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RESEARCH SYNTHESIS

A missing link for inclusive education: The importance of supporting teachers with disabilities to ensure learning for all

Nidhi Singal and Katie Godwin

About the Research

This synthesis is part of a strategic partnership between the Learning Generation Initiative and the What Works Hub for Global Education. The Transforming the Education Workforce report (2019) highlighted that inequities and inclusion in the education workforce are rarely addressed, and that this can lead to a workforce that is not representative of the students they serve and not able to fully support inclusive education. The report called for education systems and the global community to recognise this challenge and ensure that inclusion extends to those supporting students. This synthesis was developed in direct response to that call and builds on the work that has been undertaken by Professor Nidhi Singal since the report was published. In this synthesis, we aim to illustrate the critical importance of inclusion in the education workforce, and specifically the issue of teachers with disabilities, in ensuring quality education for all.

Learning Generation Initiative

The Learning Generation Initiative (LGI) is a global initiative encouraging greater progress on Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) by empowering the people within and connected to education systems to enable all children to be learning within a generation.

Cambridge Network for Disability and Education Research (CaNDER)

CaNDER is committed to generating rigorous scholarship in the field of disability and education, particularly in the Global South. Based at the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge, it has an international membership.

What Works Hub for Global Education

The What Works Hub for Global Education (WWHGE) brings together people and institutions who share a common goal: to help governments use the best evidence on how to get children learning, and to implement these proven ideas at the scale necessary for transformative outcomes. WWHGE is a collaborative partnership between the Blavatnik School of Government (University of Oxford), the UK government's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the British Council, Building Evidence in Education (BE2), the Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel (GEEAP), the Learning Generation Initiative, USAID, UNICEF Innocenti, UNESCO-IIEP, the World Bank and the Jacobs Foundation.

Contributors

Emma Cameron, Amy Bellinger, and Deborah Kimathi
(Learning Generation Initiative)

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

EMIS	Education Management Information System
GDS	Global Disability Summit
LMIC	Low and Middle-Income Countries
TMIS	Teacher Management Information System
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UN CRPD	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
WWHGE	What Works Hub for Global Education

Executive Summary

Historically persons with disabilities tend to be one of the most neglected groups in many countries, especially when it comes to education. Additionally, disability intersects with many other points of marginalisation, such as gender, poverty, and remoteness, exacerbating the risks of exclusion and discrimination. Global frameworks, such as the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) and the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), illustrate that it is now widely accepted that inclusive education is needed to improve access to quality education for all learners.

Although significant efforts are made around inclusion of children in education, including those with disabilities, little attention has been paid to inclusion within the education workforce. Yet, it is difficult to imagine how an education system can promote inclusion if it is not applied to those working directly with students every day. An increasingly diverse student population's needs will only be met with an equally diversified teacher workforce. A more diversified teacher workforce ensures individuals with a wider range of skills, experiences, and backgrounds who can recognise students' unique needs and provide relevant support. Evidence shows that such a workforce also helps promote inclusive school cultures where diversity is recognised and celebrated. Recognising and promoting teachers with disabilities can also open up important employment pathways for persons with disabilities.

Where diversity in the education workforce is considered, the focus is often on gender, race, or geography. There is limited evidence – especially from low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) – on the experiences or indeed the impact of teachers with disabilities. A focus on generating this evidence is critical given existing studies show that employing teachers with disabilities in mainstream schools can have multiple positive benefits. These benefits include being better able to differentiate the learning needs of children; being more empathetic to diverse student needs; and drawing on their lived experiences to represent approaches to education grounded in justice, mutual support, and valuing diversity, which are often missing from traditional curricula.

This synthesis aims to summarize existing evidence on teachers with disabilities working in mainstream classrooms. It draws on primary data collected through different country projects to forefront what teachers with disabilities believe can be done to support them. Beyond the evidence, we also provide insights from low- and middle- income country (LMIC) examples of how teachers with disabilities are included in education policy and planning. The synthesis concludes with recommendations for supporting teachers with disabilities through data, policy and investment, and practice as well as research.

