

# Analysing the Effect of Inclusive Education on the Academic Performance of University Students with Disability

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## ABSTRACT

A pedagogical strategy known as inclusive education seeks to involve differently abled learners alongside their counterparts without impairments. This method is based on the idea of educating university students with disabilities in general education classes that all students ought to have equal access to learning opportunities and settings, irrespective of their skill levels. Legislative requirements, educational changes, and a growing awareness of the rights of people with disabilities have all contributed to the global adoption of the inclusive education idea. The study aims to analyse the effect of Inclusive Education on the academic performance of students with disabilities. The study is a mixed methods study. The study used desktop research to show that inclusive education positively impacts the academic performance of students with disabilities. Furthermore the study combines qualitative and quantitative information from academic performance records. A sophisticated knowledge of the academic experiences of students with disabilities in inclusive settings is made possible by this all-encompassing approach. The study has the following recommendations: Governments and educational institutions should develop and implement policies that promote inclusive education and provide equal opportunities for students with disabilities. Moreover, training and support for teachers is essential as Teachers should receive training and support to effectively teach and support students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. The conclusion is that inclusive education positively impacts the academic performance of students with disabilities.

**Key Terms:** Inclusive Education; Academic Performance; Students with Disabilities; Pedagogical Strategy;

## INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has been widely recognised as a fundamental element in supporting the academic performance of students with disabilities. Inclusive education guarantees all learners the opportunity to thrive at school, to learn and develop new skills. Inclusive education offers a supportive learning environment, that is classrooms that are compatible with teaching and learning, having relevant teaching aids, a safe and conducive environment. Inclusive education also entails learners having equal access to equal opportunities of education and learning and is, distinct from educational equality or educational equity. Diversity is the essence of inclusive education. All learners engage in a participatory learning approach regardless of their abilities and or disabilities. Higher education institutions have been prone to opportunities and challenges as they are faced with inclusive education. In the twenty first century, inclusive education has brought about innovative changes in the education sector as follows: Improved academic achievement and social integration, enactment of a specific policy on inclusive education, training more teachers in special needs education, implementing more community awareness programmes, having itinerant specialist teachers, sufficient funding of the education system as a whole and availing more resources for inclusion. The paper will analyse the Effect of Inclusive Education on the Academic Performance of Students with Disabilities.

## BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Students with disabilities face varied challenges which greatly affect their access and full contribution in academic programmes at academic institutions of all levels. Therefore, the aim of the current empirical study is to analyse the effect of inclusive education on the academic performance of university students with disability. Knowledge and the capacity to transmit it from one generation to the next are humanity's greatest gifts. Education is the only way to go through this period. Thus, it emphasises how important education is to the whole meaning of human life. According to Article 26 of the 1948 Human Rights Declaration, children with special needs have the same right to education as any other child. Since education is a basic human right, all children have the right to receive it.

Studies have shown that inclusive education can have a significant impact on the academic performance of students with disabilities. For example, a study by Higgins and Patton (2021) found that inclusive education was associated with improved academic achievement and social outcomes for students with disabilities. Another study by Lee and Kim (2021) found that inclusive education had a positive impact on the academic achievement of students with learning disabilities, education is essential to our growth as a group and as individuals. It helps to clear the path for a prosperous and successful future. In addition to the right to education outlined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), all children are capable of learning regardless of their linguistic, intellectual, social, emotional, physical, or other circumstances. All children are capable of learning, but it's generally accepted that they will not all learn the same things at the same time, with the same rhythm, or with the same outcomes. In order to take care of these issues, it is generally accepted that schools need strong inclusive policies and philosophies to support the rights of all children to engage in an inclusive way.

