Game-Based Learning
Promotes Inclusive Strategies

Implementing Inclusive Education:
What Are the Opportunities and Challenges
for Equitable Inclusive Education?

Fostering Inclusive
and Equitable
Education Through
**The Impact 360
Project**

**Inclusive
Education:**
A Framework
for Equity and
Accessibility for
Students with
Disabilities

Reaching **All Learners**

**Creating Inclusive Classrooms for
Students with Autism:** Overcoming
Barriers and Unlocking Potential

Empowering Every Learner:
Practical Insights and Success Stories
from Inclusive Classrooms

UNLOCKING EVERY
LEARNER'S POTENTIAL

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SHARJAH
EDUINSIGHTS

SHARJAH EDUINSIGHTS 2

I am excited to welcome you all to the second issue of **Sharjah EduInsights**, the education magazine of the Sharjah Education Academy.

This issue, which includes seven articles, is dedicated to a topic at the heart of educational improvement: inclusive education. As educators, policymakers, and advocates strive to ensure that no learner is left behind, the authors have examined what it takes to build truly inclusive learning environments where all students feel valued, respected, supported, and able to participate fully in learning to achieve their best potential.

The contributions in this issue offer fresh perspectives and practical insights into both the promise and complexity of building more inclusive learning environments.

From frameworks for equity and accessibility to systematic barriers to game-based strategies, inspiring real-world solutions that engage diverse learners, the authors highlight both the challenges and possibilities of inclusive education.

Together, these articles reflect a growing commitment to designing education systems that are both inclusive and equitable. Whether you're a teacher, leader, or researcher, we hope this issue sparks critical reflection, meaningful dialogue, and action toward a more inclusive future for all learners.

Dr. Mustafa Toprak
Chief Editor

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mustafa Toprak brings more than 20 years' experience in education as a chair, faculty member, researcher, and teacher. As the chair of the Department of Educational Leadership at Sharjah Education Academy, he oversees school leadership programs to enhance the effectiveness of current and aspiring educational leaders. He is the author of the most recent book: Problems and Possibilities of Neoliberal Education Reforms: Accountability, High-Stakes Testing, and Inequality, which was published by Bloomsbury Academic. Dr. Toprak has authored more than forty journal articles in prestigious academic journals on school leadership, education policy and organizational behavior within educational settings.
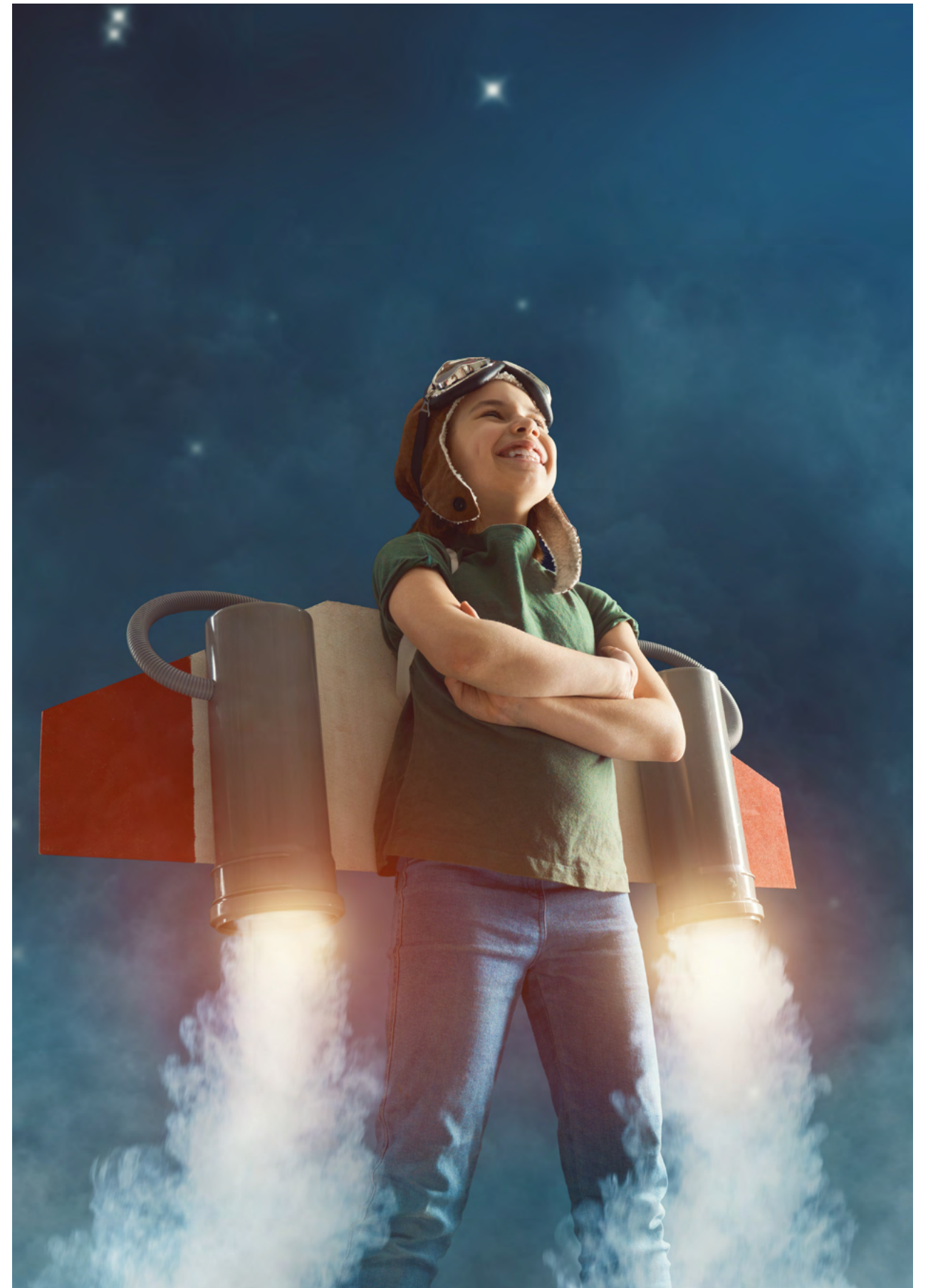
ARTICLE 1.
IMPLEMENTING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: WHAT ARE THE OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR EQUITABLE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION?

Darren Moore
Exeter University

In this article, I draw upon my prior research work on implementation in schools and case studies of inclusive practice in Sharjah schools. Implementing inclusive education is an ongoing journey of improvement for educational systems across the globe. We need a shared understanding of what inclusive education is. Thinking about implementation in terms of equity is important because it helps us consider the advantages and disadvantages afforded to schools in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) compared to other international contexts, as well as recognise that schools will face different challenges and be at different points in their own journey toward inclusive education.
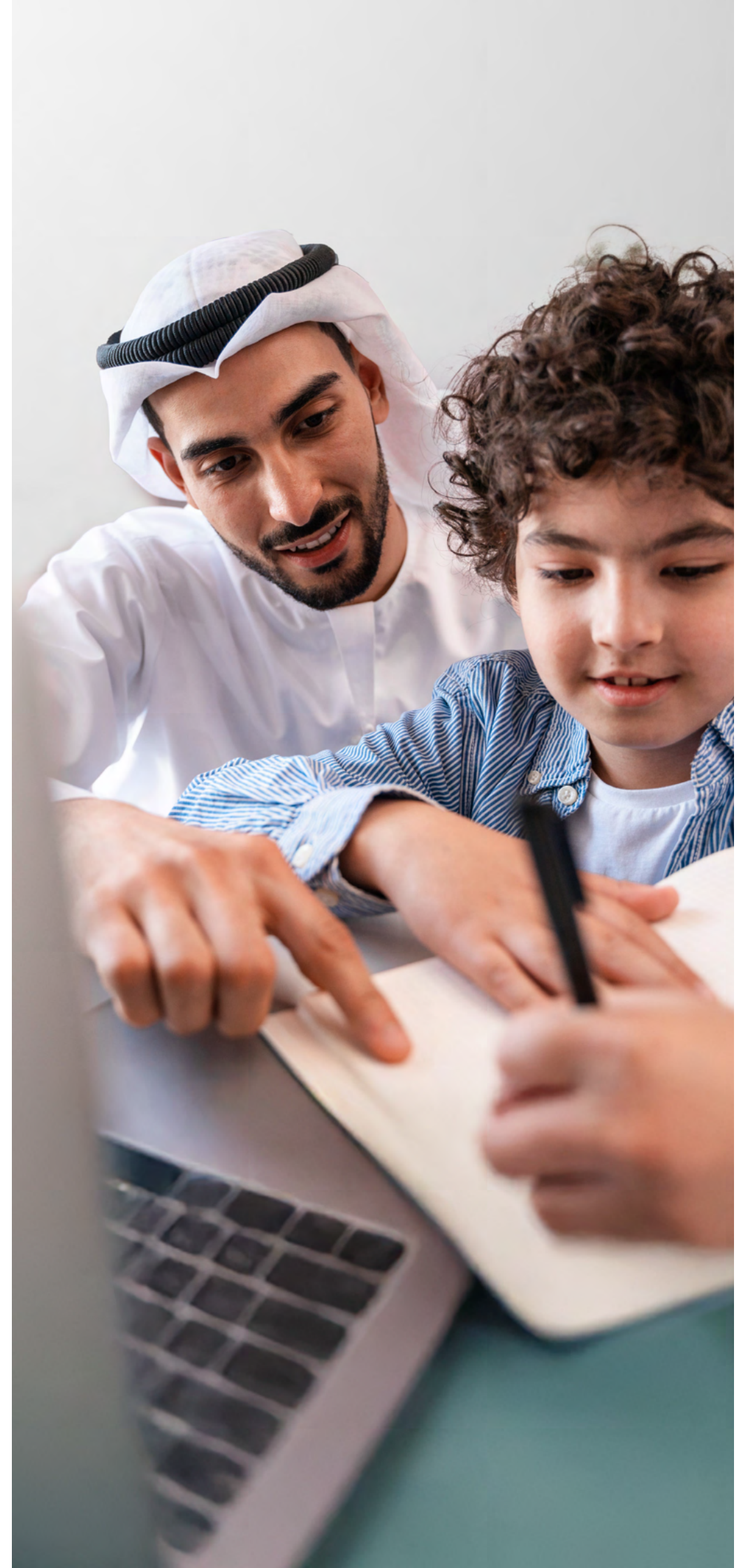
DEFINING
INCLUSIVE EDUCATION
AND IMPLEMENTATION

While inclusive education has been defined in a variety of ways, there are clear definitions from United Nations agencies, such as "removing barriers to education for all students" (UNESCO, 2020). These barriers may relate to individual characteristics that at times have meant children and young people are excluded from education. Inclusion for all therefore often means improving access for those with additional learning needs or where historically schools have not met all needs, such as disability, language or migration. Inclusive education relates to the broad sustainable development goal 4 of ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education. However, it is also applied to more specific areas. It

implies the need to value all students, include all students in the same educational space, and respect for diversity. Inclusive education, whether defined holistically or considered in relation to particular student needs, calls for access to learning support, student-centred learning and collaboration among school staff and parents. Defining inclusive education as a fundamental right that values all students is key to its implementation.

Implementation focuses not only on the point at which practice changes, but is also an ongoing cycle of improvement that involves exploring needs, preparation for change in practice, supporting the change as it is made, and then shifting efforts to sustain new practices that are working well for a school (Moore et al., 2024). Implementation is a process that can be applied to a very specific intervention, for instance a social skills intervention for primary school students with autism. Whereas, the same process can also be applied to curriculum reform and school improvement more generally, including

the implementation of inclusive education. Both implementing inclusive education as a whole and specific inclusive practices require consideration of the existing practices and the school community's orientation to them. Implementation is therefore as much a social process, as it is about new policy or resources. This means inclusive education will be interpreted, adapted and sustained as a function of school staff's understanding and buy in to the approach.

A range of implementation strategies have been researched and can be used to help give the implementation of inclusive education or particular inclusive practices the best chance of becoming part of the fabric of a school or classroom (Gaias et al., 2022). These include professional development about the new approach, identifying barriers and problem solving, supporting those who need additional help to change practice, having staff who champion the change, and staff reflecting on their learning about the change in practice.

EQUITY

Educational inequities exist where there are differences in outcomes between groups of pupils (but also teachers and schools) that are unnecessary, avoidable, unfair and unjust. Equity is a key principle of inclusive education, ensuring that all students have access to quality education and the necessary support to succeed (Schuelka, 2018). It recognises that students have diverse needs and may require different levels of support and resources to achieve the same outcomes. This differs from equality, which implies treating everyone the same. Equity, however, focuses on fair and just treatment that acknowledges individual differences and disadvantages. The importance of equity exposes a tension in understandings of inclusive education. Inclusive education aims to provide all students with access to quality education, which may require specific support for students with disabilities or other needs to access learning opportunities. This means directing resources where they are needed most to address disparities.

A flexible curriculum and assessment system is essential to ensure that all learners can participate and demonstrate their learning. This indicates how equity does not only apply to inclusive education as a concept, but how an equity lens can also be applied to the selection of approaches and how they are implemented. The value of an intervention can be considered as how it promotes equitable outcomes, rather than improvements for all students. Less attention has been given to how schools can plan how they implement new approaches in a way that is mindful of equity. For example, schools might identify barriers to implementation, like parent buy in, resource availability and leadership support, to inform implementation strategies they use. For this to be equitable, these barriers need to be identified by representative individuals. Leaders may be unaware of teachers' concerns about additional skills required; similarly, teachers may not fully understand parents' views about inclusive education. Therefore, equity is crucial in promoting social justice through education, ensuring that inclusive schools lead to inclusive societies. It can help to create a system where every student, regardless of their background or abilities, can learn, grow, and thrive.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPLEMENTING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

In the second part of this article, I discuss some opportunities and challenges relevant to implementing equitable inclusive education, drawn from research findings. These opportunities are often actions that schools do well and can be applied to changes in inclusive education. A barrier therefore is to wrongly treat inclusive education as a different kind of school improvement or not the responsibility of all in the school community. Implementing inclusive education needs specific and measurable targets. An inclusive school might be indicated by a change in feeling or connection to the school by all in the community. However, these and other outcomes can be measured to evaluate not only access but also the quality of education, student experiences, and teaching practices (Alnahdi et al., 2022). Inclusive education can change attitudes and behaviours, as well as student demographics over the longer term. Implementation outcomes, such as the acceptability of inclusive practice and the understanding of inclusive education across the school community can be measured earlier than changes in behaviour and student outcomes.

Providing ongoing training, support, and resources for all teachers and school leaders is crucial. Therefore, efforts to improve inclusive education are not served by one-time professional development or skills for specialised staff that provide additional support to help diverse learners access the curriculum and learning. Professional development models that move beyond a trainer sharing knowledge with a group of staff need to be considered. Collaboration between staff in different roles is important and therefore encouraging reflective learning groups that share practice, challenges, and can support one another, aids inclusive education as a journey that may develop differently across and within schools.

Implementation also involves changing attitudes and cultures and ensuring that everyone feels valued and included (Moore et al., 2024). School leaders need to demonstrate inclusive values and trust in their staff. They play a vital role in creating a supportive school culture that can realise more inclusive education. Research has often over-emphasised the role of school leaders in changing approaches across a whole school. Leaders at all levels must actively encourage behaviours that support inclusion, while also making necessary structural changes. School leaders play a key role as "gatekeepers" for inclusive education, but they are not the only implementation leaders. Implementation leaders who enable inclusive education can include champions, local opinion leaders, inclusion leads, implementation team leaders and members, those delivering professional development, as well as school leaders (Lambrecht et al., 2022).

Effective leadership involves:

- **Creating a clear vision and setting direction** for inclusion. This includes sharing the values of inclusive education and collaborating with the school community, including students with diverse needs and parents to inform this.

- **Redesigning school structures** by allocating resources, adequate staffing and fostering collaboration. This might involve ensuring that time for collaboration is integrated into the regular school day.

- **Understanding and developing staff** by supporting teachers, recognising their work towards inclusive education, and fostering participation from students, parents and teachers in decision-making.

Curriculum modification and flexibility is crucial to support inclusive education. Support is needed from authorities and ministries to allow this kind of flexibility. However, school staff can draw on a range of approaches to designing lessons and activities that are accessible to all students. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is an approach that involves multiple means of representation, engagement and expression that helps to meet the needs of diverse learners alongside all their peers (Sewell et al., 2022). UDL relates and can enhance inclusive practices because it helps ensure that learning materials, such as textbooks and online resources, are accessible to all students. This may involve assistive technologies or adapting materials. UDL allows for flexibility in how students access information, engage in learning, and demonstrate their knowledge. This helps accommodate the diverse needs of students in inclusive classrooms. UDL also places emphasis on designing lessons and activities that are accessible to all students from the outset. As such, inclusive education often draws upon skills and resources readily available, through a new educational framework.

OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Finally, I discuss three barriers to implementing equitable inclusive education that have already been indicated in the article. Here I suggest some ways of overcoming what are barriers that are likely to be shared across schools.

1 **Resources:** Many schools, especially in low-income countries, lack the necessary resources and facilities to support inclusive education (Grimes et al., 2012). This includes a shortage of specialist staff, school buildings that limit accessibility, a lack of assistive technologies, and insufficient learning materials. However, existing resources, both human and financial can be allocated in ways that benefit diverse learners. This may include focusing resources on support for these learners in regular classrooms. A focus on implementation of inclusive education as a school value shares responsibility, and means new resources are therefore for all in the community. Resources that benefit all learners are more cost-effective.

