama. Group, pair, and individual learning are core strategies for individual growth and to develop knowledge. Additional elements promoting children's autonomy and responsibility include positive feedback, compliments, smiles, gestures, and applause. These primary teaching strategies, methods, and elements aim to apply inclusive didactics that cater to individual needs within the classroom, ensuring that no learner is excluded.

A few of the reviewed articles addressed classroom practices. Peer-tutoring is a strategy whereby students are grouped and tutor each other. Okech et al. (2021) explored its use in Uganda. The approach not only benefits the students in need of assistance but also enhances the learning of the peer tutor, by gaining a deeper understanding of the subject matter. The approach underscores the importance of teachers who reflect on the challenges and possibilities within the specific situation at hand. A case study from Myanmar shows that

it is possible to implement inclusive practices where the teachers address the students' needs with life-skills courses, supplementary study time, peer support, and by fostering a safe learning environment (Tonegawa, 2022).

5.2.2   Didactics of teaching, learning materials and technology.

Another category is the didactics of teaching, communication, and the utilisation of learning materials and technology. These approaches further challenge the notion that a child's learning capacity is fixed. Blind children, deaf and hearing-impaired children have communication needs that often exceed the teacher's competency. To address such challenges, it is essential to provide the students, the teacher, their families, and the communities with "communication tools" and learning aids like braille books, sign language books, slate and stylus, white cane, adapted learning kits, talking calculators, and other materials that support mobility and facilitate learning (Gedfie & Negassa, 2019; Temesgen 2021).

Additionally, minor adjustments regarding teaching strategies can be made by any subject teacher. For example, using the blackboard to communicate tasks and instructions, and encouraging peer learning by student assistants. Such minor adjustments can be followed by specialised assistants and interpreters who convert the students' work into written forms for further feedback from the teacher.

The technologies of computers, smart phones, and printers offer new possibilities for teaching and learning. The motivational aspect of the technology may facilitate active teaching strategies where the teacher and students can explore the possibilities of technologies in real-life situations. Schiemer and Proyer (2013) argue that small technologies are a crucial factor. From this perspective, ICTs are of significant interest for people with disabilities. Reports and observations show that students with disabilities find innovative ways to use the technology. For example, blind students can access printed text by scanning texts using a text-to-speech app. Smartphone technology, known for its user-friendly nature, opens new possibilities for teaching and learning. Nevertheless, problems arise because appropriate tools and well-educated staff are rare. Incorporating the didactics of smartphone technology into teacher education programmes could help to address this issue.

5.3   Teacher education for inclusive education: pre-service and in-service

The idea of inclusive education is to transform schools and classrooms to ensure that every child experience fellowship and learning for life. An essential factor in realising this ambition is the teacher and the knowledge, attitudes, and competency the teacher brings into the classroom. Research from Malawi and Ethiopia indicate that teachers, in general, are in favour of inclusive practices. However, they express a need for knowledge and qualifications in special education/inclusive education to address the challenges involved (Chitiyo et al., 2019; Zegeye, 2022). More generally, drawing on teachers' reflections on their own situation reported in the publications, teachers do not feel equipped to teach students with disabilities due to large classes and cohorts, lack of teaching aids and lack of training in inclusive pedagogy. Consequently, the translation of regulations and strategies into practice varies significantly among the countries reviewed. Nevertheless, across the ten countries, only a limited number of schools can provide an adapted, accessible, and safe learning environment for children with special needs.

Adding to the urgency, publications focusing on Mali and South Sudan highlight a higher prevalence of moderate and severe disabilities, and this situation is likely to be more prevalent in African low-income countries compared to other regions. Visual and hearing impairments are common, and there is a widespread lack of basic education among blind and deaf individuals (Lodou & Oladele, 2018; Samia et al., 2022). Therefore, enhancing teachers' competence and providing appropriate instruction for a variety of disabled children is of vital importance.

Much attention is paid to the importance of teacher competence, and building the competence of teachers is a recommendation that echoes throughout the reviewed articles. A key concern is whether national regulations and strategies adequately prepare mainstream teachers to educate learners with disabilities alongside their peers. Some countries, such as Malawi and Ethiopia, have a National Education Policy that includes a Strategy on Inclusive Education, supported by a strategy for Teacher Training (Banks et al., 2022; Ethiopia Ministry of Education, 2016; Malawi Ministry of Education Science and Technology, 2019; Zegeye, 2022). The government of Malawi has required since 2009 that all teacher training institutions include a special education course in their pre- service teacher training programme (Chitiyo, Odongo et al. 2015). Malawi has a relatively long tradition of teacher training in special needs started by Montfort Special Needs Education College in 1968, with an initial programme in hearing and visual impairment followed by learning difficulties in 1996. Alongside Montfort, the Catholic University also offers specialised programmes in SNE. Both institutions have a cross-categorical curriulum for the first years before students go on to specialise (Chitiyo, Odongo et al. 2015). Yet, one study of 12 schools in Malawi indicated that teacher preparation for inclusive education in colleges and universities was inadequate and/or theoretical, and with no hands-on experience. Nine out of ten teachers argued there was no established system for identifying learners' needs. Most of the teachers argued they did not have adequate knowledge in inclusive education, and those who had some knowledge said they did not have the specific skills required to adapt their teaching to specific needs, except for some teachers who had worked closely with the Special Needs Education colleges (MacJessie-Mbew, Ndala et al. 2023). In 2013, Uganda implemented a Revised Primary Teacher Education Curriculum as part of an ambitious effort to advance the implementation of inclusive education (Nantongo, 2019). Other countries, like Palestine, have a centralised educational system and teacher training programme alongside a growing private education sector supported by various entities such as charities, religious groups, private enterprises, and individuals (Rodriguez & Dieker, 2018).