When the World Program of Action concerning Persons with Disabilities was adopted in 1982, it introduced the idea of equal access to society and equal opportunities. However, the quality of life for people with disabilities in Africa did not increase throughout the worldwide decade (1983–1992) for disabled people. However, the 1993 adoption of the United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities reaffirmed the fundamentals of inclusive policies, plans, and activities by declaring that the needs and concerns of people with disabilities should not be treated separately but rather integrated into general development plans (UN, 1993). As a result, the Declaration on Education for All of Jomtien (1990) was reaffirmed at the 1994 World Conference on Special Needs Education in Salamanca. More recently, a major commitment to inclusive education was made when the 61st session of the UN General Assembly approved a Convention on the Rights of Disabled Persons in December 2006. The education sector has long been interested in the problem of disability and how it affects students' academic performance, particularly in underdeveloped nations like Uganda (Kazaara & Deus, 2024). In the context of education, disability refers to any physical, mental, or social restrictions or impairments that prevent a student from fully engaging in the learning process (Anthony, Kazaara, & Kazaara, 2023). According to Mark, Kazaara, Deus, Julius, et al. (2023), these disabilities can include learning problems, hearing and vision impairments, emotional or behavioural disorders, and physical impairments like mobility issues.

Due to physical obstacles, unfavourable social perceptions, and limited educational facilities, the majority of youngsters in this group are not able to attend formal schooling (Nelson, 2024). Students with disabilities are marginalised in educational institutions that do not provide accommodations for them, which leads to poorer academic performance and social isolation, according to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) (Victoria et al., 2023). Insufficient curriculum adaption, a general lack of societal understanding of the skills of students with disabilities, and a lack of training for teachers in inclusive education practices all contribute to this predicament. As a result, compared to their counterparts without disabilities, kids with disabilities frequently encounter obstacles that impair their capacity to achieve academic success (Nelson, 2024). This exacerbates the already high dropout rates for children in rural areas, as many disabled pupils drop out or do badly on national tests (Victor et al., 2023). The proportion of students with disabilities in secondary schools is still disproportionately low, and those who do attend face major obstacles in getting resources, getting help during tests, and moving across the school grounds (Sub-county et al., 2023). Students with impairments encounter social and emotional obstacles in addition to physical ones, which affects

their academic achievement. Students with impairments can face social stigma, bullying, and isolation, especially in rural settings. These students frequently find it difficult to blend in with their peers, which lowers their confidence and self-esteem and further impairs their academic performance (Godfrey et al., 2023).

## **Theoretical framework**

### **Social Model of Disability**

This paradigm emphasises how social constraints contribute to people's disabilities and sees disability as a social construct. Equal chances and adjustments in the classroom are two ways that inclusive education seeks to eliminate these obstacles. The social model, according to Barton (2003), provides a framework for individuals with disabilities to explain their lived experiences and poses questions about how and why society excludes particular individuals and groups that it categorises as inferior, unable, or having an "unacceptable" look. The barriers in society and their immediate surroundings force disabled persons to conform to environments meant for healthy or "normal" people, according to Oliver (1990). Therefore, in order for people with disabilities to fully engage in society, these hurdles or obstacles must be removed. For people with disabilities to have equal access to education and experiences, the educational institution is a vital setting that requires restructuring and reorganisation (Healy et al., 2006).

### **Constructivist Learning Theory**

According to the educational paradigm known as social constructivism, social contact and outside help especially in a group context help students learn. Through collaborative learning, peer support, and individualised instructional approaches, it contends that people's interactions within a social environment impact their acquisition of new information, enabling students of all abilities to thrive and gain from one another's educational experiences (Natividad, 2022). Because social constructivism and inclusive education place a strong emphasis on interacting with others, working together, and appreciating different points of view, they are similar. This strategy is very helpful for putting inclusive education into practice and can serve as the foundation for tackling various barriers to the inclusionary concept, which allows students of all abilities to thrive. Through their encounters with peers who are not disabled, students with impairments have improved peer interaction and communication skills, according to research by Parveen and Qounsar (2018). The existence of inclusive educational environments encourages the growth of social learning opportunities, makes it easier to build positive peer relationships, and provides important communication models for students with disabilities.

### **Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory**

This approach highlights how crucial social connections and cultural background are to education. In a supportive learning environment created by inclusive education, students with disabilities can gain from social learning and peer assistance. It emphasises not only how peers and adults work together to impact individual learning (social learning), but also how cultural attitudes and beliefs affect how learning and teaching occur (cultural). It has two significant educational implications: scaffolding and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Students with learning difficulties can benefit from scaffolding for learning and easier instruction delivery when the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) principle is used in an inclusive educational setting. This method helps them progressively enhance their academic performance and abilities.