2 **Teacher development:** Many teachers require training to both understand inclusive education as well as teaching techniques that help to reflect this in practice. Teachers may feel that inclusive education is an additional task. We can start earlier with all teacher trainees receiving thorough training in inclusive practices, meaning it is not seen as relevant only to special teachers. If there is resistance to inclusive education as a change in practice, reiterate the message that inclusive teaching is not new, but reflects quality teaching and helps to raise attainment. Professional development is still needed, and it should be regular, to reflect that teachers will continually learn about and improve their inclusive practices (Schuleka, 2018). If inclusive education is a shared responsibility, collaboration to share knowledge and best practices will be a cost-effective form of professional development, supplemented by mentoring that recognises it is important to have staff in roles that lead on inclusive education.

3 **Attitudes and support:** Socio-cultural attitudes, stigma, and discrimination can create significant barriers to inclusive education, particularly if it is not thought about as supporting all learners. There can be a lack of understanding about what inclusive education means which can inform attitudes and a belief that it is not a shared responsibility. While national policies will help clearly articulate the values of inclusive education and should be developed in collaboration with key stakeholders, raising awareness about inclusive education is something that can be done in and beyond schools more locally. This might be by share success stories and hosting events that help to raise awareness about the benefits of inclusion both in school and across society. By addressing these barriers with multiple strategies, leaders can facilitate the creation of more equitable and inclusive educational systems that benefit all learners (Al-Mahdy et al., 2018).

CONCLUSION

Implementation of inclusive education is about creating a system where all students feel welcomed, valued, and supported. It requires a multifaceted approach that addresses various levels of the educational system, from the classroom to national policy, as well as constant reflection, preparation and research (both within schools and rigorously conducted across settings by academics). Strategies for more equitable inclusive education include professional development for teachers, meaningful engagement with parents, supportive school leadership, school-level reviews and external policy that clearly articulate and support inclusive practices, while promoting considered adaptation to curriculum and assessment.

REFERENCES

Al-Mahdy, Y. F., & Emam, M. M. (2018). 'Much ado about something' How school leaders affect attitudes towards inclusive education: The case of Oman. International Journal of Inclusive Education, 22(11), 1154-1172.

Alnahdi, G. H., Lindner, K. T., & Schwab, S. (2022). Teachers' implementation of inclusive teaching practices as a potential predictor for students' perception of academic, social and emotional inclusion. Frontiers in Psychology, 13, 917676.

Gaias, L. M., Arnold, K. T., Liu, F. F., Pullmann, M. D., Duong, M. T., & Lyon, A. R. (2022). Adapting strategies to promote implementation reach and equity (ASPIRE) in school mental health services. Psychology in the Schools, 59(12), 2471-2485.

Grimes, P., Sayarath, K., & Outhaithany, S. (2012). 'It's better than catching frogs': Understanding the importance of local context in the development of inclusive school self-evaluation in Lao PDR. Improving Schools, 15(2), 148-162.

Lambrecht, J., Lenkeit, J., Hartmann, A., Ehlert, A., Knigge, M., & Spörer, N. (2022). The effect of school leadership on implementing inclusive education: How transformational and instructional leadership practices affect individualised education planning. International Journal of Inclusive Education, 26(9), 943-957.

Moore, D., Proctor, R., Benham-Clarke, S., Gains, H., Melendez-Torres, G. J., Axford, N., Rogers, M., Anderson, R., Hall, D., Hawkins, J., Berry, V., Forbes, C., & Lloyd, J. (2024). Review of evidence on implementation in education. Education Endowment Foundation. https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/evidence-reviews/implementation-in-education

Schuelka, M. J. (2018). Implementing inclusive education. K4D helpdesk report. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5c6eb77340f0b647b21 4c599/374_Implementing_Inclusive_Education.pdf

Sewell, A., Kennett, A., & Pugh, V. (2022). Universal Design for Learning as a theory of inclusive practice for use by educational psychologists. Educational Psychology in Practice, 38(4), 364-378.

UNESCO (2020). Global Education Monitoring Report 2020: Inclusion and education: All means all. UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000373718.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

DR. DARREN MOORE is an interdisciplinary researcher and educator specializing in children and young people's mental health, implementation in education and attention-deficit/ hyperactivity disorder. His research work is broadly focused on wellbeing in education, additional learning needs and implementation in schools. This includes topics such as social, emotional and mental health as a special educational need; implementing social emotional learning curriculums, behavior in schools; school attendance; professional development; teachers' mental health and wellbeing; school mental health and wellbeing policies. He co-leads the University of Exeter's Centre for Wellbeing, Inclusion and Disability in Educational Research.

ARTICLE 2.
INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: A FRAMEWORK FOR EQUITY AND ACCESSIBILITY FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Duaa Dridi & Amani Abdel Moneim
Sharjah City for Humanitarian Services

Education is a right for all, offering every individual a fair opportunity to learn. This cannot be truly achieved without ensuring inclusive access for everyone, free from discrimination. The framework for ensuring inclusion and equity in meeting the diverse educational needs of students with disabilities is grounded in core principles that emphasize the importance of inclusive education for persons with disabilities. Inclusive education is a concept that embraces all students, regardless of their disabilities, differences, or abilities. Inclusion and participation are fundamental to human dignity and the enjoyment of human rights. In education, this translates into achieving genuine equality of opportunity.

Inclusive education for students with disabilities involves proven teaching methods that benefit all learners. It highlights the critical importance of implementing legislation, best practices, and organizational planning. The role of school leadership and educators is essential in applying effective teaching strategies that promote engagement and participation. These learner-centered strategies are based on individual needs and characteristics, helping overcome the challenges of implementing inclusive education.

General education schools that adopt an inclusive mindset are among the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, fostering tolerant societies, building inclusive communities, and achieving education for all. Additionally, they provide quality education to the majority of students and enhance system efficiency. All stakeholders in education—including learners, service providers, families, and society at large—must support the development of inclusive education for persons with disabilities as an integral part of all educational programs. This is essential to making education more inclusive, equitable, and effective from early childhood through higher education. Through a continued commitment to the implementation of inclusive practices by educational leaders and administrators, this document explores the status and opportunities for inclusive education in the United Arab Emirates.

Interest in inclusive education is growing both globally and locally. The UAE has provided equal educational opportunities for students with disabilities in both public and private schools, in line with Federal Law No. 29 of 2006 and its amendment, Federal Law No. 14 of 2009. To ensure access to a supportive and inclusive learning environment, the UAE has established strong policies supporting inclusive education—such as the National Policy for Empowering Persons with Disabilities. Schools are required to provide inclusive environments that meet international standards and develop curricula that reflect the diversity of learners' needs.

Technological innovation also plays a key role in supporting inclusion. Modern assistive technologies—

such as communication apps, visual reading devices, virtual classrooms, and distance learning—offer flexible learning options for students with disabilities.

Community initiatives and awareness programs, such as social inclusion activities among students, help develop interaction skills and promote mutual acceptance. Partnerships between educational institutions and specialized centers are also vital. Collaboration with disability support centers enhances services for students in inclusive settings through consultation, assessments, and rehabilitation support.

Specialized teacher training programs have been developed by institutions like Ajad Training Center, part of Sharjah City for Humanitarian Services (SCHS). Since its founding in 1979, SCHS has focused on empowering, training, rehabilitating, and employing persons with disabilities. Starting in 1995, SCHS began systematically

integrating students with visual, hearing, and physical impairments into mainstream schools. In 2006, the integration of students with intellectual disabilities and autism spectrum disorder began, with regular monitoring by specialists to assess academic, behavioral, and social progress.

In 2017, SCHS established the Inclusive Education Unit, reflecting our firm belief that inclusion is not merely a model of special education, but a way of thinking and practice that includes all members of society. As a result, we have successfully integrated 646 students with disabilities into public and private schools, in collaboration with educational institutions across the UAE.

RATIONALE FOR INCLUDING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN MAINSTREAM EDUCATION

Inclusive education is supported by multiple rationales and is no longer a choice—it has become a necessity. The focus must shift from "why and where" to "how" inclusion should be implemented. So, why is it essential to include students with disabilities in mainstream education?

LEGAL RATIONALE

Nearly all countries affirm the right to education for all in their national constitutions, including persons with disabilities. Most have ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which emphasizes that mainstream educational settings are the most appropriate environments for persons with disabilities.

EDUCATIONAL RATIONALE

Education should be available to all regardless of individual differences. This requires schools and educators to develop teaching methods that meet diverse needs, benefiting all students. Public school settings offer natural learning contexts that are critical for skill development.

SOCIAL RATIONALE

Inclusive education helps shift societal attitudes toward diversity by bringing all students together. This forms the foundation for a just, non-discriminatory society. Accessibility enables everyone to contribute and benefit from inclusive environments. Social integration provides countless benefits—enhancing well-being, self-confidence, self-esteem, and enabling full participation in social life. It breaks down long-standing barriers and fosters mutual respect.

ECONOMIC RATIONALE

Establishing and maintaining inclusive schools is more cost-effective in the medium and long term than creating a parallel system of segregated special schools. Inclusive education contributes positively to workforce integration and reduces unemployment, while also preventing the isolation of persons with disabilities.

RESTRUCTURING EDUCATION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The implementation of policies and practices by educational institutions that address the diverse learning needs of persons with disabilities—and that significantly promote inclusive education and equity for all learners—requires a fundamental restructuring of education within public schools. This involves setting meaningful educational standards and holding schools accountable for achieving positive outcomes for every student.

School leaders in public education play a critical and influential role in facilitating the inclusion of students with disabilities. They are instrumental in the development and implementation of inclusive practices through their ability to influence teachers, parents, students, and the broader community. As leaders, principals can shape a clear vision of inclusion within their institutions, guiding school teams toward this vision by leading changes in school practices, promoting collaboration among teachers, supporting their professional development, and creating a positive and cooperative learning environment—an environment that effective leadership can foster.

There are numerous benefits and outcomes to such restructuring, including:

- Every student can learn and succeed.

- Diversity enriches everyone, and students at risk are better able to overcome potential failure through participation in an inclusive and reflective learning community.

- Each student has unique and valuable contributions to offer their peers.

- Every student possesses strengths as well as needs.

- Effective educational outcomes result from the collaborative efforts of all individuals working to ensure the success of every learner.

- Systemic reform initiatives in special education must align with, and complement, broader reform efforts in general education.

- Utilizing heterogeneous and cooperative group arrangements for students, as they are more effective for learning.

- Providing students with individualized curricula that meet their specific academic needs.

- Fostering collaboration among school administrators, teachers, students, parents, and community members in the design and delivery of effective education for all learners.

In line with our commitment to promoting children's well-being and fulfilling their rights within schools and nurseries, the Inclusive Education Unit at Sharjah City for Humanitarian Services developed, in 2023, the Inclusive School and Nursery Readiness Standards. These standards introduce key changes that support inclusive practices, including:

- The role of the school leader

- The school's vision and mission

- A multi-tiered assessment model

- Health, physical fitness, and the development of a positive cultural climate

- Participation and collaboration

- Clear distribution of roles and responsibilities

- Barrier-free environments

- Ongoing teacher training and coaching programs

- Curriculum adaptation, modification, and classroom management

- Emphasis on Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

- Differentiated instruction

- Use of assistive technologies

- Vocational education and productive industries

- Life skills education

- Activating the role of families as partners to ensure full participation in all school activities

- Designing the Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) by the inclusive education teacher, in cooperation with parents and classroom teachers

- Establishing a strong network of community partnership

Figure 2 below shows a model of inclusive education for students with disabilities in the school community.

The Model of Inclusive Education for Students with Disabilities in the School Community

Positive Teacher Behavior	Collaboration and Sharing of Experiences Among Teachers and Specialists	Formation of a Team of Qualified Specialists	Customization of Educational Programs and Teaching Methods Based on Needs
Parental Involvement in the Educational Process	Maintaining Personal Relationships Within the Community	School Modifications: Environment, Spaces, and Dimensions for Persons with Disabilities	Revising School Policies to Include Children with Disabilities
Identifying Students' Needs	Disseminating Information on the Issues Faced by Children with Disabilities	Involving Parents and Specialists in Organizing After-School Activities	Creating and Fostering a Positive Psychological Environment

Prerequisites for Successful Inclusion

Intervention

Teacher — Parents — Classmates — Specialists

Child with a Disability — School community

Social Challenges
- Child's Participation in School Community Life
- Development of Social Skills
- Community Readiness to Accept Persons with Disabilities

Educational Challenges
- Educational Communication
- Implementation of Teaching Methods
- Inefficiency of Inclusive Education Programs

Inclusion Challenges within the School Community

Creating a Suitable Environment	Positive Behavior of Teachers	Development of Social Skills	Fostering Positive Behavior
Lack of Arrangements for Schools and Educational Tools	Reluctance of Parents to Participate in the Integration of Children with Disabilities	Teacher Inefficiency and Lack of Knowledge about Children with Disabilities	Lack of Societal Acceptance of Persons with Disabilities
	Lake of Modify and Adapt the Curriculum According to the Needs and Abilities of Children with Disabilities	Peer Reluctance to Interact with Children with Disabilities	
	Lack of Standards for Testing and Assessing the Learning Outcomes of Children with Disabilities		

DIFFERENTIATED EDUCATION

Educational staff in public schools should ask themselves, "How can I differentiate instruction for students with disabilities and those from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds in the classroom?" To answer this, brainstorming sessions and workshops for teachers should be organized on how to meet the diverse needs of students in the classroom, analyze students' educational needs based on their individual differences, and ensure continuous assessment.

Differentiated instruction strategies are crucial as they create an educational environment that supports each student individually, considering the individual differences among students. The goal is to design a learning experience tailored to the needs of each student, relying on various teaching methods and activities in line with different learning styles, levels of readiness, and personal interests, instead of providing a uniform curriculum for all. This helps maximize each student's potential.

Differentiated instruction focuses on four key areas: content, process, product, and the learning environment. There are several examples that help teachers apply it effectively in the classroom:

CONTENT

refers to what is taught to students, including the information and skills students must acquire. The content is modified to suit the different levels of students, ensuring that each student gets the necessary information to develop their skills. For example, new students can focus on recalling and understanding basic concepts, while students with prior knowledge can create innovative projects, allowing each student to learn according to their abilities and readiness. Diverse examples include offering students multiple choices for research tasks or using Bloom's Taxonomy to design tasks ranging from recall and comprehension to analysis and innovation, meeting the needs of students at different levels.

PROCESS

focuses on how content is presented to students, which is a key aspect of differentiated education. It involves using multiple teaching methods that accommodate different learning styles such as visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. For example, grouping students based on their learning styles to offer activities suited to their learning preferences, or allowing students to choose the method of work they prefer, whether individual or group-based, which increases motivation and participation.

PRODUCT

refers to how students' understanding of the lesson is assessed. Students choose the method through which they express their understanding of the lesson's content, enhancing their interaction. Examples include writing a report, giving a presentation, creating a project or model, using multimedia, or presenting data through charts or slides, all designed according to their learning styles.

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

focuses on the physical and psychological elements surrounding the student that support the learning process. It must be diverse and flexible to meet the needs of all students within the classroom. Examples include designating specific areas for different activities, such as a reading corner or science corner, and allowing students to choose their preferred locations for learning.

BENEFITS OF DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION

Differentiated instruction offers several benefits that contribute to enhancing the learning of students with diverse needs in the classroom. Some of the key benefits include:

- Improving the understanding of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic students by making learning more effective through activities designed to suit individual differences and learning styles.

- Promoting positive participation and reducing negative behaviors while supporting positive behaviors.

- Enhancing students' self-confidence and self-esteem as they are able to complete tasks suited to their level and are encouraged to face challenges.

- Supporting academic and social development by offering challenges that align with their level, providing equal opportunities for growth and progress for all students.

- Encouraging creativity and critical thinking by giving students the freedom to choose how they learn.

FAMILY PARTNERSHIP

Families, like students, have strengths, needs, backgrounds, and perspectives that differ. Several factors affect families, which in turn require teachers to adjust their approach to encourage family involvement. These factors include:

CULTURAL FACTORS:

Such as educational level, beliefs about the educational system, previous experiences with discrimination, family needs, student-rearing practices, and developmental expectations.

LINGUISTIC FACTORS:

Language barriers may impede communication between schools and families. Challenges in communication can be exacerbated by terminology issues that may not be present in the families' languages. Utilizing translators can help facilitate communication between educators and families speaking different languages.

EMOTIONAL FACTORS:

Families may go through several stages as they adapt to and accept their child's disability, and these stages can vary depending on experience, culture, and other factors.

SOCIOECONOMIC FACTORS:

These also affect family involvement. Schools can employ technology-based communication with families, such as using the internet, email, multilingual hotlines, and phone response systems to send and receive messages and provide information about local educational events of interest to families. Schools can also encourage families to attend conferences, recommend books and educational materials, and activate communication channels to meet their needs in various ways.

Encouraging and facilitating family feedback in the classroom and school environment provides better insight and understanding of different aspects, while also providing families with the necessary information to discuss school-related issues. Additionally, offering educational programs to all family members and focusing on the program's content based on family needs, identifying family problems and finding possible solutions, and determining who will do what, when, and where, are all part of an effective family partnership approach.