The journey from policy to practice is often hindered by a lack of government will and funding for inclusive strategies and practices, as well as by prejudices, misconceptions, and undesirable attitudes at all levels from the state to the classroom, and in society – all challenges with consequences for teacher education and training. The problem is made worse by a shortage of qualified teachers in general education (Department of Education of South Sudan, 2023; UNESCO, 2022).

5.4   Accessibility

Ensuring access to school for every child has been driving the international education agenda and has led to strong progress in enrolment globally. In this section, we look at access to school in a physical sense. Such accessibility has two main concerns regarding children with disabilities: 1) travel to school and 2) while at school, access to classrooms, playgrounds, water, and toilet facilities. Most of the reviewed articles include concerns about

physical access as an explicit barrier to children with disabilities being able to attend school. Authors also argue that existing school infrastructure is inadequate.

Students must often travel far to school, especially in rural areas. There may be no roads, roads may be inaccessible due to rains or violent conflict, or there may be no public transport. Travel challenges were highlighted in Ethiopia, Myanmar, Mali, and South Sudan but are relevant to remote and rural areas in all the countries reviewed. Studies from South Sudan and Mali raised the issue of unsafe roads due to violent conflicts (Rohwerder 2018, Loudou and Oladele 2018, Jolley 2018). One study from Ntcheu in Malawi showed that all children had to walk to school (Banks et al 2022). Under such conditions, children with disabilities experience difficulties (Ginja and Chen 2023, Rohwerder 2018, Jolley et al 2018, Loudou and Oladele 2018, Jolley 2018). Some children with disabilities may need to be accompanied by school friends or guardians while travelling to school. One study from Myanmar that asked children themselves what they worry about, showed they were concerned about examinations, travel to school and using the toilets (Waite 2015).

The importance of school infrastructure adapted to the needs of children with disabilities is a crucial issue highlighted in the literature. Studies show that infrastructure tends to be inadequate in all the countries reviewed (Hummel and Engelbrecht 2018, Temesgen 2018 and 2019, Rohwerder 2018, Taptue 2020). This applies specifically to water and sanitation facilities. Authors who have written on Malawi and Uganda have found that children with disabilities may be burdened or even prevented from attending school when toilets are not clean or not private. Parents and teachers tended to discourage children with disabilities from attending school due to poor sanitary facilities (Erhard, et al. 2013). School infrastructure may be relatively low cost, but for example WASH infrastructure maintenance requires resources that may not be available. The construction of ramps to make schools accessible for wheelchair users is another focus area in many schools. Ramps are low cost and visible and a relatively simple way of demonstrating inclusiveness.

Another aspect regarding school infrastructure is national or regional conflicts. In countries experiencing violent conflicts, schools may be destroyed, damaged, closed or taken over by military forces, and temporary school facilities that serve as replacements may be more inaccessible to students with disabilities compared to other children.

5.5   Gender differences

Despite the strong focus on girls' school enrolment and attendance in the literature on education, there are no articles in this review that systematically examine gender differences in inclusive education.

Several of the articles suggest that girls with disabilities are less likely to attend school compared with boys but without substantiating this argument by referring to statistics. However, based on previous research, Rohwerder (2018) when writing about South Sudan argues that girls with disabilities are less likely to access education than their peers without disabilities as well as boys with disabilities. Girls in general are subjected to sexual violence and harassment, and anecdotal evidence suggest that girls with disabilities may be more exposed compared with boys. A study from Myanmar showed that girls themselves reported that they fear harassment on their way to school (Maber and Aoung, 2019). Hui et al. (2018) find that girls with disabilities experience harassment of a different kind compared with boys. In some cases, girls are seen as "teachers' brides" and are at risk of sexual abuse or met with negative societal attitudes regarding their educational potential. Boys, on the other hand, are vulnerable to various kinds of corporal punishment. All girls experience challenges when

menstruating and development partners have responded to this need by funding suitable facilities. Menstruation adds to the sanitary challenges that girls with disabilities experience, and in the same way as other girls, they may decide to remain at home during their monthly period.

5.6   Groups of disabilities

So far, we have not paid attention to differences across categories of disabilities. The articles analysed are divided into two groups, articles that approach the topic of inclusive education from a general ideological and practical point, linking inclusion to policy development, challenges in the local environment etc. The second approach found are articles that discuss the goal of inclusive education from a categorical perspective, i.e. from a group of disabled students. Few articles target specific categories of disability, but understanding disability from the perspective of disability categories is common to all countries when challenges of inclusive education are discussed.