### **Peer Modelling Theory**

Albert Bandura, a psychologist, developed the peer modelling hypothesis, which postulates that people can learn new behaviours, attitudes, and abilities by imitating and observing others (Bandura, 1977). According to this theory, students with learning disabilities can enhance their academic performance in the setting of inclusive education by studying their peers who are not disabled. These peers act as role models for the students with disabilities.

## Research Questions

1. How does inclusive education affect the academic performance of students with disabilities?
2. What are the key factors that influence the academic success of students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms?
3. How do teachers' attitudes and teaching strategies impact the academic outcomes of students with disabilities in inclusive settings?
4. What are the challenges and benefits of inclusive education from the perspective of students with disabilities?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **The effect of inclusive education on the academic performance of students with disabilities**

Numerous academics have studied inclusive education in great detail and offered differing opinions on its effects (Adetoro, 2014 & Sharma, 2017). Adetoro's research showed that it is possible to educate all children in the same school while guaranteeing that students with disabilities are not discriminated against or refused access to learning resources. The primary goal is to encourage participation in all school events, support children in the same age group in their learning process, and offer any necessary assistance (Kirschner, 2015). According to Ugwu and Onukwufor (2018), inclusive education is a teaching strategy that tackles exclusion in the educational system and enables kids with disabilities to attend school with their classmates in the community without encountering prejudice because of their physical or learning disabilities.

In order to advance social justice, inclusive education is seen as a pragmatic strategy that aims to educate everyone worldwide, regardless of their disability (Sijuola and Davidova, 2022). According to Du Plessis (2013), inclusive education is a method of instruction that promotes students' overall growth regardless of their gender, sexual orientation, learning preferences, race, social status, or handicap. The author highlights how inclusive education helps to lower the cost and increase the accessibility of educational institutions. Similar to this, Sharma (2017) emphasises the importance of internal organisational adjustments, especially in school settings, with a focus on policies, procedures, and cultural attitudes to guarantee that all kids are with disabilities?

### **The key factors that influence the academic success of students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms**

Teacher Training brings about the effectiveness of inclusive education which is moderated by the level of training and preparedness of teachers to implement inclusive practices. A positive and inclusive classroom environment enhances the impact of inclusive education on academic performance.

Student characteristics demonstrate individual differences among students, such as type and severity of disability and how they can influence how inclusive education affects academic outcomes. Parental involvement and support are also crucial. Success in the inclusive education process depends on involving parents support, understanding, or communication. Effective implementation, however, may be hampered by a lack of family discrimination based on their child's condition, parents of impaired children have an unfavourable opinion of the idea of enrolling pupils with and without disabilities (Doménech & Moliner, 2014). These unfavourable opinions may make parents less inclined to support inclusive education programs since they place a higher priority on their child's social acceptance and mental health.

Social and Emotional Benefits for students with disabilities are very important as inclusive education offers substantial social and emotional advantages that go beyond improved academic achievement. These students benefit from being in a general education classroom because it fosters their sense of belonging, self-worth, and social skills. Additionally, it lessens stigma and encourages all students to have favourable attitudes towards diversity. In addition to improving academic achievement, inclusive education fosters social and emotional growth. In inclusive classrooms, students with disabilities frequently improve their social skills and have more opportunity to connect with their peers (Carter et al., 2024). A culture of acceptance and diversity is promoted and stigma is lessened in an inclusive setting.

Teachers' attitudes and teaching strategies play a crucial role in shaping the academic outcomes of students with disabilities in inclusive settings. Here are some key findings from research studies published between 2020 and 2021. (a) Positive attitudes: Teachers with positive attitudes towards inclusion and students with disabilities tend to have higher expectations for these students, which can lead to better academic outcomes (Huang & Chiang, 2020). (b) Teacher self-efficacy: Teachers who feel confident in their ability to teach students with disabilities tend to have more positive attitudes and are more likely to use inclusive teaching strategies (Katz & Porath, 2020).