Some models of effective practices implemented by schools to support families in improving their children's education include:

- Developing families into leaders.

- Enhancing academic development and achievements.

- Raising family expectations through communication and providing information.

- Providing regular reports on students' progress.

- Structuring the school-family relationship based on mutual respect for cultural differences and inclusion.

- Extending learning time through homework assignments and out-of-school programs, such as family workshops.

There are four effective principles for partnership between families and professionals that can provide solutions, at least in some individual or collective cases. These principles include:

- Agreeing on the partnership's goal, roles, and shared responsibilities regarding meetings and evaluations.

- Clarifying who is involved in the partnership and why.

- Using equal authority relationships, such as ensuring everyone has access to important information.

- Making processes clear and credible to the highest degree.

CONCLUSION

Despite the challenges facing inclusive education in general, the available opportunities reflect the commitment of all stakeholders to provide an inclusive and comprehensive learning environment for all. To enhance the effectiveness of inclusion, we propose the following:

- Expanding specialized teacher training programs, with a focus on differentiated instruction strategies.

- Improving mechanisms for measuring the quality of inclusion to ensure effective support for students.

- Strengthening collaboration between schools and parents to empower families to actively support their children.

- Investing in assistive technologies to facilitate learning for students with disabilities.

- Encouraging academic research in the field of inclusive education to develop evidence-based policies and practical outcomes.

Inclusive education remains a fundamental pillar in achieving a more equitable and just society, and the UAE continues to set an example in offering education that meets the needs of all students, regardless of their abilities or challenges.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

DUAA DRIDI is a recognized leader in inclusive education in the United Arab Emirates, currently serving as Supervisor of the Inclusive Education Unit at Sharjah City for Humanitarian Services. With over 15 years of experience, she leads strategic efforts to improve educational access, quality, and sustainability for students with disabilities. Duaa holds a bachelor's degree in special education and a master's in Speech and Language Pathology from the University of Jordan. She is a Certified Quality Evaluator in Inclusive Education (2024), accredited by the Global Vision Foundation and its partners. Duaa is a member of Vision International and actively contributes to Sharjah's Inclusive Education Project. She also serves on the board of Al Amal School and Kindergarten for the Deaf and is a member of the Sharjah Child and Youth Friendly City Committee. As a Certified Trainer of Trainers (TOT), she has published articles in specialized journals, sharing her expertise on disability, policy, and inclusion.

AMANI ABDEL MONEIM is a dedicated specialist in inclusive education with over 13 years of experience at Sharjah City for Humanitarian Services. She holds a master's degree in psychology and has taken on various roles, including teaching, educational supervision, and inclusive education coordination. These positions have given her a deep understanding of the diverse needs of students with disabilities and the ability to provide effective, individualized support. Amani is skilled in designing and implementing tailored educational programs, enhancing the quality and sustainability of inclusive education in alignment with both national policies and international standards. She also plays a key role in analyzing curricula to ensure they are inclusive and accessible. Additionally, she focuses on training and developing educational staff, strengthening institutional capacity within schools, and supporting families. Her efforts actively promote community engagement and contribute to fostering a strong culture of inclusion across the educational landscape.

REFERENCES

Al-Zraykat, I. (2020). Inclusive education: Foundations and procedures. Dar Al Fikr. Jordan.

UAE Ministry of Education. (2020). Inclusive Education Policy Guide.

https://u.ae/ar-AE/information-and-services/education/education-for-people-with-special-needs

UNESCO. (2021). Inclusive Education: Global Policies and Trends.

https://www.unesco.org/en/inclusion-education

Inclusive Education Unit – Sharjah City for Humanitarian Services. (May 2023). Inclusive School Readiness Standards.

Inclusive Education Unit – Sharjah City for Humanitarian Services. (2023b). Inclusive education policy framework: The twelve critical elements for compliance with Article 24 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

https://www.inclusiveeducation.ca/iec-resource?view=9b0f4bbf-bc83-410a-9d64-c9d18fdd55bb

International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030. (n.d.). Teacher policy development guide for inclusive education

https://www.teachertaskforce.org/

https://www.inclusiveeducation.ca/iec-resource?view=9b0f4bbf-bc83-410a-9d64-c9d18fdd55bb

ARTICLE 3.
CREATING INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS FOR STUDENTS WITH AUTISM: OVERCOMING BARRIERS AND UNLOCKING POTENTIAL

Hadeel Adnan

Ensuring that students with autism have access to quality education is fundamental for their academic and social development. Inclusive classrooms provide opportunities for these students to thrive while also benefiting their peers by fostering understanding and empathy. However, many misconceptions about autism persist, making it crucial for educators to understand the condition in order to create a supportive environment (Goldson, 2004). Understanding autism allows educators to shift from viewing it as a challenge to recognizing it as a different way of experiencing the world. When teachers understand autism, they are better equipped to provide the necessary accommodations, ensuring that students with autism are not only included but also empowered to reach their full potential.

In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), significant steps have been taken toward fostering inclusive education. The Ministry of Education has implemented policies that mandate schools to provide accommodations for students with special needs, including autism. Initiatives such as the School for All policy and the National Policy for Empowering People of Determination emphasize access, equity, and individualized support in education (UAE Ministry of Education, 2019). However, with the rising number of autism cases globally, the urgency of effective inclusive education continues to grow. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2023), approximately 1 in 100 children worldwide is diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), highlighting the increasing presence of students with autism in mainstream classrooms. This raises a critical question: Are teachers adequately prepared to implement inclusive education effectively? Ensuring that educators have the necessary skills and strategies to support students with autism is essential for fostering truly inclusive classrooms.

This article explores key strategies for understanding autism, creating inclusive classroom environments, and differentiating instruction to ensure that students with autism receive the support they need to thrive academically and socially. By equipping teachers with evidence-based approaches and inclusive practices, education systems can move beyond mere integration and work toward meaningful inclusion that benefits all learners.

UNDERSTANDING AUTISM

ASD is a neurodevelopmental condition that affects communication, social interaction, and behavior (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). It is characterized by differences in brain connectivity and processing, which influence how students with autism learn and engage with their environment. While some students with autism excel academically, others require additional support to navigate the classroom. Understanding key characteristics of ASD can help educators implement targeted strategies for inclusion. The most common Characteristics of Students with Autism include:

1.   CHALLENGES IN COMMUNICATION

Many students with autism struggle with verbal and non-verbal communication, which can make expressing needs or understanding instructions difficult. A child may not be able to express simple needs, such as asking for a break, resulting in frustration or anxiety. Without the ability to communicate effectively, the child may resort to behaviors such as crying, withdrawing, or displaying physical signs of distress. Their brains process language differently, often requiring additional time to comprehend and respond to verbal cues (Aljunied & Frederickson, 2014).

2.   SOCIAL INTERACTION DIFFICULTIES

Many students with autism struggle with verbal and non-verbal communication, which can make expressing needs or understanding instructions difficult. A child may not be able to express simple needs, such as asking for a break, resulting in frustration or anxiety. Without the ability to communicate effectively, the child may resort to behaviors such as crying, withdrawing, or displaying physical signs of distress. Their brains process language differently, often requiring additional time to comprehend and respond to verbal cues (Aljunied & Frederickson, 2014).

3.   SENSORY SENSITIVITIES

Students with autism often experience heightened or diminished sensory processing. Loud noises, bright lights, or crowded spaces can cause sensory overload, making concentration and participation difficult (Williams, 2021). For example, a student may cover their ears or become distressed when exposed to the sudden sound of a fire alarm or the chatter of a busy classroom. Textures of clothing, certain food textures, or even the feeling of a pencil against paper may also trigger them. Some students may struggle with being touched, even in casual social interactions like high-fives or pats on the back, while others may seek sensory input through repetitive movements such as rocking, spinning, or hand-flapping. Additionally, bright or flickering lights may be overwhelming, leading to headaches or distraction, while strong smells from cleaning products, perfumes, or lunchboxes can become unbearable. On the other hand, some students may have a reduced sensory response, requiring strong stimuli to register sensations—such as enjoying deep-pressure hugs or engaging in repetitive sensory-seeking behaviors like rubbing objects on their skin.

4.   STRONG PREFERENCE FOR ROUTINES

A strong preference for routines is a defining characteristic for many students with autism. This preference stems from the way their brains process information. Individuals with autism often have a heightened need for predictability and structure because their brains may process sensory information and social cues differently. As a result, unexpected changes or disruptions to routines can lead to heightened anxiety, stress, and confusion. For many students, the lack of predictability can feel overwhelming, triggering distress and causing them to become withdrawn or resistant to engaging in new or unfamiliar situations.

Predictability provides a sense of security for many students with autism. Their brains may struggle with processing unexpected changes, leading to anxiety and resistance when routines are disrupted (McKenney, 2022). For example, students may insist on performing activities in a specific order, following the same steps each time, or sticking to familiar environments or seating arrangements. These preferences provide a sense of control over their surroundings, which can be crucial for emotional regulation. In classrooms where routines are inconsistent, students with autism may struggle to stay engaged, leading to frustration, difficulty focusing, and withdrawal from learning activities.

CREATING AN INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM FOR STUDENTS WITH AUTISM

Creating an inclusive classroom requires intentional planning, flexibility, and the use of strategies that support all learners, including those with autism. The following strategies are designed to help teachers build a more supportive and understanding learning environment for students with autism:

1. ESTABLISH A STRUCTURED AND PREDICTABLE ENVIRONMENT

A. USE VISUAL SUPPORTS

Creating a structured and predictable classroom environment is essential for reducing anxiety in students with autism. A well-organized space with clear routines helps students feel secure and confident in navigating their day. Teachers can implement consistent daily schedules, ensuring that transitions between activities remain stable. Additionally, using visual schedules such as picture-based daily planners or icon charts helps students to predict the upcoming activities, reducing uncertainty and promoting independence. Personalizing these schedules with preferred activities or special events enhances engagement and fosters a sense of control over their learning experience.

B. PROVIDE ADVANCE WARNINGS AND TIMERS FOR TRANSITIONS

Transitions can be challenging for students with autism, but providing advance warnings and using timers can significantly reduce anxiety and resistance to change. Teachers can give verbal cues, such as, "In five minutes, we'll switch to lunch," allowing students time to be prepared mentally. For larger changes, like moving to a different classroom, visual transition cards can help ease the shift. Timers and countdowns serve as clear, structured signals, helping students predict activity changes. Displaying a countdown clock or using a timer reinforces predictability, making transitions smoother and more manageable.

C. SET CLEAR EXPECTATIONS

Having clear, consistent rules and routines in place helps students with autism understand what is expected of them, minimizing confusion and encouraging positive behaviors. Teachers can create a visual behavior chart with images alongside text to reinforce classroom rules. Positive reinforcement strategies, such as praise or small rewards, can further encourage students to follow the established expectations.

2. CREATE A SENSORY-FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT

A. OFFER FLEXIBLE SEATING OPTIONS

Students with autism may experience sensory sensitivities that impact their focus and comfort in the classroom. Providing a designated quiet area with calming tools, such as soft lighting, noise-canceling headphones, and sensory toys, allows students to self-regulate when feeling overwhelmed. Additionally, offering flexible seating options, such as standing desks, cushions, or rocking chairs, helps students manage their sensory needs while staying engaged. In addition, fluorescent lights and high levels of background noise can be overwhelming, so dimming overhead lights and using desk lamps can create a more calming environment. Allowing movement during lessons further supports self-regulation, ensuring students can participate comfortably without feeling restricted.

B. INTRODUCE SENSORY TOOLS FOR SELF-REGULATION AND FOCUS

Sensory tools play a crucial role in helping students with autism self-regulate, stay engaged, and manage anxiety during classroom activities. These tools provide calming input, especially during tasks that require attention, reducing distractions and promoting focus. Teachers can offer a variety of fidget tools, such as stress balls, textured surfaces, putty, or chewable jewelry, which students can use discreetly to channel excess energy without disrupting the class. Additionally, weighted items like lap pads, vests, or blankets offer deep pressure stimulation, helping students feel grounded and secure. Noise-reducing headphones or earplugs can also assist students who are sensitive to auditory stimuli, allowing them to concentrate better in noisy environments. By incorporating sensory tools based on individual needs, teachers can create a supportive learning environment that accommodates different sensory preferences.

3. FOSTER SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

A. ENCOURAGE PEER SUPPORT AND COLLABORATION

Encouraging peer interactions through structured support systems helps students with autism build meaningful connections and feel included in the classroom. Teachers can implement a buddy system by pairing students with autism with understanding and patient peers who can provide guidance during transitions and social interactions. Moreover, small group collaboration further enhances social engagement by providing a structured, less overwhelming environment for interaction. Teachers can assign specific roles within group activities to ensure students understand their responsibilities and feel confident in their participation. By combining peer buddy systems with structured small group activities, teachers create an inclusive and socially enriching environment that supports both learning and social development.

B. DEVELOP EMPATHY AMONG PEERS

Encouraging empathy helps create an inclusive, supportive classroom environment where students with autism feel accepted and understood. Teachers can educate the class about autism by leading discussions or activities that explain its characteristics and challenges. Celebrating diversity and highlighting individual strengths fosters a classroom culture where all students feel valued and supported.

4. IMPLEMENT DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION

A. USE VISUAL AND ALTERNATIVE COMMUNICATION SUPPORTS

Differentiating instruction is essential for supporting students with autism, as it allows teachers to tailor learning experiences to individual strengths, needs, and preferences. By incorporating visual support and alternative communication methods, educators can enhance comprehension and reduce cognitive overload. Visual aids such as charts, diagrams, and written instructions provide clarity, while step-by-step checklists help students break tasks into manageable parts, promoting independence (Kluth & Chandler-Olcott, 2008). Additionally, alternative communication methods, such as speech-to-text tools and communication boards, enable nonverbal or minimally verbal students to express their understanding effectively (Ganz et al., 2012). Graphic organizers also play a crucial role in helping students structure their thoughts, particularly for writing assignments and problem-solving activities.

B.   INTEGRATE SPECIAL INTERESTS TO BOOST ENGAGEMENT

Another effective differentiation strategy involves integrating students' special interests to enhance engagement. Research suggests that when instruction is linked to a student's preferred topics, motivation and participation significantly increase (Koegel et al., 2013). Allowing students to choose their assignment topics or project formats provides them with a sense of control and encourages deeper learning.

C.   PROVIDE MULTIPLE WAYS TO DEMONSTRATE LEARNING

Moreover, providing multiple ways to demonstrate learning ensures that students with autism can showcase their knowledge in ways that align with their strengths. Hands-on activities, such as science experiments, model-building, or interactive simulations, allow students who struggle with verbal communication to grasp abstract concepts through experiential learning (Ayres et al., 2011). Flexible assessment methods, including oral presentations, visual projects, and digital media, accommodate diverse learning preferences and reduce anxiety associated with traditional testing (Alhammadi & Sidek, 2015). Additionally, adapting the pacing of instruction by offering extended time for tasks or breaking lessons into smaller sections allows students to process information at a comfortable rate, fostering confidence and success in the learning environment. Research in the UAE highlights that many teachers support the principles of differentiated instruction but face challenges due to limited training and misconceptions about its application (Alhammadi & Sidek, 2015). A more recent study conducted in Ras Al Khaimah found that teachers' preparedness to support children with autism is often hindered by gaps in knowledge and professional development, particularly regarding communication needs and classroom accommodations (Clarke et al., 2024).

CONCLUSION

Beyond the classroom, policymakers and stakeholders including school principals, education leaders, parents, and specialists play a crucial role in ensuring that inclusive education is implemented effectively. School administrators and education policymakers should advocate for policies that promote accessibility, provide adequate resources, and ensure that teachers receive specialized training in autism education. Funding for assistive technology, sensory-friendly classroom modifications, and professional development can greatly enhance the learning experience for students with autism.

Additionally, collaboration between schools, families, therapists, and community organizations is essential to creating a cohesive support system that extends beyond the classroom. In addition, parents and caregivers should be actively involved in the decision-making process, working alongside educators to create individualized education plans (IEPs) tailored to each child's needs.

Furthermore, universities and teacher training programs must integrate autism awareness and evidence-based teaching strategies into teacher certification programs, ensuring that future educators are well-equipped to support neurodiverse learners. By fostering collaboration between policymakers, educators, families, and the broader community, we can create a society that truly embraces neurodiversity and empowers all students to succeed.

REFERENCES

Alhammadi, A., & Sidek, H. (2015). Differentiated instruction in the UAE: Teacher preparedness and challenges in supporting students with autism. International Journal of Special Education, 30(2), 29-43.

Aljunied, M., & Frederickson, N. (2014). The social communication abilities of children with autism: Understanding language processing and its impact on education. Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 44(10), 2451-2465. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-014-2137-x.

American Psychiatric Association. (2013). Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (5th ed.). American Psychiatric Publishing.

Ayres, K. M., Lang, R., & Charman, T. (2011). Hands-on learning for students with autism: A review of experimental studies. Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 41(5), 465-480. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-010-1072-4

Clarke, A., Jones, M., & El-Bialy, S. (2024). Teacher preparedness for autism support in Ras Al Khaimah: A case study on professional development and knowledge gaps. International Journal of Inclusive Education, 28(2), 83-98.