The groups of disabilities described in the literature do not differ from the West-European categorical organisation. As presented above, there are four major groups of disabilities in the western discourse. Out of these four, the category that has received the most attention in the literature reviewed for this study is children with perceptual impairments - mainly children with visual or auditory impairments. They form a large group of children in need of special support and provide challenges for inclusive education. Firstly, in some countries, many are taught in an established special school system, and secondly, these groups clearly need teachers with specific knowledge of communication (e.g. braille and sign language). In light of the need for special knowledge to teach these students, the question is if they are better off in a special school system. The focus on specific learning environments for people with visual and auditory disabilities differs from the dominant discourse in the west, where these groups have a relatively good support system underpinned by an extensive knowledge base due to a very long history of research and support.

The second group found in this review is the group of intellectually disabled. They are mentioned in a more general discussion on attitudes to inclusive education and the question posed is if this group needs an education at all. The usefulness of a special school system directed towards these groups is suggested. However, the body of literature about this group is limited.

The last two groups, children with relational and social challenges and specific learning disabilities have not been addressed in the reviewed literature. One explanation might be that the social environment of education differs greatly between Western countries and the nations investigated, and secondly that the focus on specific learning disabilities is relatively new and partly less known and recognised.

Despite a very limited focus on specific groups of disabilities, it is possible to present a few findings related to the use of categories:

- The western understanding of disability categories dominates in this literature. The main categories used are blind, deaf, hard of hearing, and physical and intellectual disabilities. Despite variations in cultural and social contexts, these categories remain the focal points of the discussions.
- There is a clear emphasis on disabilities that are "visible". These disabilities create social challenges both within and outside the school context.

- Disability tends to be described and analysed as a disabled person's only identity, and there is hardly any discussion on how disability intersects and interacts with other identities, such as gender, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status and so forth.

Most literature focusing on disability groups consider the knowledge of teachers related to a particular group. Some focus is directed towards the parents' role. Less emphasis is on social roles, relationships with peers and the future opportunities of these children. However, there are examples of how peers can contribute to the teaching experience and future roles in the labour market.

6 Enablers and challenges

While most authors refer to challenges in inclusive education, few authors refer to enabling factors.

6.1 Enablers for inclusive education

There is little focus on enabling factors in the literature on inclusive education. However, authors directly and indirectly point to inclusive policies and plans, teachers' attitudes, motivation and competence, and technology as factors that enable inclusive education. More generally speaking, a regular education system that allows teachers to adapt teaching methods to the needs of each child is more conducive to inclusive education compared with systems that are rigid, standardised and exam focused.

Inclusive education policies serve as enablers for inclusion in the education sector. For example, in the case of Uganda, Bose and Heymann (2020) argue that the clearly stated political goal of inclusion has facilitated the process of inclusion. If stakeholders see the meaning of and the benefits of inclusive education, they may become supporters. Hui et al.'s (2018) in a review of inclusive education for children in West and East Africa argue that the benefits of inclusive education are far-reaching. Inclusive education is a cost-effective means of building an inclusive society and of achieving education for all by enabling the learners to participate and engage in school. Inclusive education also facilitates the development of cognitive, social, and physical motor skills among children with disabilities, while helping their peers appreciate and be inclusive of differences.

The Education Sector Plans (ESPs) play a vital role in the countries' decision-making and policy, and when effective, they may contribute to inclusive education. For instance, Nepal aims to increase enrolment by enhancing school accessibility through ramp construction, addressing staffing needs, providing teacher training, and implementing cross-sectoral interventions. Similarly, Mali emphasises actions like constructing accessible schools and recruiting teachers. Other countries mention disability in their ESPs without any explicit strategy or plan regarding inclusive education. For example, Uganda prioritises improving the quality of learning and teacher education but lacks comprehensive strategies for enhancing educational access, or system strengthening.

Teachers may contribute to inclusion, or they may ignore or discriminate against children with disabilities. Several studies documented positive attitudes and interests of teachers as one enabling factor, for example in Uganda (Ojok and Wormnæs 2013, Okech et al 2021), Malawi (Chitiyo et al 2019) and Palestine (Rodriguez and Dieker 2018). One study from Malawi demonstrated the positive impact of having itinerant teachers in the classroom to support children with albinism. The presence of the specialist trained teacher at the school had a positive impact on the regular teachers who had received pre-service training in special needs education because they felt more confident being able to lean on the itinerant teachers (Lynch 2014).

Research also showed that students supporting each other by peer tutoring was important in creating an inclusive school environment. According to MacJessie-Mbew et al, the most common way to keep students with special needs safe was to allocate fellow students to look after them or to encourage them to walk in groups (MacJessie-Mbew et al 2023). Several authors argue that positive attitudes from peers are important enablers for children to learn in school (Waite 2015, Banks, Hunt et al. 2022, MacJessie-Mbew, Ndala et al. 2023).

Authors argue that parents' attitudes and awareness are crucial factors that explain the opportunities that children with disabilities have. Studies from Nepal highlight the critical role of parents in making the decision on sending their child with disabilities to school (Lamichane 2012 and 2017, Dawadi 2022). Parents or care givers make the decision on whether to send their child to school by weighing factors such as the safety of their child on their way to school and at school, the school's facilities, the cost of sending their child to school set against the benefits, future job prospects, taboos involved in having a child with disability, community tradition and practices and so forth. Parents have in some countries, such as in Malawi, organised themselves to advocate for the rights of children with disabilities to attend school. However, no articles in this review specifically examine the role of parents' organisations in encouraging or facilitating inclusion.