Summary of Existing Literature

Globally, existing literature on teachers with disabilities in mainstream classrooms over the past 30 years centres on four overarching themes: (1) the motivation to become a teacher and teacher professional identities, (2) the impact of teachers with disabilities, (3) the challenges for teachers with disabilities, and (4) the enablers to supporting teachers with disabilities. It is important to recognise that there is a disproportionate concentration of this research within specific regions, such as North America and Western Europe, with a notable gap in evidence from LMICs.

Motivation to become a teacher and teacher professional identities: Three primary motivations emerge for individuals with disabilities entering the teaching profession: pragmatic factors (such as pay and holidays); personal variables (e.g. passion for working with children and having relevant skills); and a strong sense of social justice. For persons with disabilities, the decision to teach can stem from a desire to challenge societal stereotypes and to act as role models for students.

Impact of teachers with disabilities: Existing evidence on the impact of teachers with disabilities focuses on how they can act as powerful agents to shape inclusive school environments; normalize diversity within educational spaces; and, more broadly, influence wider perceptions of persons with disabilities by challenging societal biases. Biases within curricula and societal attitudes often undermine the contributions of teachers with disabilities, highlighting the need for systemic reforms to address these issues.

Challenges for teachers with disabilities: The teaching profession has systemic challenges, particularly in teacher preparation programs and in-service professional development. Special education teacher candidates with disabilities often report feeling burdensome to their programs and encounter hesitancy when requesting accommodations. Teachers also struggle with the decision to disclose a disability at work, particularly a hidden disability. Negative biases among school leaders and colleagues often undermine the contributions of teachers with disabilities. One study notes that school principals fear higher absentee rates and bureaucratic complications when hiring teachers with disabilities.

Enablers to supporting teachers with disabilities: Effective preparation and pre-service training are crucial for the success of teachers with disabilities. Evidence suggests that the development of learning communities for student teachers while they are working in their practicums can promote better communication and collaboration among students, mentors, and institutions to facilitate shared understandings of the accommodations teachers with disabilities need. When working in schools, inclusive leadership can significantly enable success for teachers with disabilities. Empathetic leaders and the presence of role models with disabilities have been identified as critical factors in fostering positive work environments.

How Teachers with Disabilities Are Included in Country Policy and Planning

We undertook a high-level scoping of education policies and data across seven LMICs – India, Kenya, Ghana, Tanzania, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and South Africa. All have some form of inclusive education policies but only a few explicitly mention teachers with disabilities. Policies that do mention teachers with disabilities tend to cover only one or two teacher-related issues from a few specific areas: representation, infrastructure and access, pre-service education, and professional development. Headline findings from the scoping include the following:

- Half of the countries reviewed have policies that speak to issues of representation of teachers with disabilities, but only Kenya sets specific targets for their recruitment.
- Four of the seven countries have policies that deal specifically with issues of infrastructure and access related to disabilities.
- Only three countries have policies that mention pre-service education and/or professional development for teachers with disabilities.
- Systematic data collected on teachers with disabilities at the national level is rare in general and in the seven countries reviewed. Notably, in Ghana, data on teachers with disabilities was collected nationally for the first time in education through the 2024 Annual School Census. In Rwanda, data is only collected at a specific time in the teaching life cycle, at the point when a teacher submits a request for transfer. In India, data has been collected as part of the national database U-DISE, but it is not publicly available due to quality issues.

It is important to note that where education policies do mention teachers with disabilities, they often provide little to no guidance on implementation or financing and do not set benchmarks or targets to track progress. Furthermore, few policies recognise the fact that individuals could also acquire a disability at any time during the teaching life cycle.