Ganz, M. L., Hong, J., & O'Reilly, M. (2012). The use of speech-to-text tools for children with autism spectrum disorders: Effects on communication. Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders, 6(1), 114-121. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rasd.2011.02.009

Goldson, E. (2004). Understanding autism: The journey from diagnosis to education. Special Education Review, 28(3), 14-22.

Koegel, L. K., Vernon, T. W., & Koegel, R. L. (2013). Increasing motivation and engagement in children with autism through interest-based intervention. Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 43(8), 1813-1822. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-012-1715-4

Mandy, W. (2023). Social communication and autism: Understanding difficulties in social interaction. Autism Research and Practice, 1(4), 45-60.

McKenney, A. (2022). The need for predictability in autism: Routines as tools for emotional regulation. Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 52(6), 1987-1996. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-022-05560-4.

UAE Ministry of Education. (2019). School for All: National Policy for Empowering People of Determination. UAE Ministry of Education. https://www.moe.gov.ae

Williams, M. (2021). Sensory sensitivities in children with autism: A review of current research and educational implications. Journal of Autism Spectrum Disorders, 51(2), 210-222. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-020-04639-5

World Health Organization. (2023). Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD): A global perspective. WHO. https://www.who.int

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

HADEEL ADNAN is a passionate educator with 18 years of experience, specializing in primary teaching, supporting students with special needs, and promoting awareness about neurodiversity. She holds a Master's degree in Special and Inclusive Education from the British University in Dubai, she is dedicated to creating inclusive and impactful learning experiences for all students and educators. Throughout her career, she has remained committed to overcoming challenges and fostering an environment of inclusion and support for diverse learning needs.

ARTICLE 4.
# REACHING ALL LEARNERS

Maisa Obeid
Expo City Dubai
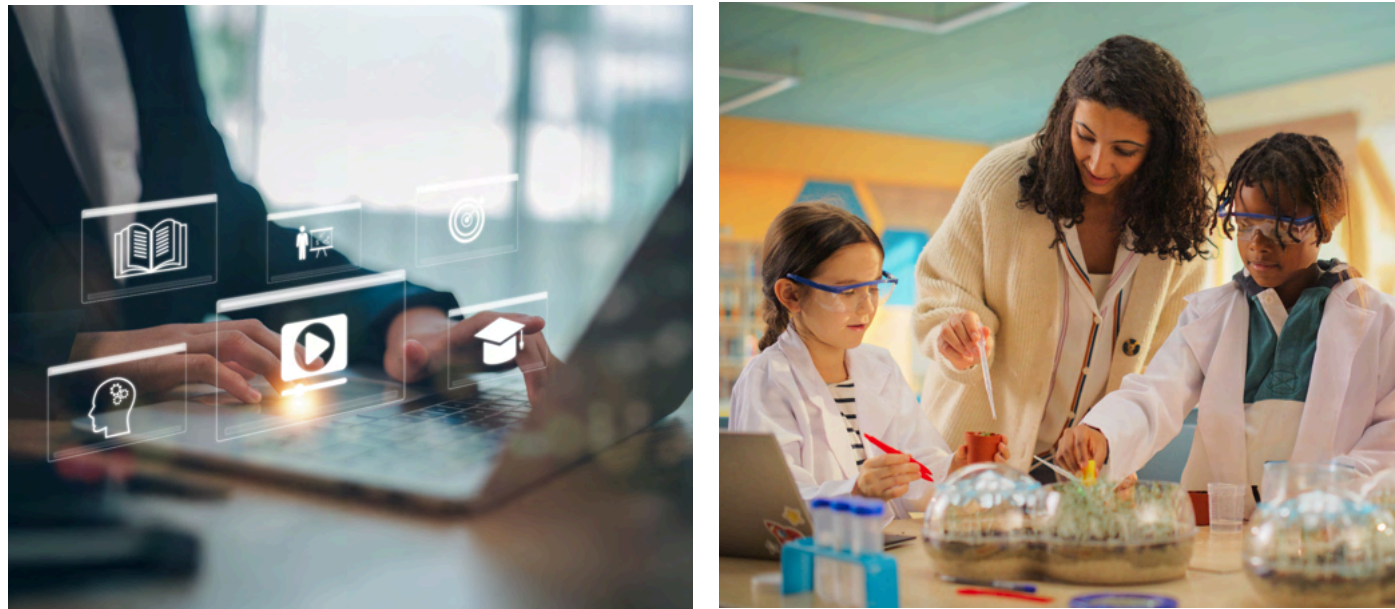
As educational environments continue to evolve, today's classrooms are becoming increasingly diverse, comprising students from a wide range of geographic regions, socio-cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, as well as varying educational experiences and learning preferences (De Wit, 2019). This growing diversity contributes to more complex classroom dynamics, requiring educators to adopt innovative strategies to meet the unique needs of their students (Awang-Hashim et al., 2019). It is essential for leadership and faculty to foster a flexible and inclusive learning environment that provides equal opportunities for all students, regardless of their physical and cognitive abilities or background.

Research highlights that diversity in the classroom is not a challenge but also a significant opportunity for enrichment. A diverse classroom enhances student learning by fostering critical thinking, effective communication, and problem-solving skills, as well as improving creativity and active participation (Awang-Hashim et al., 2019; Sanger et al., 2020). For instance, diversity in pedagogy, curricula, and student identities contributes to broader perspectives and a more engaging learning experience (Awang-Hashim et al., 2019)

Conversely, failing to address the needs of diverse learners effectively can have adverse consequences. Students may experience reduced engagement, limited participation (Thomas et al., 2005), and inequitable access to education, which can ultimately undermine their learning outcomes (Cohen, 2000). Therefore, adopting inclusive practices that prioritize equity, and individuation is crucial to managing diversity and ensuring that all students thrive in education.

The aim of this article is to share best practices and highlight the built-in accessibility features available on most devices that support students, teachers, parents, and all users—benefiting everyone, not just those with additional support needs. The article is divided into three main sections: the first explores how technology plays a key role in promoting inclusivity by providing built-in accessibility tools that benefit a wide range of learners; the second provides a deeper look into accessibility tools that educators can use to enhance learning access; and the third focuses on tools specifically designed to support students in improving their access to educational content.
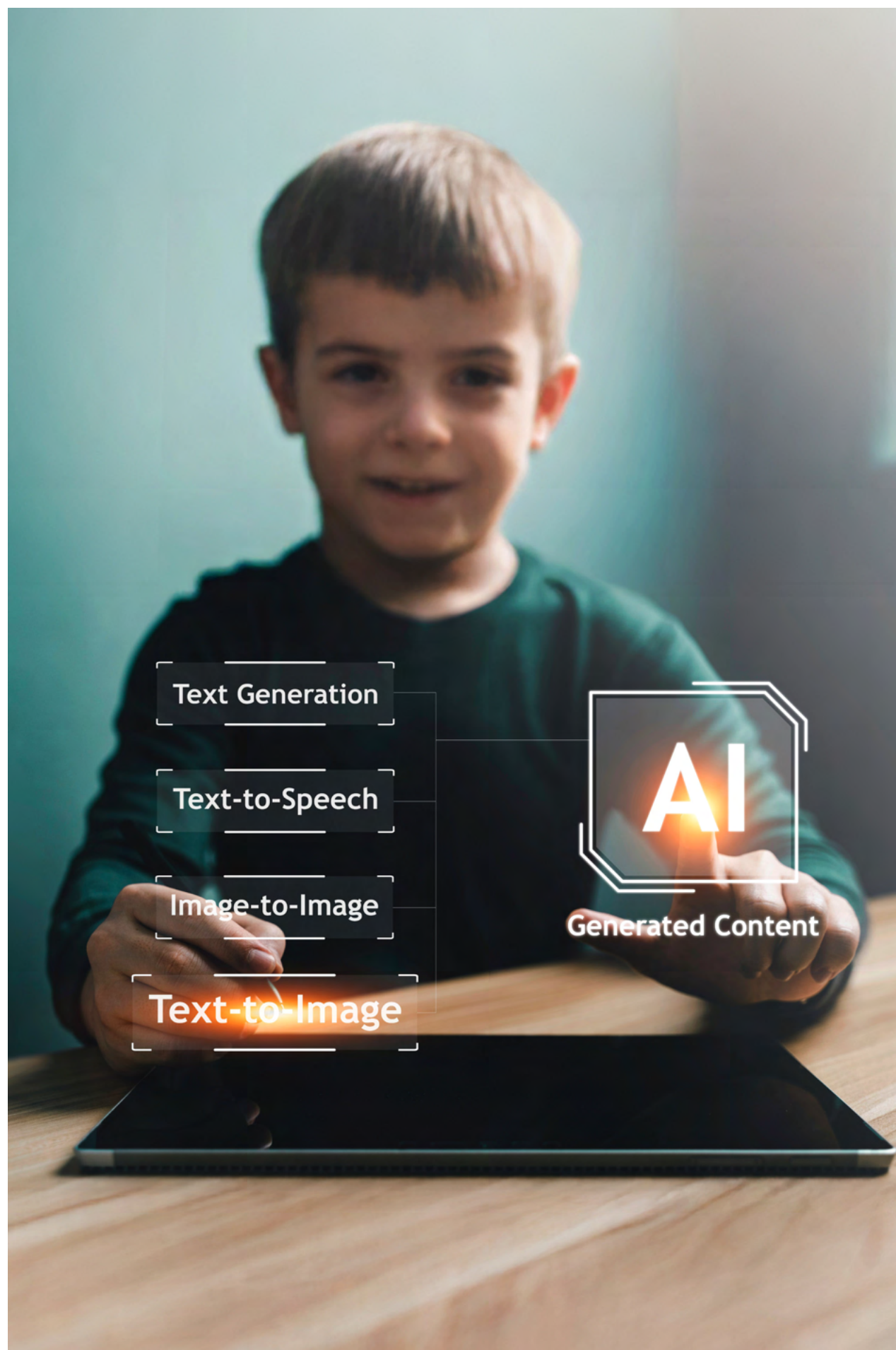
1.   INTRODUCTION

Building on the positive aspects of diversity in education, technology has become a powerful tool for promoting inclusivity in the classroom. Inclusive education goes beyond addressing disabilities; it embraces the full spectrum of diversity—linguistic, cultural, religious, ethnic, and socioeconomic. By recognizing and responding to these varied needs, inclusive practices ensure that every student feels valued and supported (Stentiford & Koutsouris, 2022). Leading technology companies such as Apple, Google, and Microsoft have integrated advanced accessibility features into their platforms to help achieve this goal. These features cater to students with diverse abilities, learning preferences, and backgrounds, ensuring equitable access to education for all. For example, text-to-speech functionality, once considered a specialized assistive technology primarily for children with learning disabilities, such as dyslexia, has now become a standard feature across most devices, platforms, and apps. This widespread adoption reflects a shift toward universal design principles, where accessibility features are seamlessly integrated to benefit all learners, regardless of their abilities. By embedding tools like text-to-speech into everyday technology, these companies have not only enhanced access for students with disabilities but have also enriched the learning experience for a broader audience. This plays a pivotal role in ensuring the accessibility of digital content, ultimately enhancing the educational experience for all students (Walters, 2022).

Additionally, these accessibility features can be utilized by both teachers and students without incurring any cost or placing an extra load on teachers. Integrated directly into devices and apps, these tools are ready to use and require no additional setup. For teachers, this means more time to focus on instruction rather than managing assistive technologies, while students can independently leverage these features to meet their individual learning needs. This dual benefit underscores the role of technology in creating a seamless and inclusive educational environment. The following sections will focus on accessibility tools that educators can use to foster inclusive education and support their teaching practices.

2.   ACCESSIBILITY TOOLS FOR EDUCATORS

These tools are designed to enhance instruction and create an inclusive learning environment for all students, including students of determination. By integrating these features into their teaching practices, educators can foster better engagement and ensure equal opportunities for every learner.

2.1.   CAPTIONING FEATURES

Live Caption is a built-in feature available across platforms such as Google, Microsoft, and Apple. It provides real-time transcription of spoken content, converting speech into text instantly. This feature is especially beneficial for students with hearing impairments, language processing challenges, or learning difficulties, as well as for students who are learning in a second language (Walters, 2022). It also supports learners who may be in noisy environments where hearing spoken content clearly is difficult. PowerPoint Live Captions, available through Microsoft, offers similar support by displaying live subtitles during presentations, further enhancing accessibility during lectures and instructional sessions. PowerPoint Live Captions stand out as one of the most powerful tools for inclusive education. Whether in a traditional classroom or virtual setting, this feature enables teachers to add captions to their presentations, ensuring accessibility and better engagement for all students.
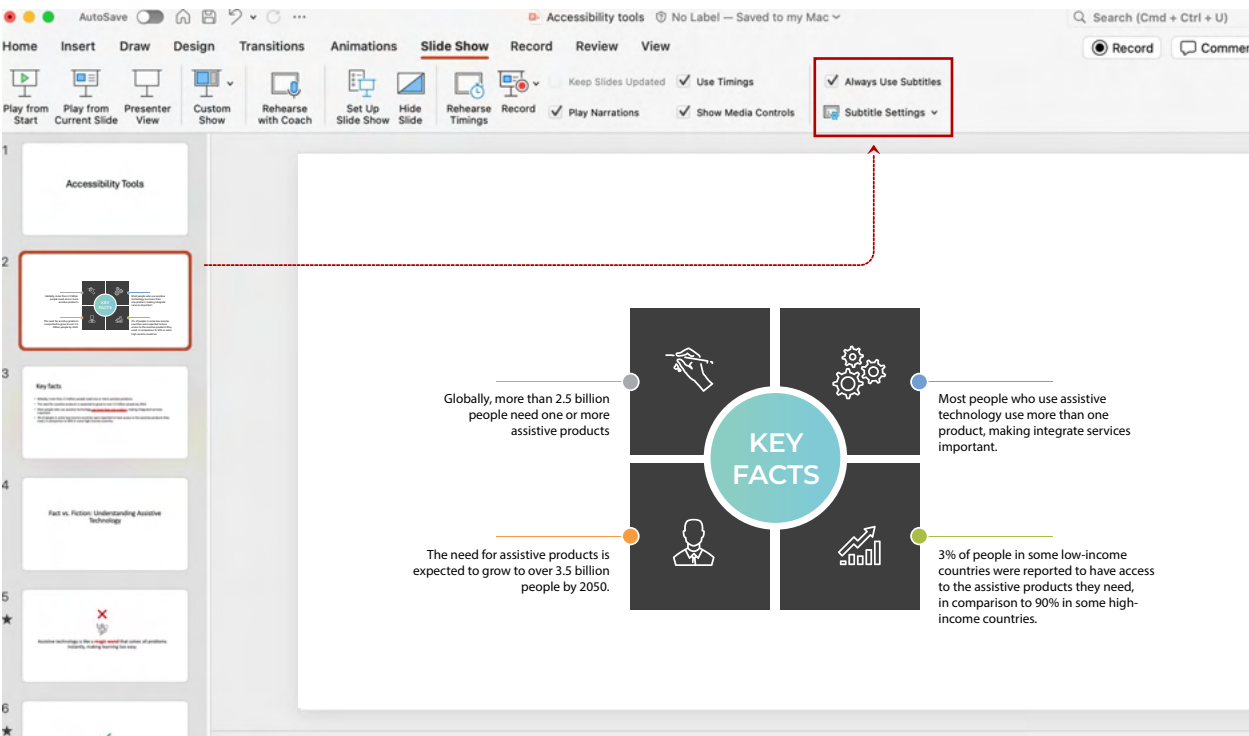
Captioning features offer several advantages in educational settings. Their flexibility allows them to adapt to various teaching formats, including live lectures, hybrid learning, and pre-recorded sessions, making them suitable for a wide range of instructional approaches. These features also enhance comprehension for diverse learners, including students with hearing impairments, non-native speakers, and those who benefit from both visual and auditory input (dual-modal learning). Additionally, captioning tools are generally easy to use, requiring minimal setup and integrating smoothly into existing teaching practices.