In terms of technology, students with disabilities often find ways to utilise new technology independently. For example, field observations report how blind students gained access to printed text by scanning texts using a text-to-speech app. The use of easily accessible technology (smartphones) in Nepal is reported by Sankhi and Sandnes (2022) and they point to the fact that this type of technology is easy to use and can give good support to teaching. However, most teachers have no or limited knowledge of how to use this technology as teaching aids, so students are left to rely on peer support to learn how to use it. One way of overcoming the challenge of teachers' technological limitation is to bring the use of easily accessible technology into teacher education as a means of support to inclusive teaching strategies.

Finally, authors have noted that some cultures are characterised by inclusion. Examples are the centrality of the concept of inclusion in Nepali culture and the concept of Ubuntu in African culture.

6.2   Challenges to inclusive education

Most of the literature pays much attention to addressing the barriers and challenges involved in achieving inclusive education. In the following, some of the highlighted factors are summarised. We find these factors across country contexts.

The school system

Several of the authors whose articles have been included in this review, suggest that features of the school system work against inclusion of children with disabilities. So, even if children with disabilities do attend school, the school system is not designed to adapt teaching to the needs of each individual child. This idea has been most clearly expressed in literature on inclusive education in Myanmar.

Maber and Young argue that the Myanmar state education system was for decades characterised by an authoritarian teaching culture and rote learning. The emphasis in classrooms was therefore largely on memorization and replication without encouraging spaces for questioning or critical inquiry. Dense timetabling oriented towards examinations and traditional structures of respect for teachers and elders further contributed to entrenching these modes of pedagogy, leaving students little opportunity to ask questions or to admit to having difficulties (Maber and Aung 2019). Similar practices are reported from other countries included in this review. Another issue that has been referred to in several countries, including Ethiopia, Palestine and Uganda is characteristics of the curriculum. In Ethiopia, authors argue that the inflexibility of the curriculum hinders inclusion, as opposed to teachers having the possibility of adapting curriculum to learners (Ginja and Chen 2023 and Temesgen 2018 and 2021). For Palestine, it has been argued that the curriculum is too

demanding and inflexible (Ashbee and Guldberg 2018; Rodriguez and Dieker 2018b). In the case of Uganda, it is argued that the theoretical nature of the curricula may dissuade children with disabilities (Okech, et al. 2021), and that curricula are too demanding and not suited for children with disabilities (Nantongo 2019). Authors further argue that the exam orientation of the education system poses a challenge to the implementation of inclusive education (Nantongo 2019; Okech, et al. 2021). Waite argued with reference to Myanmar that the centralised nature of the curriculum and the education system did not allow schools to make modifications based on children's needs. This presented difficulties particularly as children progressed towards the national examinations and matriculation (Waite 2015).

Knowledge, attitudes, and superstition

Communities, governments, and education professionals often display negative, discriminatory, or ignorant attitudes that prevent mobilisation of human and financial resources for students with disabilities. Shame, stigma, and prejudice can force families to keep their disabled children at home, and such attitudes were reported in the literature for all the countries reviewed. Practices such as concealing or hiding children with disabilities were reported from several countries. Communities in extreme cases believe that disability is a bad omen or is due to witchcraft.

Safety concerns

Concerns among parents about the safety of children with disabilities while travelling to and from school, as well as while at school, lead to hesitation when it comes to sending their children to school (Hui et al., 2018, Srinivasan et al 2023, Banks et al 2022). Children with disabilities, in particular girls, are according to research from several of the countries in this review vulnerable to violence and sexual abuse. In a study from Myanmar, the authors found that girls were worried about sexual violence and harassment on the way to school (Maber and Aung 2019). Parents in a study from Malawi reported safety concern as a reason for not sending their children to school, and this was especially a concern when the child suffered severe disabilities (Banke et al 2022). For South Sudan, Lodou and Oladele argue that very few schools provide a safe and accessible learning environment (Loudou and Oladele 2018).

Referring to a meta study published in the Lancet in 2012, Somani et al find that children with disabilities are four times more likely to experience violence compared with non-disabled children (Somani, Corboz et al. 2021). The same study in the Lancet showed that girls were more at risk of violence compared with boys. As for violence taking place at school, studies show that children with disabilities are at risk of bullying, discrimination, and violence by peers (Somani, Corboz et al. 2021, Banks, Hunt et al. 2022)). Data from Afghanistan and Pakistan documented that children with disabilities were not at a higher risk of corporal punishment administered by school staff compared with non-disabled children. Yet, a study from Uganda showed that children with disabilities were more likely to experience violence and injury by school staff (Somani, Corboz et al. 2021).