Teaching Strategies are also another key factor. Some examples are differentiated instruction, universal design for learning and technology integration. Teachers who use differentiated instruction strategies, such as adapting curriculum and instruction to meet individual student needs, tend to have better academic outcomes for students with disabilities (Tomlinson, 2017). Teachers may also use universal design for learning (UDL). Teachers who use UDL principles, such as providing multiple means of representation, expression, and engagement, tend to have better academic outcomes for students with disabilities (Meyer & Rose, 2014). Moreover, teachers can also utilise technology integration. Consequently, teachers who effectively integrate technology into their instruction tend to have better academic outcomes for students with disabilities (Lee & Kim, 2020).

### **The impact of teachers' attitudes and teaching strategies towards academic outcomes of students with disabilities in inclusive settings.**

In teacher training, the effectiveness of inclusive education is moderated by the level of training and preparedness of teachers to implement inclusive practices. The classroom environment has to be positive and inclusive such that it enhances the impact of inclusive education on academic performance. Additionally, the influence of the instructional strategies on the disabled students is an influential factor to the success of the disabled students in the classroom as it persuades the teacher in carrying out an appropriate adaptation, modification, and accommodation to the instructional process. However, many obstacles are faced by disabled students who attend mainstream schools or any educational institutions. These obstacles include: the accessible contents are unavailable and the lack of trained staff. Even the available staff lacks awareness that is related to the developments in enabling technologies' access for disabled students. In fact, the educational goals for disabled students are fundamentally similar to the goals assigned for all students. These goals include: the social competence, effective communication, employability and personal independence (Maingi-Lore, 2016).

### **The challenges and benefits of inclusive education from the perspective of students with disabilities**

Inclusive education brings both challenges and notable benefits, particularly from the viewpoint of students with disabilities. One significant hurdle is the need for enhanced resources and training for teachers. Many teachers require additional support to effectively teach students with diverse needs. Moreover, parents and teachers may express concerns about the potential impact on the educational standards for students without disabilities, fearing that the focus on inclusion could dilute the quality of instruction (Kamal, et al. 2014)

The success of inclusive education often hinges on the accessibility of essential support services, including special education teachers, teaching aides, and adaptive technology. When these resources are readily available, students with disabilities can thrive in an inclusive setting. However, the implementation of inclusive education can be fraught with obstacles. Attitudinal barriers, stemming from misconceptions and biases about disability, can create an unwelcoming environment. Physical barriers, such as inaccessible facilities, can further hinder the participation of students with disabilities.

Despite these challenges, inclusive education offers numerous academic, social, and emotional benefits. It fosters a sense of belonging and community among all students, promoting empathy, understanding, and collaboration. Academically, students with disabilities often show improvement when included in general education classrooms, as they receive support from their peers and teachers. Socially and emotionally, inclusive education can enhance self-esteem and confidence, as students with disabilities build meaningful relationships and develop vital social skills. While the path to successful inclusive education is not without its difficulties, the advantages for students with disabilities are profound and far-reaching. Addressing the

challenges with adequate training, resources, and a commitment to inclusivity can lead to a richer educational experience for all students.

## METHODOLOGY

Desktop research, also known as secondary research or literature review, involves gathering and analysing existing data and information from various sources, without collecting new data through primary research methods such as surveys, interviews, or experiments. The study adopted a desktop research methodology. Desk research refers to secondary data or that which can be collected without fieldwork. Desk research is basically involved in collecting data from existing resources hence it is often considered a low cost technique as compared to field research, as the main cost is involved in executive's time, telephone charges and directories. Thus, the study relied on already published studies, reports and statistics. This secondary data was easily accessed through the online journals and library.

## FINDINGS

### **The effect of inclusive education on the academic performance of students with disabilities**

Inclusive education is a teaching strategy that tackles exclusion in the educational system and enables kids with disabilities to attend school with their classmates in the community without encountering prejudice because of their physical or learning disabilities. (Ugwu and Onukwufor (2018)

### **What are the key factors that influence the academic success of students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms?**

The key factors that influence the academic success of students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms are Positive attitudes: Teachers with positive attitudes towards inclusion and students with disabilities tend to have higher expectations for these students, which can lead to better academic outcomes (Huang & Chiang, 2020). (b)Teacher self-efficacy: Teachers who feel confident in their ability to teach students with disabilities tend to have more positive attitudes and are more likely to use inclusive teaching strategies (Katz & Porath, 2020).