However, there are a few considerations to keep in mind when using captioning features. The availability and functionality of these tools often depend on the specific device being used—older models may not support real-time captioning. Furthermore, when external audio systems or microphones are used, it is important to ensure they are properly connected and configured to enable accurate and effective captioning performance.
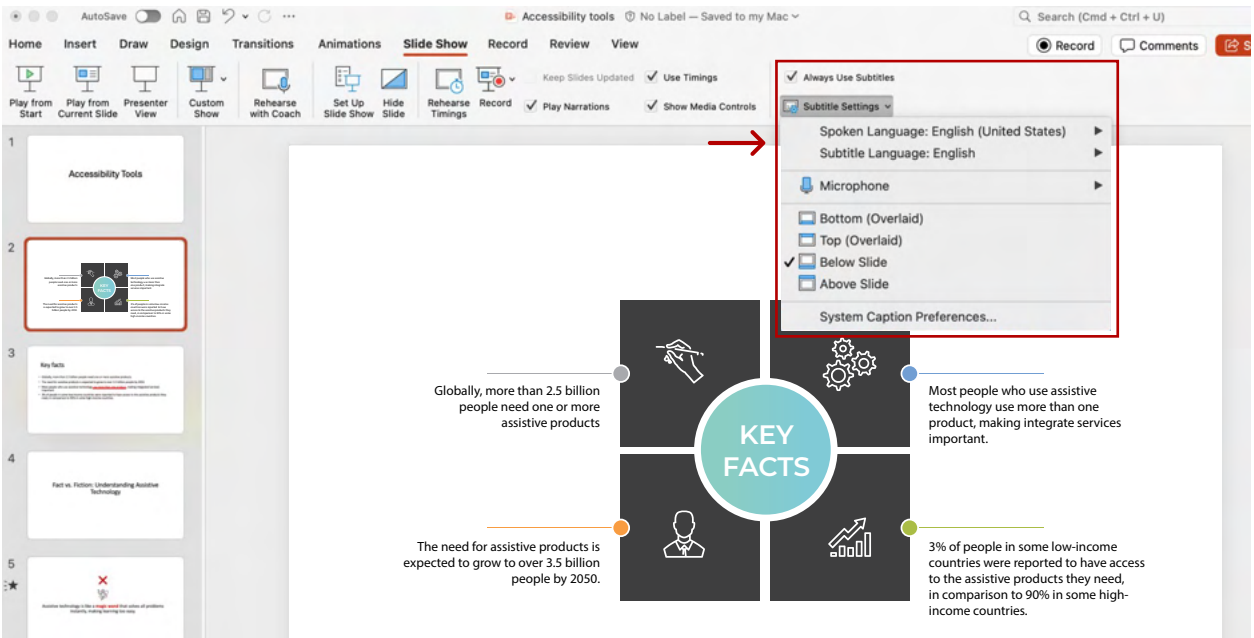
2.2.   LIVE TRANSLATION

To take accessibility to the next level, teachers can use Microsoft Translator to foster an inclusive and multilingual classroom environment. This powerful tool provides real-time translation and transcription, helping educators break language barriers and support diverse learners. Here's how teachers can use it effectively:

2.2.1. LIVE TRANSLATION FOR CLASSROOM

Teachers can speak in English while students view a live transcript in their preferred language, such as Arabic, Spanish, or any other supported language. This feature is particularly helpful for students who are still developing proficiency in English, have recently transitioned to an English-medium environment, or experience language processing challenges. It is also valuable for students in higher education—especially when engaging with complex subjects that are not related to language learning, such as science, engineering, or mathematics—where the focus is on understanding content rather than building language skills. While this tool should not replace language acquisition, it can serve as a temporary support to aid comprehension. When used thoughtfully, it helps ensure students remain engaged and included without compromising their long-term language development.

Live Translation in PowerPoint

2.2.2. SUPPORTING GROUP WORK

Microsoft Translator can facilitate collaboration among multilingual students during group activities. Students can participate in discussions using their own languages, with real-time translations helping everyone understand and contribute effectively.

2.2.3. ENHANCING PARENT-TEACHER COMMUNICATION

Teachers can use Microsoft Translator to communicate with parents who speak different languages. Whether during parent-teacher meetings or in written correspondence, real-time translations ensure clear and inclusive communication, fostering stronger partnerships with families.

2.3. TOOLS TO SUPPORT EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS

Students with hidden disabilities (ADHD, Learning disabilities) often face challenges in maintaining focus, staying organized, and completing tasks. While technology can sometimes act as a distraction, it also offers powerful tools to support teachers in facilitating executive functions for these students. These tools are designed to help educators create structured environments that enable students to stay on track and achieve their goals, fostering productivity and success in the classroom.

Tools like Guided Access on Apple devices and Google Classroom by Google play an important role in supporting inclusive and focused learning environments. Guided Access allows teachers to temporarily lock an iPad to a single app, preventing students from switching to other apps or accessing specific areas of the screen. Teachers can also disable hardware buttons, set time limits, and control touch inputs—making it especially useful for students who are easily distracted or require additional support to stay engaged. This feature is ideal during assessments, one-on-one sessions, or when directing student attention to a single learning task (Apple Support, n.d.).

Meanwhile, Google Classroom provides a useful platform that enables educators to streamline assignments, improve communication, and create a more organized and accessible experience for all students. With features that support managing deadlines, prioritizing tasks, and structuring workloads, it helps meet diverse learner needs in both physical and digital classrooms Google Accessibility, n.d.).

Guided Access for IPad
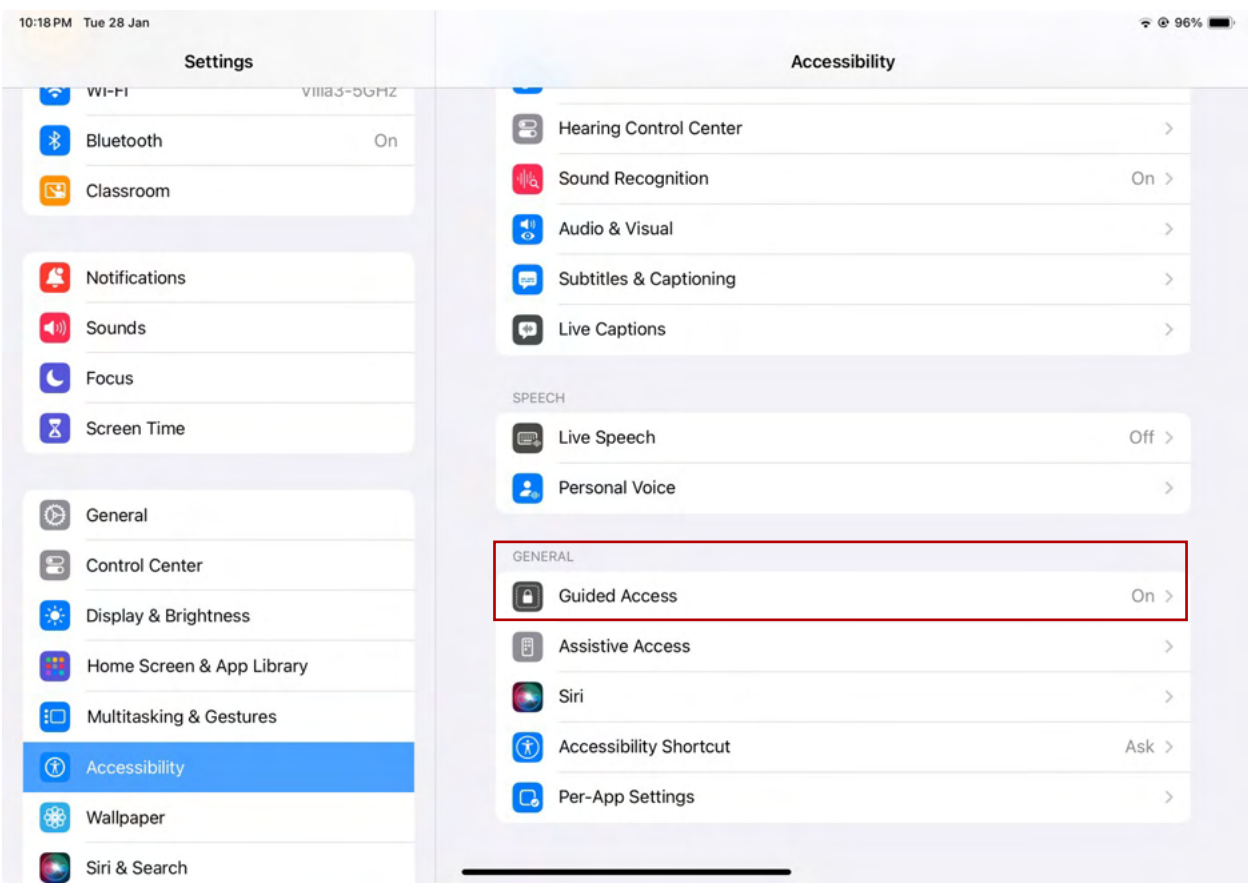
3. ACCESSIBILITY TOOLS FOR STUDENTS

3.1. TEXT-TO-SPEECH (TTS)

TTS technology is widely available across major platforms, offering essential support for learners who benefit from auditory reinforcement. On Apple devices, features like Speak Screen and Speak Selection are built into iOS and macOS, allowing users to have selected text or entire screens read aloud. These tools are especially useful for students with dyslexia and for second-language learners. or other reading difficulties. Google provides similar functionality through Select-to-Speak, available on Chromebooks and Android devices, which enables users to highlight text and hear it read aloud.

Additionally, Google Chrome offers extensions such as Read&Write that enhance text-to-speech functionality and offer a range of literacy support tools; however, accessing the full feature set in the toolbar may require a subscription. On Microsoft platforms, the Read Aloud feature allows users to listen to full or partial documents and can be used either independently or integrated within Immersive Reader, a tool designed to support reading comprehension and focus. These cross-platform features make it easier for students to access content in a format that suits their individual learning needs, fostering greater independence and engagement in the learning process.

Read & Write Extension in Chrome
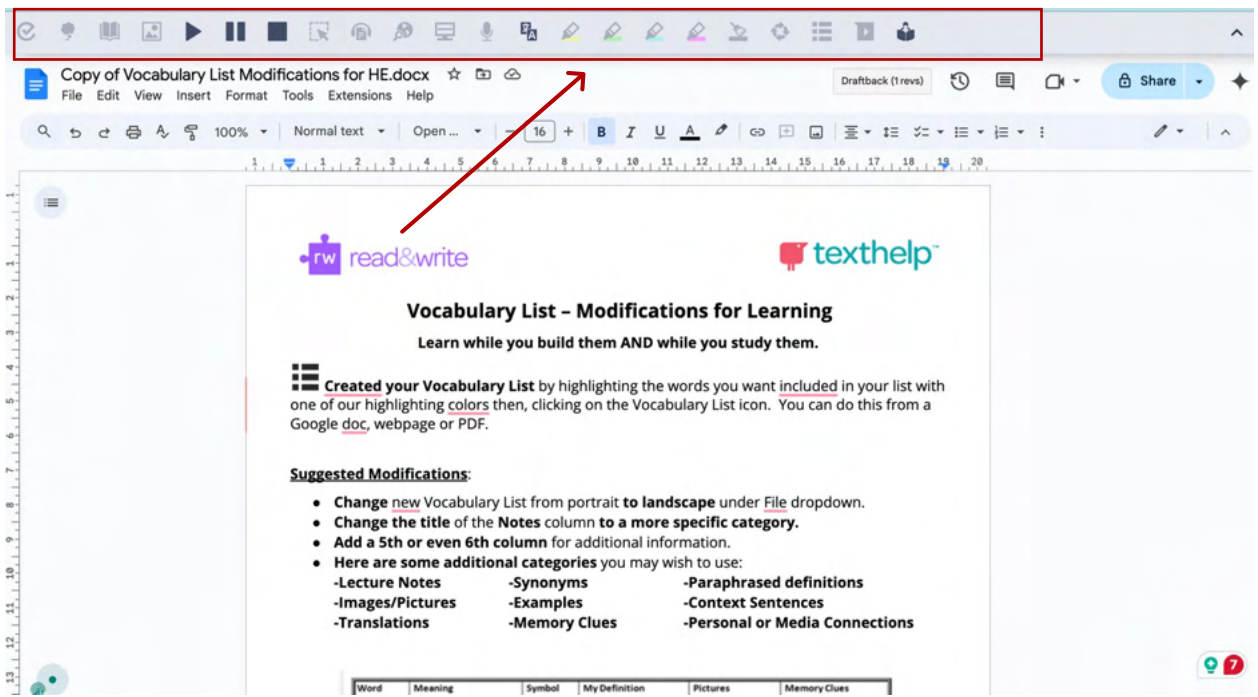
3.2. DICTATION

Built-in dictionary tools are helpful resources that promote understanding, vocabulary development, and accessibility. These tools cater to a wide range of learners, including those with language processing challenges, non-native speakers, and students of all abilities.

Apple provides several built-in tools to support vocabulary development and reading comprehension. The Look Up feature, available on both iOS and macOS, allows users to highlight a word and instantly access its definition, synonyms, and pronunciation. This is particularly helpful for students encountering unfamiliar terms while reading digital texts. Siri integration also enables users to ask for word definitions hands-free, which is especially beneficial for students with physical disabilities, visual impairments, or those who find voice interaction more accessible. For example, a student reading an article on Safari can ask, "Hey Siri, what does ecosystem mean?" and receive an instant explanation, helping them stay focused and engaged.

Google offers a variety of vocabulary support tools that benefit diverse learners. Through Google Search, students can type or say, "Define [word]" and receive immediate definitions, pronunciation guides, synonyms, and example sentences. This is valuable for students learning English as a second language or those who need quick clarification without breaking concentration. Additionally, Chrome extensions such as Google Dictionary allow users to double-click on any word within a webpage to view a pop-up definition. This feature benefits students with learning difficulties or attention challenges by supporting comprehension without disrupting the reading process. For instance, a student exploring a science article online can click on "photosynthesis" and instantly understand the term.

Microsoft also integrates vocabulary tools directly into its applications, supporting a range of learning needs. In Microsoft Word, the built-in dictionary allows users to access definitions, synonyms, and translations simply by selecting a word. This is particularly useful for multilingual students and those writing academic content who may need quick reference to language support. The dictionary also works in combination with tools like Immersive Reader, offering auditory reinforcement, syllable breakdown, and enhanced text spacing. These features support students with dyslexia, visual impairments, or processing challenges by making written content more accessible and easier to understand.

3.3. IMMERSIVE READER

Immersive Reader is a powerful accessibility tool designed to support diverse learning needs through a variety of features that enhance reading and comprehension (Microsoft Support, n.d.). Its text-to-speech function reads aloud content with synchronized word highlighting, making it particularly helpful for students with dyslexia or other reading challenges. Users can customize the voice speed and selection to improve clarity and engagement. The focus mode allows readers to isolate a specific line or section of text by dimming the surrounding content, which reduces visual distractions and supports students with attention difficulties and ADHD.

To further improve readability, Immersive Reader offers customizable text display options, including adjustable font size, spacing, and color themes, as well as a dyslexia-friendly font that helps reduce reading strain. Grammar tools support language development by breaking down words into syllables and highlighting parts of speech—such as nouns, verbs, and adjectives—in distinct colors. The translation feature enhances accessibility for multilingual learners by offering instant translation into different languages, many of which also include read-aloud functionality. Finally, the picture dictionary provides visual representations of selected words, making it especially effective for learners who benefit from visual reinforcement in vocabulary development. It is worth mentioning that access to full functionality may depend on whether you are using the online version or the native app. It is worth mentioning that access to full functionality may depend on whether you are using the online version or the native Microsoft app.
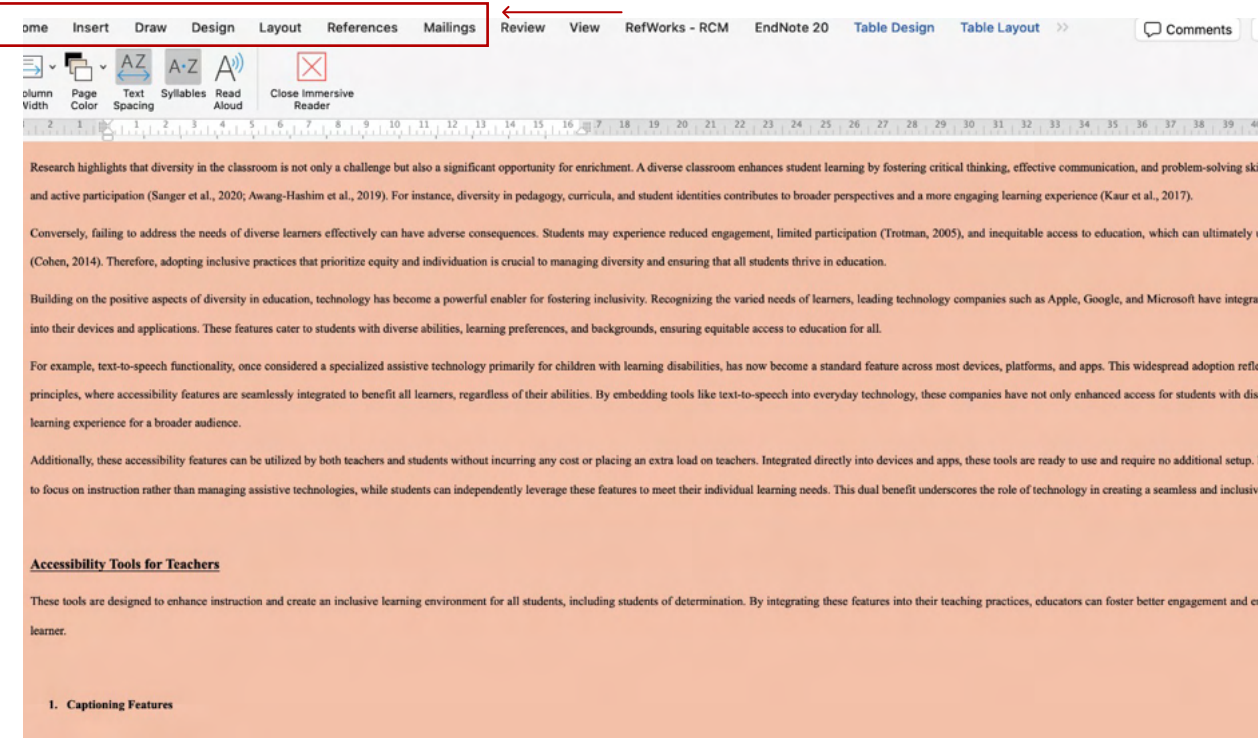
CONCLUSION

In conclusion, as classrooms continue to become more diverse, the thoughtful integration of accessibility tools is essential for creating inclusive and equitable learning environments (Radtke & Kontio, 2019). The free, built-in features offered by Apple, Google, and Microsoft provide educators with practical, scalable solutions to support all learners. These tools help remove barriers, streamline inclusive practices, and foster greater independence and engagement among students. By embracing these technologies, educators are not only meeting diverse needs but actively cultivating a learning culture that values and builds upon the strengths of every student.