Weak coordination

Education for children with disabilities requires coordination across government sectors, such as health and education, and coordination between government sectors, civil society organisations and parents (GPE 2018). For example, Šiška et al. (2020) argue that the poor progress in supporting children with disabilities are, among other issues, due the absence of a clear structure for coordination and administration of special and inclusive education and the absence of adequate financing. In the case of Palestine, the lack of a coherent and integrated policy across institutions led to weaknesses such as lack of equity with respect to funding and services across the country and services being limited to children with mild

disabilities (MacKenzie et al 2020). Linked with weak coordination is a lack of collaboration between the health and the education sector, and for example in Palestine, the lack of diagnostic practices was referred to as pervasive (Ashbee and Guldberg 2018).

Lack of funding for inclusive education

Lack of funding for inclusive education in national and local school budgets is a barrier that often is referred to indirectly under the general heading of lack of resources earmarked for inclusive education (Lynch, Lund and Massah 2014). Lack of funding may be associated with the above points on lack of knowledge and negative attitudes among decision-makers in the political system.

Non-governmental initiatives: small scale and unsustainable

The predominant provision of education services for children with disabilities in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia are provided by non-governmental organisations and disabled people's organisations (GPE 2018). These initiatives usually focus on segregated programmes and special education institutions, not integrated in the national education policies and curricula. The lack of national alignment systematically results in isolated efforts, providing costly, high-quality education services on a small and unsustainable scale.

Teacher training colleges lack capacity and training is inadequate

The challenge of adequate teacher education has been treated in some detail in the above, and it has been referred to in most of the articles reviewed. There is a general lack of trained teachers in several of the countries reviewed and there is a significant gap of trained teachers in special needs education and inclusive education in all the countries reviewed. The lack of teachers is acute in a new and conflict affected state, such as South Sudan (Loudou and Oladele 2018). Several studies also show that teachers differentiate among children with disabilities. For example, in a study from Uganda it is argued that further difficulties arise when a disability is severe, there is the presence of cognitive delay, or the child's physical appearance is different from other children. It appears that teachers prefer to include children with physical rather than cognitive disabilities, since children with physical impairment most often require minor changes in classroom practice (Okech, et al. 2021).

High student–teacher ratio in schools

Often there are few teachers with limited competence and large student cohorts with classes of 60 to 200 students. In a study from Malawi, teachers in mainstream schools in Ntcheu in Malawi reported class sizes of between 100 and 186 students (Banks et al 2022). In addition, there was a high turnover of teachers.

Infrastructure, school facilities, assistive devices, and learning material

Schools lack the basic infrastructure, such as accessible toilets and water taps, ramps, and other devices that facilitate access and learning for students with disabilities, such as glasses, hearing aids, braille books. Such challenges were reported from all the reviewed countries. Students with disabilities need support or transport to travel to school, and lack of such may prevent them from attending school.

7 Discussion

Worldwide, nations experience enormous challenges when setting out to translate international declarations and commitments into practice. Significant efforts are still required to address the barriers to accessing quality education and ensure equitable educational opportunities for all children. Below we present issues that we consider crucial to the debate on inclusive education going forward.

7.1 From policies to practices

The main challenge highlighted by the body of publications in this review lies in the transition from policy to practical implementation, navigating the tension between global standards and local contexts. It is essential to bear in mind that several of the countries included in the review confront complex and multifaceted realities, such as post-colonial structures, oppression, extreme poverty and inequality, authoritarian rule, conflicts, migration, and the repercussions of climate change. These issues are extensively problematized in the reviewed literature. This challenge is not surprising, as the international frameworks on inclusive education, rooted in human rights, reflect values, theoretical positions, and ideals that are difficult to achieve under the most favourable of circumstances. Importing inclusive education standards and discourses into national and local contexts without consideration of the cultures and specific needs of these contexts, has resulted in a persistent focus on access to (placement in) mainstream schools. This approach often overlooks the broader aspects of inclusive education that addresses systemic inequalities, promotes diversity, and adapts educational practices to accommodate a wide range of learners with diverse needs and backgrounds. The result is an incomplete implementation of inclusive education that does not address the complex educational challenges faced by several countries. Therefore, it is crucial to adopt inclusive education programmes and strategies that are culturally responsive and contextually relevant, and that provide marginalised groups with equitable, quality education. It is necessary to ensure a balance between local culture and universal values of human rights and social justice. Inclusive education was a response to cultures of marginalisation and exclusion of children with disabilities in the West. Cultural elements of exclusion as well as inclusion are present in countries in the global south, and this fact should be considered in the process of local adaptation of inclusion. Inclusive education strategies need to be adapted to local realities while aligning with global principles of human rights and inclusion. Collaboration between international stakeholders and local actors is essential to navigate these complexities and to advance the agenda of inclusive education on a global scale.

7.2 Defining approaches to inclusive education

Critical issues in defining approaches to education are i) the quality of teaching, ii) the organisation of inclusive education, iii) the purpose of education, the educational objectives and curriculum content, for children with disabilities.