### **How do teachers' attitudes and teaching strategies impact the academic outcomes of students with disabilities in inclusive settings?**

These obstacles include: the accessible contents are unavailable and the lack of trained staff. Even the available staff lacks awareness that is related to the developments in enabling technologies' access for disabled students. In fact, the educational goals for disabled students are fundamentally similar to the goals assigned for all students. These goals include: the social competence, effective communication, employability and personal independence (Maingi-Lore, 2016). . The study concluded that students with disabilities face diverse challenges in institutions of higher learning which greatly affect their access and full participation in academic programmes. The factors include family background which influences the academic performance of students with special needs, the attitudes of students with special needs which influence their academic performance, and the infrastructural facilities as well as the instructional strategies which influence the academic performance of students with special needs. The findings of the study also indicated that adapted classrooms and extra notes and hand-outs influence the academic performance of students with special needs.

### **What are the challenges and benefits of inclusive education from the perspective of students with disabilities?**

There is need for enhanced resources and training for teachers, support services, attitudinal barriers and physical barriers. Moreover, the study found out that academic, social, and emotional benefits prevail for students with disabilities as they foster a sense of belonging and community among all students. (Al-Adra, 2016).

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings reveal that there exists a contextual and methodological gap relating to the effectiveness of inclusive education policies for students with disabilities. Preliminary empirical review revealed that such policies played a vital role in promoting educational inclusion and academic success within mainstream educational settings. Despite encountering challenges such as inadequate resources and negative attitudes, inclusive education policies showed promise in creating equitable learning environments. The study emphasized the importance of addressing systemic barriers, promoting positive attitudes, and continuously monitoring and adapting policies to meet the evolving needs of students with disabilities. Overall, the findings underscored the potential of inclusive education policies to foster academic achievement and social inclusion for students with disabilities, contributing to a more equitable and supportive educational system.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the analysis of the effect of inclusive education on the academic performance of students with disabilities reveals that inclusive education has a positive impact on the academic performance of students with disabilities. The findings suggest that inclusive education can lead to improved academic achievement, increased social participation, and enhanced emotional well-being for students with disabilities. Overall, inclusive education has the potential to transform the educational experience of students with disabilities, but it requires a commitment to creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Policy Recommendations

1. Develop and implement inclusive education policies: Governments and educational institutions should develop and implement policies that promote inclusive education and provide equal opportunities for students with disabilities.
2. Provide training and support for teachers: Teachers should receive training and support to effectively teach and support students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms.
3. Increase accessibility and accommodations: Educational institutions should ensure that their facilities, curriculum, and instructional materials are accessible and accommodating for students with disabilities.

### Practical Recommendations

1. Use universal design for learning (UDL) principles: Teachers should use UDL principles to design instructional materials and methods that are accessible and engaging for all students, including those with disabilities.
2. Provide assistive technology and tools: Educational institutions should provide assistive technology and tools, such as text-to-speech software and speech-generating devices, to support students with disabilities.
3. Foster a positive and inclusive classroom culture: Teachers should foster a positive and inclusive classroom culture that values diversity and promotes social inclusion.

### Research Recommendations

1. Conduct longitudinal studies: Researchers should conduct longitudinal studies to investigate the long-term effects of inclusive education on the academic performance of students with disabilities.
2. Investigate the impact of inclusive education on different types of disabilities: Researchers should investigate the impact of inclusive education on different types of disabilities, such as physical, sensory, and intellectual disabilities.
3. Explore the role of technology in inclusive education: Researchers should explore the role of technology in inclusive education and investigate its impact on the academic performance of students with disabilities.

## Recommendations for Parents and Caregivers

1. Advocate for inclusive education: Parents and caregivers should advocate for inclusive education and ensure that their child with a disability has access to equal educational opportunities.
2. Collaborate with teachers and educators: Parents and caregivers should collaborate with teachers and educators to develop and implement individualised education plans (IEPs) that meet their child's unique needs.
3. Provide emotional and psychological support: Parents and caregivers should provide emotional and psychological support to their child with a disability, as they navigate the challenges and opportunities of inclusive education.

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