REFERENCES

Apple Support. (n.d.). Lock iPad to one app with Guided Access.

https://support.apple.com/guide/ipad/lock-ipad-to-one-app-ipada16d1374/18.0/ipados/18.0

Awang-Hashim, R., Kaur, A., & Nena, P. V. (2019). Strategizing Inclusivity in Teaching Diverse Learners in Higher Education. Malaysian Journal of Learning & Instruction, 16 (1), 105-128. https://doi.org/10.32890/mjli2019.16.1.5

Cohen, E. G. (2000). Equitable classrooms in a changing society. In Maureen T. Hallinan (Ed.) Handbook of the sociology of education (pp. 265-283). Springer US.

De Wit, H. (2019). Evolving Concepts, Trends, and Challenges in the Internationalization of Higher Education in the World. Вопросы образования, 2, 8-34. https://doi.org/10.17323/1814-9545-2019-2-8-34

Google Accessibility. (n.d.). Products and features. https://www.google.com/accessibility/products-features/

Microsoft Support. (n.d.). Use Immersive Reader in Word.

https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/use-immersive-reader-in-word-a857949f-c91e-4c97-977c-a4efcaf9b3c1

Sanger, C. S., Sanger, C. S., & Gleason, N. W. (2020). Diversity and Inclusion in Global Higher Education Lessons from Across Asia. Springer Nature.

Stentiford, L., & Koutsouris, G. (2022). Critically considering the 'inclusive curriculum' in higher education. British Journal of Sociology of Education, 43(8), 1250-1272. https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2022.2122937

Radtke, R., & Kontio, J. (2019, 2019). An A11Y-ance: Approaches for transferring expertise to build accessibility liaisons in the campus community.

https://dl.acm.org/doi/abs/10.1145/3347709.3347797.

Thomas, L., May, H., Harrop, H., Houston, M., Knox, H., Lee, M. F., Osborne, M., Pudner, H., & Trotman, C. (2005). From the margins to the mainstream: Embedding widening participation in higher education.

https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED536168.

Walters, A. P. (2022). Evaluating the Effectiveness of Online Faculty Development in Creating Accessible Content (Publication Number 29403121) [Ph.D., The University of Toledo]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. United States -- Ohio.

http://proquest.umi.com/login/athens?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/evaluating-effectiveness-online-faculty/docview/2697183039/se-2?accountid=11979

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

MAISA OBEID is a certified international accessibility specialist and Assistive Technology Professional with over a decade of experience in accessibility and inclusion. She leads the accessibility programme at Expo City Dubai, ensuring infrastructure and services are universally accessible. Representing the UAE for G3ict, a UN-backed initiative, she actively advocates for digital inclusion for persons with disabilities. With a background in optometry and low vision rehabilitation, Maisa's work bridges healthcare and accessibility. She holds a PhD in E-Research and Technology Enhanced Learning from Lancaster University.

ARTICLE 5.
GAME-BASED LEARNING PROMOTES INCLUSIVE STRATEGIES

Cara D. Williams
Sharjah Education Academy

Think back to games you played in your childhood - perhaps Hopscotch, Jump Rope, Jenga, Connect 4, Monopoly, Mancala, Dominoes, memory games, Freeze Tag, Chess, Checkers, Hide-and-Seek, or others. Children play games to have fun! There is excitement in the unknown, curiosity about the next move, and anticipation of the outcome.

Children are naturally social beings who learn best through exploration and interaction with others (Vygotsky, 1978). As children are also inherently inquisitive, games play a critical role in the developmental characteristics and acquisition of new skills (White & McCoy, 2019; Kamish, 2019). Children

are encouraged to learn through play from birth (Chao, 2020). Parents may play Peek-a-Boo by covering their eyes and then suddenly revealing their faces to surprise the child. As children turn to toddlers, they may play Hide-and-Seek or Tag with their parents or other children. Nursery rhymes are used to help children learn language and cartoons help children learn colors, shapes, patterns, numbers, and even manners.

Games are problems in disguise (Chandler, 2017). Game-Based Learning (GBL) disguises problems with fun and enhances motivation to learn. Let's take a closer look into some components of GBL and a few suggestions of how to encourage the use of GBL in all classrooms.

WHAT IS GAME-BASED LEARNING

Educational games, entertainment games, making games, and gamification, where prizes, scores, or badges are used to attract and motivate learners, are four approaches to GBL (Kamish, 2019). GBL can be digital, such as apps and computer games, or non-digital, such as board games, card games, and physical games (Grace, 2019). GBL is learning by having fun, by doing, and through activities (Avdiu, 2019).

MOTIVATION: THE KEY TO ENGAGEMENT

Take a moment to imagine your students' faces and reactions when you say, "Clear your desks. Time for a test." There may be groans, sighs, and eye rolls. Now, picture the same students when you say, "Clear your

desks. Time to play a game." Reactions may include cheering, clapping, and excited faces. Students are more likely to pay attention and demonstrate appropriate behaviors when the learning process is enjoyable (Ambrose, 2013). What better way to expand students' curiosity and motivation for learning than through games?

Games alone have not shown to increase academic performance but do increase motivation. There is a direct positive correlation between motivation and improved academic outcomes of learners (Chen et al., 2021). Learners are more motivated to learn when having fun (Hilliard & Kargbo, 2017). Oftentimes, even the most uninterested learner finds a game to be engaging (Damron, 2019). Studies confirm that educational games are effective in motivating students to learn (Ke, 2008; Papastergiou, 2009; Tuzun et al., 2009; White & MacCoy, 2019). Students have voiced that non-traditional and hands-on activities, rather than lectures or textbooks, were enjoyable and engaging (Pennington, 2015). Research has also confirmed that GBL can be effective for developing students' intrinsic motivation and critical thinking (Cicchino, 2015; Habgood & Ainsworth, 2011).

BENEFITS OF GAME-BASED LEARNING

A 2017 national survey in the United States found that 75% of K-8 teachers were using GBL tools (Hilliard & Kargbo, 2017). For teachers to overcome students' dislikes and anxieties, the lesson must be engaging and interactive (Damron, 2019). When students play games, the focus is not on 'why' they are playing but 'what' they are playing (Avdiu, 2019).

Immediate feedback and rewards motivate students to complete a series of activities, irrespective of the teachers' desired learning outcomes (Kirstavridou et al., 2020). Students view games as a social activity and a break from traditional learning practices, which are often monotonous, and feel a greater connection between theory and practice (Damron, 2019). Students have difficulty differentiating between playing and learning when constantly engaged in GBL (Avdiu, 2019). When students view learning as meaningful and enjoyable, they also view learning as relevant (Kenny & McDaniel, 2011).

21ST CENTURY SKILLS

The four Cs of 21st century skills and GBL are collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, and communication. Early years education supports preparing students for the 21st century but the effects quickly dissipate with traditional education practices in the upper years of education. Continuing early years education practices throughout all educational years will better equip today's youth for tomorrow's future. Students need to experience the world and curriculum through a lens of mystery and wonder, rather than lecture and worksheets.

For classrooms to develop 21st-century skills, students should be provided with diverse options to learn new skills and improve knowledge (Hilliard & Kargbo,

2017). Team-based board games have been shown to enhance not only learning, but also communication, collaboration, and risk taking (Juhász, 2021). GBL supports the enhancement of students' engagement, coordination, and creativity while motivating learners to generalize knowledge from diverse disciplines to utilize in decision-making processes (Boctor, 2013). GBL may not be more effective than other learning approaches for educational potential but has the advantage for greater potential with increasing students' motivation (Pho & Dinscore, 2015).

HEALTHY COMPETITION IN LEARNING

Games often have a competitive component, where players or teams aim to win. Not all students respond positively to competition or the stress of finishing a task before a timer goes off. Teachers must carefully design game-based activities to ensure inclusivity.

For students thriving on competition, having a winning player or team could be exciting. Just remember to emphasize positive sportsmanship. Encourage the winning team cheer on the other teams, having the other teams congratulate the winning team, and requiring all students to speak positively before, during, and after the game.

For students preferring a less competitive approach, focus on accuracy rather than speed. Points can be awarded for correct responses rather than only to the first correct response. For team games, consider requiring group discussions before answering rather than having only one person answer for the team. Helping students set personal goals fosters a growth mindset rather than comparison-based motivation. Healthy competition is part of effective communication and collaboration. Learning to work effectively as a team is an essential skill for the 21st century.

THE DECLINE OF PLAY IN EDUCATION

In Kindergarten, the concepts of play and games are a priority. Students are encouraged to sing, dance, and socialize. Learning is comprised of hands-on activities, such as coloring, painting, playing with blocks, or role play. Students are rewarded for trying and participating.

As students progress through school, the concepts of play and games begin to fade away. Students are instructed to remain seated, still, and silent. Learning through play is replaced by lecture and games are replaced with worksheets. The joy of learning is often diminished, yet research suggests that interactive, game-based approaches are more effective for engagement and retention.

WORKSHEETS ARE BORING

Would you rather complete a worksheet or play a game? Most students will choose to play a game. What if there were a way to play a game and complete a worksheet simultaneously?

Teachers are often required to have students complete certain assignments to show proficiency in specific learning outcomes. Here is a suggestion to play a game and still complete the required worksheets.

1.   Turn worksheets into game questions

   • Copy worksheet questions onto notecards or paper squares, laminate them, and cut them out.

      ◦ You can even create similar questions to diversify the quantity and difficulty of the questions.

   • Now, you have a stack of content-aligned questions.

2.   Combine with a game

   • Have students work in small groups and choose a game like UNO, Snakes and Ladders, or Pictionary.

   • Before each turn, students must answer a question card correctly to proceed.

   • The content is reinforced, and students are engaged while having fun with peers.

3.   Assess understanding informally

   • At the end of the class, assign the original worksheet as an informal assessment to gauge student understanding and to comply with school requirements.

DIFFERENTIATION AND GBL: A PERFECT MATCH

Differentiated instruction scaffolds the content, process, and product of learning outcomes based on students' interests, readiness, or learning profile, including auditory, kinesthetic, and visual. Although the myth of students having one main profile for learning has been debunked, incorporating a multimodal approach to learning, using auditory, visual, and kinesthetic activities, has been shown effective.

GBL and differentiated instruction are a perfect combination. Games can be selected and adapted based on students' interests. The curriculum content paired with the game can be adapted to each student's readiness. When the game is being played, the learners will focus on individual, or small group, tasks with the main objective being to complete the game while learning objectives are being practiced. Combining GBL with differentiated instruction is an effective way to motivate students and support academic achievement. "

CONCLUSION

GBL is a powerful educational tool that enhances motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes. By integrating games into lessons, teachers can create interactive and dynamic learning environments that foster curiosity, critical thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving. Whether through digital or non-digital games, competitive or cooperative formats, GBL accommodates diverse learning styles and promotes meaningful, student-centered learning experiences. As traditional lecture-based instruction continues to dominate many classrooms, teachers should consider reintroducing the joy of play to make learning more impactful and memorable. By embracing GBL, educators can help students develop essential 21st-century skills and cultivate a lifelong love for learning. At the start of the article, you were asked, "Why do children play games?" Perhaps a better question is, "Why do adults stop playing games?"

For more teaching strategies and content on special education, subscribe to my YouTube channel.

www.youtube.com/@DrCara

REFERENCES

Ambrose, S.A. (2013). How learning works: Seven research-based principles for smart teaching.

Jossey-Bass.

Avdiu, E. (2019). Game-Based Learning Practices in Austrian Elementary Schools. Educational Process: International Journal, 8(3), 196-206. http://dx.doi.org/10.22521/edupij.2019.83.4

Boctor, L. (2013). Active-learning strategies: The use of a game to reinforce learning in nursing education. A case study. Nurse Education in Practice, 13(2), 96-100.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nepr.2012.07.010

Chandler, S. (2017). Reinventing yourself: How to become the person you've always wanted to be. New Page Books

Chao, C. & Fan, S. (2020). The effects of integrating board games into ice-breaking activities in a fifth-grade english class to reduce students' anxieties. English Language Teaching, 13(9), 40-49.

https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v13n9p40

Chen, I. H., Yang, Y. T. C., Wu, W. C., & Chiang, W. C. (2012). The relationship between academic abilities and internal/external thinking styles on digital game flow experience (pp. 911-918). In T. Bastiaens & G. Marks (Eds.), Proceedings of E-Learn: World Conference on E-Learning in Corporate, Government, Healthcare, and Higher Education 2012. Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education

Cicchino, M. I. (2015). Using game-based learning to foster critical thinking in student discourse. Interdisciplinary Journal of Problem-Based Learning, 9(2).

https://doi.org/10.7771/1541-5015.1481

Grace, L. (2019). Doing things with games: Social impact through play. Routledge.

Habgood, M., & Ainsworth, S. (2011). Motivating children to learn effectively: Exploring the value of intrinsic integration in educational games. Journal of the Learning Sciences, 20(2), 169-206.

https://doi.org/10.1080/10508406.2010.508029

Hilliard, A. & Kargbo, H. F. (2017). Educationally game-based learning encourages learners to be actively engaged in their own learning. International Journal of Education and Practice, 5(4), 45-60.

https://doi.org/10.18488/journal.61.2017.54.45.60

Juhász, A. (2021): Primary school teachers' attitude to board-games and their board-game playing practice, Acta Didactica Napocensia, 14(1), 182-187.

https://doi.org/10.24193/adn.14.1.15

Kamish, H. (2019). On primary school teachers' training needs in relation to game-based learning. International Journal of Curriculum and Instruction, 11(2), 285-296.

Ke, F., (2008). A case study of computer gaming for math: Engaged learning from gameplay? Computers & Education, 51(4), 1609–1620.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2008.03.003

Kenny, R.F.K. & R. McDaniel (2011). The role teachers" expectations and value assessments of video games play in their adopting and integrating them into their classrooms. British Journal of Educational Technology, 42(2),197–213.

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8535.2009.01007.x

Kirstavridou, D., Kousaris, K., Zafeiriou, C., & Tzafilkou, K. (2020). Types of game-based learning in education: A brief state of the art and the implementation in Greece. The European Educational Researcher, 3(2), 87-100.

https://doi.org/10.31757/euer.324

Papastergiou, M., (2009). Digital game-based learning in high school computer science education: Impact on educational effectiveness and student motivation. Computers and Education, 52(1), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2008.06.004

Pennington, S. E. (2015). Inquiry into teaching: Using reflective teaching to improve my practice. Networks, 17(1), 1-11.

https://doi.org/10.4148/2470-6353.1036

Pho, A., & Dinscore, A. (2015). Game-based learning. Tips and trends.

https://acrl.ala.org/IS/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/spring2015.pdf

Tuzun, H., M. Yilmaz-Soylu, T. Karakus, Y. Inal and G. Kizilkaya (2009). The effects of computer games on primary school students' achievement and motivation in geography learning. Computers & Education, 52(1), 68-77.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2008.06.008

White, K. & McCoy, L. P. (2019). Effects of game-based learning on attitude and achievement in elementary mathematics. Networks: An Online Journal for Teacher Research 21(1).

https://doi.org/10.4148/2470-6353.1259

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes. Harvard University Press.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Cara D. Williams, began her journey in U.S. K-12 classrooms, where she first discovered her passion for supporting students with learning differences, such as Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Dr. Cara's passion carried her across the globe to Abu Dhabi, where she currently serves as an Assistant Professor at Sharjah Education Academy. With over 20 years of experience, Dr. Cara has become a sought-after speaker on diverse learning needs and at-risk populations, sharing her insights with audiences both near and far. Her research, rooted in real-world classroom experience, explores the power of game-based learning, curriculum-based measurement, and innovative strategies in special and mathematics education.

ARTICLE 6.
FOSTERING INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE EDUCATION THROUGH THE IMPACT 360 PROJECT

D. Samah Mohamed Al Thehli
Ministry of Education
United Arab Emirates (UAE)

BACKGROUND OF THE THE IMPACT 360 PROJECT

The Impact 360 project, implemented under my leadership as a Cluster Manager across K-12 schools in Abu Dhabi, exemplifies a comprehensive approach to fostering inclusive and equitable education. Designed to address systemic challenges such as academic disparities, leadership gaps, limited community engagement, and operational inefficiencies, the project adopts a multi-faceted methodology to transform schools into collaborative, sustainable, and inclusive environments. Through data-driven planning, targeted training programs, and structured community engagement, the project empowered educators, students, and parents to embrace shared accountability and innovation. It achieved measurable outcomes, including improved academic performance, enhanced leadership capacity, and increased parental satisfaction. By aligning with the UAE's vision for educational excellence and inclusivity, Impact 360 provides a scalable model for global education systems. This paper outlines the methodology, implementation strategies, and outcomes, demonstrating how practical, equity-focused initiatives can drive sustainable change and redefine educational success.

1. INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is vital for building equitable, thriving societies, ensuring all students—regardless of abilities or circumstances—access high-quality education. In the UAE, this vision aligns with the Ministry of Education's Strategic Direction 2023-2026, which promotes equity, well-being, and lifelong learning while preparing students for future skills and national competitiveness (Ministry of Education UAE, 2023). However, achieving true inclusivity requires addressing systemic challenges like academic disparities, leadership gaps, and insufficient community engagement.

The Impact 360 Project bridges these gaps through inclusive, innovative learning environments. Implemented across nine K-12 government schools in Abu Dhabi, the initiative focuses on equity, collaboration, and cultural pride. Its key objectives include supporting students of determination, empowering marginalized leadership, and strengthening community ties through culturally relevant programs.

This article examines the design, implementation, and outcomes of Impact 360, positioning it as a transformative model for fostering equity and collaboration while achieving educational excellence.

2. CONTEXT AND RATIONALE

The journey toward inclusive and equitable education reveals not only systemic challenges but also deeply rooted barriers that impact the effectiveness of schools. Across the nine K-12 government schools in Abu Dhabi, several critical issues emerged that the Impact 360 Project was designed to address:

1. Academic disparities arise from socioeconomic differences, family disruptions, and unequal resource access, affecting student performance, motivation, attendance, and focus.

2. Leadership gaps were evident due to a lack of diverse middle management leadership, which limited schools' ability to address student needs effectively. Additionally, leadership turnover and limited opportunities hindered innovation and sustainability (Abdallah & Forawi, 2017).

3. Community engagement was limited, as weak parental involvement and stakeholder collaboration hindered the creation of a unified school culture. This disconnect reduced trust and excluded families from meaningful participation in decision-making.

4. Operational inefficiencies such as bureaucratic delays, inconsistent communication, and the absence of streamlined digital platforms hindered innovation, inclusive practice implementation, and effective interactions with both parents and staff.

5. Teacher motivation and communication were negatively impacted by low teacher morale and weak communication with leadership. This led to professional isolation, reduced collaboration, and stagnation in classroom routines and innovation.

TRANSFORMING SCHOOL CULTURE THROUGH IMPACT 360:

One of the most transformative outcomes of the Impact 360 Project was breaking down these barriers. The project provided teachers and staff with opportunities to step outside their classroom routines and connect with new colleagues, fostering professional relationships and collaboration. Teachers discovered new opportunities for growth, exchanging knowledge, information, and skills with peers across schools.

The project created a vibrant culture of collaboration and innovation, empowering teachers as the primary contributors to its success. By leading committees, adopting change, and inspiring others, they played a pivotal role in creating a positive and inclusive school environment. This collective effort added immense value to all staff members, particularly teachers, who found renewed purpose and a sense of professional fulfilment.

THE RATIONALE BEHIND IMPACT 360:

- Inclusive education is not solely about addressing individual student needs; rather, it demands systemic transformation that empowers all stakeholders and fosters equity, collaboration, and innovation. This approach aligns with the UAE's national vision for a forward-looking and transformative educational system.

- The Impact 360 Project was developed to respond to these complex challenges through a structured and phased implementation model. One of its central aims is to empower leadership, particularly among second-tier leaders, by building their capacity to drive meaningful and sustainable change. As Fullan (2011) emphasizes, leadership practices rooted in change theory play a pivotal role in school improvement.

- Equally important is motivating teachers and staff by creating clear pathways for professional development, encouraging collaboration, and offering platforms for the exchange of knowledge and experience. This empowerment supports a culture of continuous growth and innovation within schools.

- The project also prioritizes community engagement by building trust-based partnerships between schools, parents, and external stakeholders. This collaborative environment promotes shared responsibility for student success and enhances community involvement in educational transformation.

- Operational excellence is another key pillar of the initiative. By streamlining communication processes and reducing bureaucratic delays, the project facilitates more efficient implementation of inclusive practices. In this context, the UAE School Inspection Framework functions as a critical quality assurance mechanism, helping to guide school improvement and elevate overall performance (El Saadi, 2017).

- Ultimately, Impact 360 redefined what it means to foster an inclusive school culture. It ensured alignment with the UAE's vision for innovation and excellence, delivering long-lasting benefits to students, educators, and the wider community.

3. THE IMPACT 360 PROJECT AND ITS METHOD

The Impact 360 Project adopts a comprehensive, phased approach to fostering inclusivity and equity in schools, prioritizing strategic collaboration, accountability, and measurable outcomes. This methodology reflects an enormous, coordinated effort that has transformed the educational ecosystem in the Cluster, engaging every stakeholder and leveraging innovative practices to drive success.

3.1 RISK ASSESSMENT AND DATA ANALYSIS

The project begins with an in-depth examination of the current state:

· SWOT ANALYSIS: Comprehensive analysis to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats specific to inclusivity and equity in schools.

• DATA COLLECTION: A rigorous review of attendance patterns, academic performance metrics, and feedback from key stakeholders, including parents of students of determination. This phase ensures that every decision is grounded in data and tailored to address systemic barriers effectively.

3.2 BUILDING INCLUSIVE TEAMS

At the heart of Impact 360 is the creation of 11 school-level committees, each focused on critical areas such as student well-being, academic improvement, and community engagement. These committees are:

• Each school committee had a teacher leader, totaling 11 leaders across the Cluster. These leaders reported to a designated cluster leader, ensuring rapid communication, transparency, and efficient decision-making. The system enabled foresight and preparedness by equipping the leadership with real-time updates and solutions before challenges arose.

• Parents, students, and other stakeholders were actively involved in the decision-making processes, promoting shared accountability and ensuring inclusivity at every level.

• This dynamic structure fostered a culture of ownership, where teachers, as the backbone of the committees, led transformational changes and drove impactful results.

3.3 IMPLEMENTATION OF KEY PROJECTS

Impact 360 deployed six major initiatives to address inclusivity comprehensively:

3.3.1 YOU ARE NOT ALONE; WE ARE ALL WITH YOU:

• Targeting parents of students of determination, this initiative provided tailored resources and created a nurturing environment. It ensured that both parents and students felt supported academically and emotionally, fostering confidence and stronger connections between families and schools.

3.3.2 TAMAYAZ (EXCELLENCE):

• Empowered school committees to lead innovative initiatives, promoting accountability and shared ownership across schools and the cluster.

3.3.3 OUR IDENTITY IS OUR HERITAGE:

• Promoted cultural pride by celebrating diverse traditions and values, creating a strong sense of community and inclusivity.

3.3.4 MUSTA'ED (PREPARED):

• Supported students during critical academic transitions (e.g., between grade levels or school stages), ensuring equitable access to resources and guidance.

3.3.5 FLEX 2025:

• Focused on entrepreneurial skill-building, particularly targeting underrepresented student groups, to prepare them for a competitive global economy.

3.3.6 SHE LEADS 2025:

• Built leadership capacity among second-tier female leaders, addressing gender equity and enhancing operational efficiency across the Cluster.

• Each project was designed to meet specific challenges, from fostering cultural inclusivity to promoting leadership and entrepreneurial skills, ensuring every student and stakeholder felt included in the larger mission.

3.4 STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Stakeholder engagement was a cornerstone of the project's success. Regular meetings with principals, teachers, and parents provided a consistent platform for open communication and collaboration. Feedback loops were established to support continuous improvement by integrating insights from stakeholders, ensuring the project remained responsive to the evolving needs of the school community.

3.5 MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The Impact 360 Project prioritized transparency and accountability through rigorous monitoring and evaluation processes. Digital tools such as OneDrive and specialized applications were utilized to streamline communication and enhance data tracking across schools.

Progress was measured using clearly defined performance indicators, including improvements in academic results, increased stakeholder satisfaction, and the successful execution of project initiatives. Furthermore, school inspections were recognized as playing a critical role in fostering continuous improvement in educational institutions (Gustafsson et al., 2015).

4. IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation of Impact 360 represents a multi-faceted approach to establishing sustainable, inclusive practices across schools. Through targeted initiatives, comprehensive training, and community engagement, the project ensures meaningful and lasting change.

4.1 TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

Building capacity among teachers and school leaders was central to the project's success:

• COMPREHENSIVE WORKSHOPS: Educators and leaders received dynamic training on inclusive teaching, differentiated instruction, emotional intelligence, and equity-driven decision-making.

• LEADERSHIP EMPOWERMENT: Second-tier leaders were trained to foster collaboration, address systemic barriers, and promote equity in their teams.

• ONGOING DEVELOPMENT: Regular follow-ups and on-the-job training ensured continuous support, enabling staff to adapt and enhance their strategies effectively.

Hallinger (2010) highlights the critical role of instructional and transformational leadership in driving educational change. This aligns with the leadership training programs embedded in Impact 360, which equip second-tier leaders to promote inclusivity and collaboration.

4.2 COLLABORATIVE GOAL-SETTING

The success of Impact 360 hinges on clear, shared objectives that align with the unique needs of each school community.

4.2.1 SCHOOL-LEVEL GOAL SETTING

Schools began by conducting thorough data analysis, examining attendance records, academic performance, and stakeholder feedback to identify existing gaps and establish inclusion-focused goals. Based on this analysis and a detailed SWOT assessment, findings were documented in the School Self-Evaluation Form (SEF) to ensure alignment with the UAE School Inspection Framework standards. Clear expectations were then set according to the rubric for Outstanding schools, creating a structured roadmap to achieve both excellence and equity in education.

These inclusion goals were subsequently embedded within each school's School Improvement Plan (SIP), ensuring consistency with broader institutional strategies. This integration allowed schools to pursue measurable outcomes while maintaining accountability at every level.

4.2.2 CLUSTER-LEVEL LEADERSHIP PROJECTS

At the cluster level, leaders nominated through the She Leads Program led three transformative projects that played a critical role in the overall success of Impact 360. The first project focused on motivating teachers and staff by fostering a sense of enthusiasm and commitment toward achieving school goals. The second project aimed to improve students' reading and writing skills in both Arabic and English, addressing key foundational areas essential for academic success. The third project worked on enhancing collaboration and communication, particularly by strengthening relationships between schools, parents, and the broader community to build a cohesive and supportive educational environment.

To ensure success, cluster coordinators were assigned to oversee these projects. Their responsibilities included detailed planning, aligning team efforts, and regularly reporting on progress and outcomes. These leadership projects laid the groundwork for further innovation and enabled the effective implementation of broader Impact 360 programs across schools.

4.3 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Active collaboration with parents and community stakeholders played a vital role in fostering a culture of inclusivity and mutual support.

Parent Councils served as platforms for open dialogue, enabling parents to share feedback, raise concerns, and contribute valuable ideas. These councils also helped parents better understand their roles within school initiatives, promoting stronger involvement.

Cultural and community events, such as Heritage Days and Talent Shows, were organized to celebrate diversity and encourage family participation. These activities helped extend the spirit of inclusivity beyond the classroom environment.

Additionally, specialized workshops were held for parents of students of determination. These sessions equipped parents with practical strategies to support their children both academically and emotionally, ultimately strengthening the partnership between families and schools.

4.4 RECOGNITION AND ENGAGEMENT

RECOGNITION AMPLIFIED SUCCESS: Teachers were awarded for inclusive practices, students of determination celebrated for resilience, and involved parents recognized, fostering belonging and strong school connections.

4.5 COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION

Streamlined reporting systems connected educators and leaders, enabling efficient communication. Shared platforms documented and shared best practices, fostering collaboration, informed decisions, and continuous school improvement.

4.6 MEASURABLE IMPACT

Over 50 workshops enhanced educators' inclusivity skills. Achieved 95% parent satisfaction in Term 1 (see Figure 1) and increased community participation by 30%, strengthening school-family collaboration.

Parent Satisfaction Survey Results
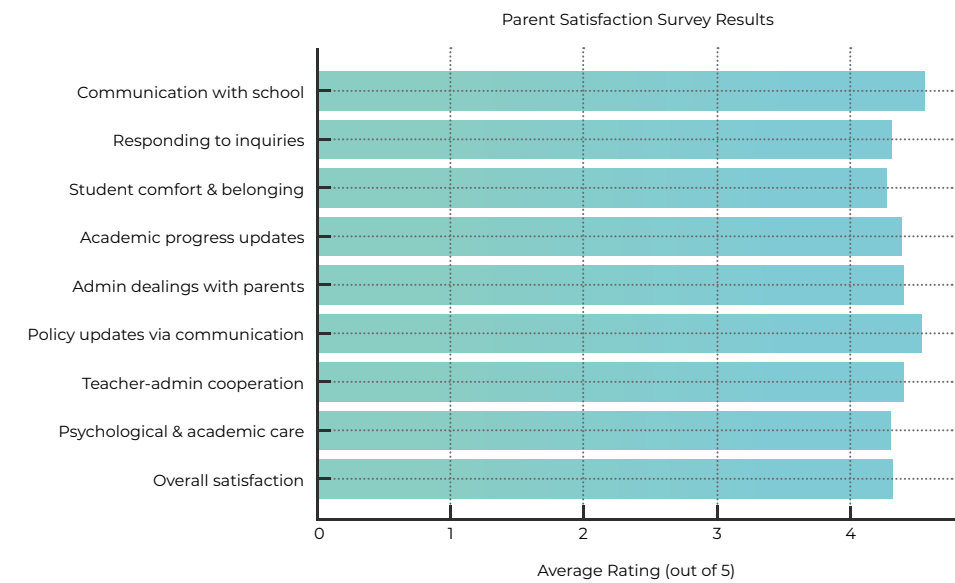
5. MEASURABLE OUTCOMES AND TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACT

The Impact 360 project has yielded significant, quantifiable results, emphasizing its role in advancing inclusive education. It contributed to a 15% improvement in student academic outcomes, while student participation in national and international competitions increased, enhancing global competencies and expanding learning opportunities.

Through the She Leads 2025 initiative, 31 second-tier female leaders received targeted leadership training. This effort promoted gender equity and helped build a sustainable leadership pipeline across schools.

The implementation of advanced digital tools improved communication within school teams and reduced bureaucratic delays, allowing for quicker and more informed decision-making processes. These enhancements strengthened operational efficiency and overall school responsiveness.

Community partnerships were also reinforced, with projects like Our Identity is Our Heritage and other initiatives boosting parental engagement by 30%. This resulted in stronger collaboration between schools and families.

Parent satisfaction experienced a significant boost, with the vast majority expressing positive views about school services during Term 1. Improved communication practices and inclusive approaches built trust and strengthened school-community relationships. Furthermore, cluster leaders led three transformative projects: a Motivation Program for staff, a Literacy Enhancement Initiative in Arabic and English, and a School-Community Partnership Framework. These initiatives collectively contributed to better academic outcomes, deeper stakeholder engagement, and a more collaborative school culture.

6. ENSURING SUSTAINABILITY AND EXPANDING REACH

The Impact 360 project was intentionally designed to ensure long-term sustainability and inspire broader adoption across varied educational settings. Inclusive practices were embedded into daily school operations, ensuring that the impact of the project continues well beyond its initial implementation.

Comprehensive documentation—including detailed frameworks, success stories, and implementation guides—was developed and shared, enabling other schools to replicate the project's strategies and benefit from its outcomes.

To support continuous professional development, ongoing training programs were introduced. These initiatives allow educators to refine their practices and adapt inclusive strategies in response to emerging educational trends and evolving school needs.

The project's structured and phased implementation model proved to be highly scalable and adaptable across diverse contexts. As such, Impact 360 stands as a replicable model for schools aspiring to promote inclusivity, equity, and excellence, not only within the UAE but also on a broader, global scale.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Samah Mohamed Al Thehli is a Cluster Manager at the UAE Ministry of Education with over 24 years of experience in school leadership, quality assurance, and educational improvement. She holds a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership and has spearheaded national initiatives promoting inclusive education and sustainable school development. An accredited trainer and consultant, Dr. Samah specializes in institutional excellence, leadership development, educational innovation, and well-being. She is the founder of the **Impact 360 Project**, a transformative framework that promotes collaborative leadership and equity in schools. Her international experience includes serving as a leadership coach with the University of Florida and coordinating the British Council's "Connecting Classroom" project, which earned the International School Award. In recognition of her outstanding contributions, she received the prestigious Hamdan Bin Rashid Al Maktoum Award for Distinguished Educator in 2024. Dr. Samah is widely respected for her strategic vision and commitment to advancing inclusive, high-quality education.education.

CONCLUSION

The Impact 360 project signifies a groundbreaking shift in education, prioritizing inclusivity and equity. By addressing systemic barriers, empowering leadership, and fostering collaboration, it has transformed educational experiences for students, parents, and educators.

This initiative's strength lies in its holistic approach—anchored in data-driven decisions, inclusive practices, and innovative strategies ensuring no student is left behind. The outcomes are remarkable: enhanced academic performance, stronger leadership pipelines, and over 95% parent satisfaction.

In an ever-changing educational landscape, Impact 360 offers a sustainable model for progress, proving that inclusivity isn't just a goal but the cornerstone of excellence and success.

REFERENCES

Abdallah, L., & Forawi, S. (2017). Investigating leadership styles and their impact on the success of educational institutions. The International Journal of Educational Organization and Leadership, 24(2), 19-30.

El Saadi, D. H. (2017). The contribution of the UAE school inspection framework as a quality assurance tool for school transformation and performance improvement. (Doctoral dissertation, The British University in Dubai (BUiD), Dissertations for Management Leadership and Policy (MLP).