Defining the quality of teaching is important. The educational reforms in several of the reviewed African countries in the late 1990s, aiming for "education for all", were carried out by hiring unqualified teachers and providing them with short in-service courses to expand access to education for all children. However, decades after the reforms, children's achievements remain unchanged, especially for marginalised groups and for children with special needs. The publications reviewed indicate limited teacher competency to meet

disabled children's needs and few opportunities for the teachers to reflect on and become more inclusive in their practices. This impacts children who need the most support and facilitation. While policies encourage inclusion (i.e. placement) of children with disabilities in mainstream education, there has been little focus on the nature of inclusion and on how to prepare the teachers to meet the challenges. The lack of attention to the core processes of learning, especially in children with disabilities, is reflected in several of the reviewed countries' educational reforms, often neglecting the intricate relationship that education embraces: the relations between the teacher, the environment, the subject matter, and the learner (Schwab, 1983).

The debate on inclusive education is characterised by a spectrum of positions which lie on a continuum, from viewing inclusive education as a radical social project to positions expressing a commitment to inclusion "as far as possible" (Norwich, 2014). At one end of the continuum, inclusive education requires fundamental change to enable all children to be educated in mainstream schools where teachers should be flexible and able to respond to differences. This perspective is closely linked to the social project perspective, addressing all forms of exclusion (Unesco/IBE, 1994). However, schools educating all children "under the same roof" has yielded not only positive social outcomes but also exclusionary results. Therefore, located at the other end of the continuum, is a perspective that sees inclusive education primarily as providing optimal education by providing additional and special support to meet the children's needs. In practice, as reflected in the literature review, the first perspective remains an ideal and a vision in the legislation and policy documents. However, the review indicates that a lot of children with disabilities who have been able to access school, sit in mainstream classrooms with no or very little support. Special attention is provided for children in resource classrooms, in special schools for children with special needs, or by itinerant teachers supporting regular classroom teachers. However, only a small minority of children with disabilities receive the extra support offered through such models.

One way of approaching the discussion on how to define inclusive education in national and local contexts is to ask the question "What is education for?" Biesta (2010) connects the question to three domains: qualification, socialisation, and subjectification. The concept of qualification in education involves how to support individuals with skills, knowledge, and qualifications that are crucial for life. However, education goes beyond mere skills and academic knowledge; it encompasses the integration of social, cultural, and political practices and traditions. Biesta conceptualises this process as socialisation and connects the concept to various agendas that are incorporated in the curricula, including environmental education, citizenship education, social and moral education, sex education, to mention a few. Additionally, Biesta introduces a third dimension, subjectification, focusing on how education impacts the child's personal development and human freedom, from a self-determination perspective. The task at hand is how to strike a balance between these dimensions in a way that supports the idea of providing children with special needs with an education that offers opportunities to actively participate in society: education for life. A similar perspective is presented in Anna Robinson-Pant (2020) paper "Inclusive Education: Thinking Beyond Systems". Based on field studies in several of the countries included in this review, she poses a critical question: What does inclusive education entail for adults and youth regarding everyday activities and livelihoods? From her perspective, inclusive education encompasses more than "access to a classroom". To achieve inclusive education, it is important to have a learner-centred approach and to use "intercultural" and "contextual" lenses to understand the students' needs and their everyday living. Drawing on experiences from Ethiopia, Nepal, and elsewhere, she underscores that true inclusion involves providing education that ensures safety and imparts meaningful qualifications. These perspectives are crucial when considering the education of children with disabilities. Their presence in the

classroom should have a positive impact on their development, rather than resulting in additional setbacks and defeats.

7.3   Academic knowledge and inclusive education

The literature study clearly shows that there are only very small academic communities, if any, committed to research on inclusive education in the ten countries explored. There are some research articles on inclusive education in all the ten countries, but the volume and scope of the articles are limited. Our impression is that research and knowledge development on inclusive education, especially from the human rights and social justice perspective, has received very little attention. This probably holds true also when comparing inclusive education to subtopics within agriculture and health sciences. Most authors of the academic papers included in this study live in other countries or even continents than the land they investigate. Research on inclusive education is dominated by people from Western and to some extent Asian countries. Just a few of the publications are written by academics from a higher education institution in their home country. Nationally located researchers are mainly single researchers that publish with researchers from other continents (mainly Western).

Some authors have originated from the country they investigate but are now representing universities in other continents. The fact that researchers originally from the global south represent universities abroad is also an example of "brain drain" and the other side of the coin of the lack of national academic debates in the countries investigated. Thus, there is a lack of national research groups, networks and publications that might inform the national debates. The absence of a national debate on inclusive education makes the field weak and fragile and easy to manipulate from a political and coloniality perspective. The reviewed articles highlight the need for more knowledge on the prevalence of disabilities, more focus on inclusion in teacher education and an increased awareness of what inclusive education is, and how to best achieve it. These demands are difficult to meet due to the narrow national knowledge base that exists on how to understand and provide inclusive education.

7.4   Coloniality and inclusive education

As suggested in the introduction, there is a danger of coloniality when developing inclusive education in the countries described as second or third countries of inclusive education. There are several elements in our investigation that indicate coloniality on all levels of knowledge, power and being.

Authors who are based at universities in the West draw on western theoretical frameworks when posing questions on inclusive education in non-Western countries and when interpreting the data. It is therefore not surprising that the challenges and solutions reported reflect the knowledge and conceptual frameworks produced in the western contexts. There are examples of alternative theoretical perspectives mainly formulated in the African context and drawing on concepts such as Ubuntu. Nevertheless, the research we have reviewed in the ten countries is highly influenced by a western understanding of inclusive education.

The coloniality of power element of the research investigated was less clear in the literature. However, as stated in the above description of coloniality of power, authors nearly unanimously argue for the need for extra resources when challenges of inclusion are described. This need for extra resources to fulfil the western standards of inclusion can be seen as an expression of coloniality as claimed by Kalyanpur (2016). The other concern

regarding power and inclusion is the possible exploitation of the concept by political leaders who may use the idea of inclusive education as a political strategy to "do the right thing" by signing conventions and international agreements and thereby increasing western funding and support, possibly strengthening their regimes.

Coloniality of being is expressed in our literature study in two ways. When describing categories of disabilities, the dominant description is based on the same structure that we see in the west. It might be that some categories of disability are universal, such as visual and auditory disabilities and different forms of physical impairments. In an environment of less coloniality there might be a focus on other types of disabilities - or lack of social abilities that people do, or do not, categorise as disabilities in each cultural context. The only example found in the reviewed literature is research on albinism and the problem this type of disability creates in some social environments. The second example of coloniality of being is expressed in the organisation of education of the "being". In this perspective, the school structure of special schools, resource classes, resource centres etc. frames the "being" of a disabled person as a person that needs a particular structure of support.

7.5   Education in countries affected by crisis and conflict

As shown above, there is hardly any literature on inclusive education in the crisis and conflict affected countries included in this review that have informed a debate on how inclusive education could be approached in these countries. The conflict affected countries are among the world's poorest and have scarce financial and human resources to spend on the regular education system. Statistics on gross enrolment rates across the ten countries, show that Niger, Mali, and South Sudan are at the bottom, and for Afghanistan and Myanmar there are no recent figures available (World Bank 2024[5]).

Enrolment rates for children with disabilities is very low, and in Niger, for example, less than 0.5 per cent of children enrolled in school were disabled, and completion rates among them were also low. A low number of teachers and limited accessible transport facilities, poor sanitation, and unsafe learning environments along with prevailing attitudes and cultural prejudices toward children with disabilities are reported features. For example, in South Sudan, children with disabilities have very limited access to any educational opportunities, and this applies especially to children living outside the Juba region, girls, or children with intellectual, psychosocial, and multiple impairments (Rohwerder, 2018). In some urban areas, a few special schools for children with sensory and physical impairments are established; however, the overall picture reported is that schools providing services for children with disabilities are scarce.

The literature review documents how education becomes a battleground in political crises and conflicts. Following the coup in Myanmar in 2021, the takeover by Taliban in Afghanistan in 2022, and the recent advances of the Jihadists in Mali, access to education for minorities or girls has become restricted. In Afghanistan and Myanmar, the principle of inclusion in secular education was discarded or weakened by the new regimes and in the case of Mali, secular schools were closed by Jihadist groups taking control of large swaths of land. Research by Human Rights Watch in South Sudan found that people with disabilities face greater risks of being caught in fighting and have been left behind when communities have fled attacks. Numerous abuses and brutal killings have been documented, and children with disabilities are in danger of getting lost during forced migration. Most children with disabilities

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[5] Education Attainment and Enrollment Around the World (EdAttain) (worldbank.org

do not go to school because special education services are scarce and mainstream schools are often inaccessible and do not have teachers trained in inclusive education (Rohwerder, 2018).

Figures are not available on how children with disabilities have been affected by these changes. Consequently, global figures show that progress on inclusion of children with disabilities has stalled, perhaps due to the increase in the number of violent conflicts globally and an authoritarian trend leading to a decline in democratic regimes globally.

8   Conclusion and recommendations

The following recommendations are intended for development partners, funding agencies and national and international actors who are committed to encourage inclusionary practices in schools.

1) Strengthening an inclusive national dialogue informed by research and a national knowledge base.

There is an urgent need to build national research communities and to produce national research to inform an inclusive, national debate on inclusive education theories, policies, models, and practices to move the inclusive education agenda forward in a way that is relevant and responsive to country specific institutions while at the same time fulfilling commitments made to international legal norms. The following activities may be considered:

- Funding for research on inclusive education for pupils with disabilities, both as collaborative efforts between the North and the South and as South-South collaboration. Research and knowledge creation in the following areas are important:
  o Theory development on inclusive education drawing on non-western experiences.
  o Power relations in the education sector, including the role of international funding agencies and their alignment with political and professional elites (for example, is coloniality a useful concept?)
  o Gender differences in inclusive education
  o Children's and students' own perceptions and views
  o Education models and approaches in humanitarian contexts
  o How to manage the transition from 'special' to 'inclusive' education
  o Inclusive education didactics and differentiation, including the use of multimodalities, such as braille.
  o The interconnectedness between the 'quality of education' debate and the 'inclusive education' debate
  o Dilemmas in navigating between international commitments and local contexts in inclusive education
- Support for arenas for discussion and dialogue on inclusive education in partner countries, for example in the form of local level/community events, national conferences, television, or radio shows. Such arenas should include disabled persons organisations, government representatives, representatives from the academic community, civil society organisations etc.