Fullan, M. (2011). Change leader: Learning to do what matters most. Jossey-Bass.

Gustafsson, J. E., Ehren, M. C. M., Conyngham, G., McNamara, G., Altrichter, H., & O'Hara, J. (2015). From inspection to quality: Ways in which school inspection influences change in schools. Studies in Educational Evaluation, 47, 47-57.

Hallinger, P. (2010). Leading educational change: Reflections on the practice of instructional and transformational leadership. Cambridge Journal of Education, 33(3), 329-352.

https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764032000122005

Ministry of Education UAE. (2023). Vision and goals for the UAE Centennial 2071. Retrieved from

https://www.moe.gov.ae

ARTICLE 7.

EMPOWERING EVERY LEARNER: PRACTICAL INSIGHTS AND SUCCESS STORIES FROM INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS

Vidya Vinod
Gems Wesgreen International School, Sharjah

Inclusive education stands at the heart of global educational reform, striving to celebrate diversity and ensure equitable opportunities for all learners, regardless of their abilities, socioeconomic backgrounds, or unique challenges. The philosophy of inclusion transcends merely integrating students into the classroom; it seeks to create learning environments where every individual feels valued, supported, and capable of achieving their fullest potential.

This paper provides practical insights and success stories from inclusive classrooms, shedding light on the strategies that foster active participation, academic achievement, and social-emotional development. By synthesizing theoretical frameworks and real-world applications, Inclusive education is guided by principles rooted in equity, access, and respect for diversity. Inclusive education seeks to dismantle systemic barriers that hinder learning while fostering environments where all students can thrive. Further, showcasing best practices such as differentiated instruction, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), peer mentorship programs, and collaborative teaching approaches. Furthermore, it explores the transformative power of these methods through real-life examples of students overcoming barriers to success.

THE FOUNDATION OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Inclusive education is guided by principles rooted in equity, access, and respect for diversity. It seeks to dismantle systemic barriers that hinder learning while fostering environments where differences are not just accepted but celebrated. Key pillars of this philosophy include:

- DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION: Customizing teaching methods to meet diverse student needs.

- UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING (UDL): Designing curriculum and instruction accessible to all learners.

- COLLABORATIVE PRACTICES: Encouraging teamwork among educators, parents, and students.

- SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL): Integrating emotional well-being into academic goals.

By embedding these principles into daily classroom practices, educators can create spaces where all students thrive.

SUCCESS STORY: OVERCOMING CHALLENGES: AMEERA'S JOURNEY TO ACADEMIC SUCCESS WITH DYSLEXIA AND DEPRESSION

Through a success story, various components of a plan which address both the academic and mental health needs of a dyslexic student will be discussed below. Ameera, a 16-year-old student, exemplifies resilience in the face of adversity. Diagnosed with dyslexia and chronic depression, she navigated a challenging academic journey marked by struggles with reading, writing, and mental health. Her transformation, facilitated by tailored support, collaborative efforts, and her own determination, offers valuable lessons on empowering students with diverse needs.

Ameera's early education revealed her difficulty with phonemic awareness and decoding words—hallmarks of dyslexia. Despite these challenges, her natural curiosity and creativity shone through. However, transitioning to secondary school intensified her struggles. The fast-paced curriculum and increased academic demands heightened her feelings of inadequacy, leading to social withdrawal and worsening depression.

HOLISTIC SUPPORT PLAN

Recognizing these challenges, Ameera's Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) and teachers developed a holistic support plan that addressed both her academic and mental health needs. This plan incorporated four key components:

ACCESS ARRANGEMENTS

Access arrangements refer to pre-exam accommodations designed to ensure that students with disabilities can demonstrate their knowledge without being hindered by their challenges (Cambridge International Education, 2025). For Ameera, these arrangements included pairing her with a trained scribe to assist in articulating her answers during exams, as well as a reader to ensure comprehension of complex questions. This alleviated the burden of spelling and reading comprehension, allowing her to focus on demonstrating her understanding. Additionally, opting for core-level papers in mathematics and science reduced her cognitive load while maintaining academic rigor. To further support her success, additional time and a separate venue were provided, minimizing distractions and creating a conducive testing environment.

CLASSROOM ACCOMMODATIONS

To support Ameera's learning in everyday classroom settings, educators implemented differentiated instruction tailored to her needs. Multisensory teaching methods, such as integrating visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning strategies, helped reinforce concepts more effectively. Assistive technology, including text-to-speech software and audiobooks, facilitated her engagement with course materials.

PEER SUPPORT

Peer mentorship programs played a crucial role in Ameera's academic and social development. Structured peer-assisted learning sessions allowed her to collaborate with classmates who provided guidance and encouragement. Group activities and cooperative learning strategies fostered a sense of belonging and increased her confidence in classroom participation.

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL INTERVENTIONS

Given the impact of dyslexia and depression on Ameera's well-being, social-emotional interventions were integrated into her support plan. Counseling sessions provided a safe space to express her challenges, while mindfulness techniques and self-advocacy training empowered her to manage stress and advocate for her needs. Teachers also promoted a growth mindset, reinforcing resilience and perseverance in the face of difficulties.

Ameera's journey illustrates the transformative power of inclusive education, collaborative efforts, and personal determination. Through tailored support strategies, she not only achieved academic success but also developed the confidence and leadership skills necessary for future endeavors. Her success story underscores the importance of equitable learning environments that empower students with diverse needs.

CLASSROOM ACCOMMODATIONS: BUILDING EVERYDAY SUCCESS

Ameera's teachers adopted several strategies to support her learning throughout the school year:

1.   DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION

Lessons were tailored to Ameera's strengths, incorporating visual aids, simplified instructions, and hands-on activities. For example, in history class, timelines and graphic organizers helped her grasp complex events.

2.   ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

Tools like text-to-speech software and audiobooks revolutionized Ameera's access to learning materials. Speech-to-text applications empowered her to articulate her thoughts without the pressure of spelling errors.

3.   STRUCTURED SUPPORT

Weekly one-on-one sessions with the SENCO provided a safe space for Ameera to discuss her progress, challenges, and emotions. This consistent support helped her stay on track academically while managing her mental health.

THE ROLE OF PEER SUPPORT

Peer relationships played a transformative role in Ameera's journey. Her classmates, guided by school-wide inclusivity training, fostered an environment of empathy and collaboration. Zara, a close friend, became a pillar of support, helping Ameera during group projects and study sessions. This camaraderie boosted Ameera's confidence and sense of belonging.

To further nurture Ameera's self-esteem, the SENCO encouraged her to become a Peer Mentor for younger students facing similar challenges. Ameera embraced this role with enthusiasm, sharing strategies she had learned and providing emotional support to her mentees. This experience not only strengthened her leadership skills but also gave her a renewed sense of purpose.

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES: AMEERA'S JOURNEY OF RESILIENCE

Despite these accommodations, Ameera encountered moments of doubt and anxiety, particularly during exam preparations. These challenges were addressed through:

1. When teachers worked with Ameera for dividing her revision into manageable tasks, this resulted in reducing feelings of overwhelm for her. Hence breaking down goals seemed go help Ameera drastically.

2.   Collaboration between the SENCO and school counselor ensured Ameera had access to coping strategies for stress and depression. Techniques such as mindfulness and cognitive-behavioral strategies became integral to her daily routine. This kind of emotional support aided in a better method for coping for Ameera.

3. Celebrating milestones and further Recognizing Ameera's achievements, no matter how small, reinforced her belief in her capabilities. Whether it was completing a challenging assignment or mentoring a peer, these celebrations motivated her to persevere.

4.   ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Despite significant challenges, Ameera achieved notable academic success. Through the support of a scribe and reader during her IGCSE exams, she overcame the barriers posed by her dyslexia, which often hindered her ability to fully express her understanding in traditional assessment formats. The additional time and separate venue provided a conducive environment for her to focus and work at her own pace. This accommodation allowed her to perform to the best of her abilities, resulting in a mix of C and B grades. While these grades represented her academic capability, they also symbolized her resilience and determination to rise above her struggles. This success was not merely about passing exams; it was a pivotal moment that reinforced her self-worth and showed her that she was capable of achieving her goals despite her learning and emotional challenges.

LEADERSHIP GROWTH

Ameera's role as a Peer Mentor became a defining experience in her personal development. Encouraged by her SENCO, she took on the responsibility of guiding younger students who faced similar challenges. In this role, she demonstrated compassion, understanding, and leadership. Ameera's mentorship extended beyond academics; she provided emotional support, practical advice, and encouragement, creating a sense of belonging for her mentees. Her ability to relate to their struggles and share her own coping strategies fostered a positive and inclusive atmosphere.

Her efforts were widely recognized by her teachers and peers, who admired her resilience and dedication. As a mentor, Ameera not only inspired others but also discovered her own leadership potential. This experience strengthened her interpersonal skills, boosted her confidence, and gave her a profound sense of purpose. It marked a significant shift in her self-perception, transforming her from a student who once doubted her abilities into a role model who empowered others to overcome their challenges.

IMPROVED CONFIDENCE

Ameera's journey also led to a remarkable boost in her self-confidence. Her academic achievements and her role as a Peer Mentor helped her redefine her identity. She no longer saw herself solely through the lens of her dyslexia and depression but as someone capable of achieving and contributing meaningfully to her community.

Motivated by her success, Ameera set her sights on pursuing further studies in psychology. She aspired to use her experiences and insights to help others facing similar challenges. This decision reflected her growing confidence and a desire to make a difference in the lives of others. By transforming her struggles into strengths, Ameera not only reshaped her own future but also became an inspiration to those around her.

Ameera's achievements underscore the profound impact of inclusive practices and the potential within every learner. Her story is a testament to the importance of recognizing individual strengths, providing tailored support, and fostering environments where all students can thrive.

KEY INSIGHTS ABOUT INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Ameera's journey provides valuable lessons for educators, parents, and stakeholders in the field of inclusive education. These insights emphasize the importance of collaboration, tailored accommodations, and fostering self-esteem in creating a supportive and empowering environment for all learners.

COLLABORATION IS CRUCIAL

The coordinated efforts of educators, peers, and parents played a pivotal role in Ameera's success. Inclusive education thrives when all stakeholders work together to address a student's unique needs. Ameera's SENCO acted as a central figure, ensuring communication and collaboration between her teachers, peers, and family. Teachers adapted their instruction to suit her learning style, while peers offered emotional and academic support. Ameera's parents contributed by reinforcing her confidence and maintaining open communication with the school. This collective approach demonstrated that inclusion is not the responsibility of one individual but a shared effort requiring teamwork, mutual respect, and commitment. By working together, the team created a cohesive support system that allowed Ameera to overcome challenges and excel.

THE POWER OF ACCESS ARRANGEMENTS

Access arrangements, such as extra time, a scribe, and a separate venue, were instrumental in Ameera's academic achievements. These accommodations addressed her specific challenges, allowing her to perform to her potential without being hindered by her dyslexia. Such adjustments are often simple to implement but can have a profound impact on leveling the academic playing field for students with disabilities. In Ameera's case, these arrangements alleviated stress, enabling her to focus on demonstrating her knowledge rather than being overwhelmed by the mechanics of reading and writing. The success of these accommodations underscores the importance of recognizing individual needs and implementing strategies that promote equity in education.

FOSTERING SELF-ESTEEM

Assigning Ameera a leadership role as a Peer Mentor was transformative for her self-esteem and personal growth. This responsibility empowered her by recognizing her strengths and contributions, which were often overshadowed by her challenges. As a mentor, Ameera discovered her ability to inspire and support others, shifting her focus from her struggles to her capacity to make a difference.

Moreover, this role created a ripple effect within the school community. By sharing her experiences and strategies, Ameera fostered a culture of mutual support and understanding. Her journey inspired other students, demonstrating that challenges can be overcome with determination and the right support. For Ameera, this leadership role became a source of pride and purpose, further enhancing her confidence and reinforcing her belief in her abilities.

These key insights from Ameera's story highlight the critical elements of successful inclusive education. They remind us that collaboration, tailored support, and opportunities for personal growth are essential in unlocking the potential of every learner. Through these practices, schools can create environments where diversity is celebrated, and all students are empowered to thrive.

BROADER INSIGHTS:
LESSONS FROM INCLUSIVE PRACTICES

CHALLENGES AND PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS

While Ameera's story highlights the possibilities of inclusive education, it also brings attention to systemic challenges such as, schools often facing constraints in funding and staffing. Addressing this requires advocacy for increased investment in training, assistive technology, and specialized personnel. Overcoming stigmas associated with disabilities or mental health is essential. Awareness campaigns and community engagement can challenge stereotypes and promote acceptance. Furthermore, equipping educators with the skills to implement inclusive practices is vital. Continuous professional development ensures that teachers remain adept at addressing diverse learning needs.

Ultimately, Impact 360 redefined what it means to foster an inclusive school culture. It ensured alignment with the UAE's vision for innovation and excellence, delivering long-lasting benefits to students, educators, and the wider community.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STAKEHOLDERS

To strengthen inclusive education practices, stakeholders must allocate resources for inclusive programs, enforce anti-discrimination policies, and incentivize research on best practices. Professional development opportunities and collaboration with peers to share strategies and successes must be embraced. Parents and community members must actively engage with schools, advocate for inclusive policies, and support students' diverse needs at home and in the community.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Armstrong, F. (2011). Addressing diversity in schools: Policies and practices. Routledge.

Cambride International Education (2025). What are Access Arrangements and how do I apply? (n.d.). What Can We Help You With? https://help.cambridgeinternational.org/hc/en-gb/articles/115004285225-What-are-Access-Arrangements-and-how-do-I-apply

CAST. (2011). Universal Design for Learning guidelines version 2.0. Wakefield.

Friend, M., & Cook, L. (2016). Interactions: Collaboration skills for school professionals (8th ed.). Pearson.

Loreman, T., Deppeler, J., & Harvey, D. (2010). Inclusive education: Supporting diversity in the classroom (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Mastropieri, M. A., & Scruggs, T. E. (2018). The inclusive classroom: Strategies for effective differentiated instruction (6th ed.). Pearson.

Mitchell, D. (2014). What really works in special and inclusive education: Using evidence-based teaching strategies (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Rose, D. H., Meyer, A., & Hitchcock, C. (2005). The universally designed classroom: Accessible curriculum and digital technologies. Harvard Education Press.

UNESCO. (2020). Inclusion and education: All means all. Global Education Monitoring Report 2020. Paris: UNESCO.

CONCLUSION

Inclusive education is a powerful catalyst for societal transformation, unlocking the potential within every learner. Ameera's story serves as an inspiring example of how determination, coupled with tailored support and a nurturing environment, can lead to remarkable achievements.

By embracing diversity and implementing evidence-based practices, educators can create classrooms that celebrate every student's uniqueness. Let Ameera's journey remind us that challenges are not insurmountable barriers but opportunities for growth and empowerment. Together, let us commit to fostering a world where every learner has the chance to rise above their challenges and shine.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

VIDYA VINOD is an experienced Inclusion practitioner with over 15 years of expertise in inclusive education. She has worked extensively with learners with diverse needs, including ADHD, Autism, and learning disabilities. Vidya has led numerous initiatives to foster parent engagement, promote inclusive practices, and mentor aspiring educators. Her dedication to holistic student development and community building has earned her recognition, including being the only teacher shortlisted from UAE for the Cambridge Dedicated Teacher Award.

INCLUSION AS A MORAL IMPERATIVE IN THE UAE

Lawrence Meda
Sharjah Education Academy

The journey toward inclusion is no longer a choice but a moral imperative, especially in a country like the United Arab Emirates (UAE), where technological advancements make inclusive education more attainable than ever. The UAE has made significant strides by establishing policies and frameworks to ensure all learners' needs are met in the classroom. Teachers have access to cutting-edge emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI), which enables them to plan inclusive lessons with greater ease and efficiency. Additionally, everyday devices such as cellphones, laptops and tablets come equipped with built-in accessibility tools, and impactful inclusive projects have proven effective in catering for the diverse learning needs of students. Implementation of inclusion is now easier than it was before because of technological advancements.

As highlighted in this magazine, inclusion is a cornerstone of modern education. Teachers are now expected to implement inclusive pedagogical practices that address the diverse needs of every student. The authors in this edition demonstrate multiple approaches to supporting diverse learners. For instance, game-based learning, which was presented, holds immense potential to engage students innovatively, motivating them to learn regardless of their individual needs, hence fostering inclusion.

Teachers often face obstacles such as limited knowledge of specific learning disabilities or difficulties in fostering parental involvement. Nevertheless, unwavering commitment to educational excellence and inclusivity provides systems and support to help educators overcome these barriers. I conclude that inclusive pedagogical practices seldom come without complexities, but with the right tools, policies, and collaborative efforts—as demonstrated by the UAE—the nation has paved the way for a future where every student thrives.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

LAWRENCE MEDA holds a PhD in Curriculum Studies and presently serves as an Associate Professor and Director of Research at Sharjah Education Academy in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Previously, he chaired the Education Studies Department at Zayed University in Dubai. He is a certified online instructor, has authored over 75 publications and possesses extensive experience in supervising Masters and Doctoral Students. Additionally, he has externally examined more than 20 postgraduate theses for universities in South Africa, India, and the UAE. His research focuses on Inclusive Education, Curriculum Studies, and Teacher Education.