2) From international commitments to educational practices

The review highlights that one of the major challenges on the journey towards inclusive education is the translation of international agreements into national policies and practices while navigating the tension between global standards and local contexts. Implementation processes are complex, and the introduction of inclusive education require profound changes in educational systems and social institutions. The idea of many countries in the global south being 'third generation countries' implies that school systems and social conditions are less conducive to the adoption of western models of inclusive education. Thus, national inclusive education plans and strategies must not be imposed but should be built on a deep understanding of context, opportunities and risks that exist within the national school system and the broader society.

Issues that need to be discussed in workshops, seminars, or conferences to align international commitments with national and local contexts include:

- What is the overall purpose of education in the country (life skills, participation in the labour market, participation in the local community/society at large)?
- What are the risks and benefits involved in the four models of inclusive education in each country context, and how may models be combined? Are alternative models available that draw on the country's traditions?
- How should countries prioritise between specialised and generalised knowledge in teacher education to achieve a balance between the two?
- How might actors across government, civil society and local communities be mobilised to achieve change in education institutions and in society at large?

3) Preservation of institutions that work well for children with disabilities

Efforts towards achieving inclusive education, should preserve diverse education opportunities, and ensure that reforms do not undermine institutions that perform well. This includes enhancing the flexibility of mainstream schools to accommodate a broader diversity of children while also establishing quality specialised arrangements for children requiring additional support - closely connected to mainstream schools.

Close collaboration between special schools and regular schools is required, and arenas and meetings for such collaboration should be encouraged at local, regional, and national levels.

4) Connecting practices in schools with research and teacher education

Collaboration among schools, research institutions and teacher education institutions to meet the need for theoretical and practical knowledge of inclusive and special education should be strengthened by:

- Linking the knowledge field of inclusive education to the field of teacher education
- Support for centres of competence development on inclusive education that collaborate with research communities and schools.
- Incorporation in teacher training courses of a substantial component of teaching practice in schools.

5) School leader and teacher education with an inclusive perspective

Enhancing the competence of not only teachers, but also school leaders, is important. Authors emphasise the need to strengthen the mainstream teachers' qualification, especially their competencies in strategies that support pupils with special needs and an inclusive learning environment.

- Establishing programmes and courses in special- and inclusive education for pre-service and in-service teacher training is essential. To achieve the vision of inclusive education, it is vital that teacher education and training receives attention at the national policy level.
- Development of teacher training material, such as textbooks, on inclusive education and inclusive practices for different categories of disabilities adapted to country contexts is required.

6) The need for strategies on inclusion in conflict affected countries

In countries that experience or have recently experienced violent conflict, development partners should carefully assess how they might support inclusive education. This is because

development partners often play a crucial role in funding the education sector after conflict, while at the same time multiple, urgent priorities compete for attention and funding, human resources are scarce and demands for regular and catch-up education are high.

- Strategies and plans should consider whether rebuilding after conflict offers opportunities to reform education systems, not only at the constitutional and policy level, but also in practice.
- Development partners should provide support for small scale initiatives/pilot projects in geographical areas where this is feasible, while carefully considering financial and human resource sustainability challenges.

A related issue concerns the role of development partners in countries where progress towards inclusion has been reversed following regime change, and where space for inclusion interventions appear low, while the need for support may be especially high due to mental and physical traumas resulting from war and conflict. There is not much literature that document possible avenues in such circumstances. However, research from Myanmar suggests that education in religious schools have been sustained for decades.

- Private school options should be considered as an alternative to state school systems where regime change narrows the options for support to governments.

7) Changing awareness, attitudes, and knowledge

Funding and programmes for strengthening national awareness on inclusive education in the education sector, among civil society organisations, parents, the business community, and citizens more generally are required to overcome many of the barriers to inclusion listed in this report. 'Nothing for us, without us' is a principle of the disability movement. We also know that the mobilisation of disabled persons organisations and their subsequent political and social influence were driving forces behind the inclusion agenda in Western countries. The following measures might contribute to increased awareness on inclusion:

- Development partners and other funding agencies should ensure that project and programmes are based on dialogue, participation, and representation by persons with disabilities and their organisations on issues that are of concern to them. This applies from national to local levels.
- Development partners should support effective awareness building programmes on inclusive education, for example by collaborating with in service-teacher training institutions, radio channels, health and social services and so forth.

8) Guidelines for funding agencies in the inclusive education field

Funding agencies should:

- Ensure that all education initiatives, regular and inclusive, address, measure, report on, and evaluate the impact on inclusion of children with disabilities. Efforts should be made to collect data on disabled children's own views and to disaggregate information by gender and disability category. Data by disability category is useful for tailoring measures to the severity of the disability, and for identifying conditions that may require low-cost interventions.

- Require partners to evaluate risks and benefits associated with the four different models of inclusive education (mainstream, integrated, support centres and special schools). This analysis should include information on the impact on the children with disabilities and their families, for example what does being placed in regular

classrooms without extra support mean for children with disabilities, and what risks do boarding schools pose to children with disabilities?

- Consider ways in which universal human rights could be reconciled with local and national inclusionary practices. One way forward is to ensure participatory and inclusive processes when inclusive education policies, plans and practices are developed, to commission research when data is wanting, and to document and build on low-cost, locally adapted models for inclusive education.

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