Recommendations from Teachers with Disabilities

This synthesis brings together recommendations from teachers with disabilities, which were identified through new analysis of data collected as part of a series of projects across 10 countries. This data came from interviews and participatory activities with teachers with disabilities working in mainstream schools. The findings can be categorized around six key recommendations:

Accessible infrastructure: Across countries, most participants noted physical barriers to working in schools. These included inaccessible school buildings and gates for those with mobility problems, inaccessible roads to reach schools safely, lack of accessible and clean toilets, no place outside the class for the teacher to rest, and the lack of a comfortable desk and chair to sit at in their classroom.

Assistive devices and teaching and learning materials: An important concern that emerged across interviews was the lack of accessible teaching and learning resources. As a blind teacher in India noted: 'Blind teachers face a lot of problems. The curriculum is not available in the braille. It is difficult to teach students. Such things should be taken care of'.

Awareness among school leaders: Across different countries, the biggest challenge identified by participants were issues related to school leaders and head teachers. A teacher in Jordan shared, 'When I came to my school, the school manager didn't know how to deal with me, how to deal with disabilities, how to deal with what kind of work I can do'.

Availability and use of edtech: An overall recommendation was the need for better availability and training in the use of educational technology (edtech). A male teacher in India noted how technology was supporting persons with disabilities in other sectors but was yet to be used in schools.

Professional networks: Teachers reported a lack of organised networks or platforms for teachers with disabilities to meet with each other, including no associations at the school, regional, or zone level. Even when teachers were aware of the existence of teacher unions, these spaces were not experienced as supportive.

Policies, resources, and implementation: There is a vital need to develop clear policies, promote awareness, provide resources, and monitor implementation.

A Road Map for the Future: Data, Policy and Investment, and Practice and Research

This synthesis provides concrete actions to strengthen data, policy and investment, practice and research that can support teachers with disabilities.

Data – To facilitate better research, planning, and programming, a clear first step is to ensure data on teachers with disabilities is collected. Given that most countries already collect data on teachers for various purposes, such as salaries, deployment etc., including a category on disability in routine national data collection is essentially a no-cost effort and should be encouraged. In parallel, there should be a sound understanding of how this data can help address critical issues such as issues representation and deployment.

Policy and investment – In addition to constitutional and employment legislation, countries should ensure they have education policies explicitly supporting teachers with disabilities, and these should cover the full life cycle of teachers' professional lives. For recruitment and representation policies, some countries provide quotas or targets, but equally important is providing guidance for those in charge of recruitment. Investment in disability allowances, adequate and accessible infrastructure, and accessible teaching and learning materials are foundational support mechanisms that should be included in policy, planning, and budgeting.

Practice – Especially given how teachers with disabilities can leverage edtech, it needs to be included in pre-service teacher education curriculum and in-service professional development policies. Teachers also recommended that a concrete way to support them is through peer networks, such as communities of practice, mentorship programs, and professional platforms. Providing disability awareness and inclusion training for senior management, especially school leadership, is critical to supporting teachers with disabilities. Participation of individuals with disabilities in the teacher workforce should be promoted and their voices represented in dialogues with governments and other education stakeholders.

Research – A critical gap is evidence on the impact of teachers with disabilities on learning and wider education outcomes. Future research should cover the experience of teachers with disabilities across all stages of their professional life cycle, including their well-being, classroom teaching and learning experiences, and access and use of edtech. The intersectional dynamics of disability should be explored, including gender, race, ethnicity, and geography, as well as other factors. Evidence is especially needed on how awareness building, sensitization, and training for school leaders can help challenge negative beliefs and attitudes around disability and ableist leadership. Existing research often focuses on the level of the individual, but more needs to be understood about the role of system level elements, such as policies and legislation, infrastructure and resources, support from unions, and engagement with other relevant sectors.

1 Introduction

1.1 Why it is critical to better understand and support teachers with disabilities for developing inclusive schools?

Education is part of shifting social and political landscapes that require continuous and dynamic adaptation to prepare students now and for the future. There is a move away from a traditional focus on academic achievement and cognitive development to embrace a more holistic vision—one that nurtures life skills, fosters socio-emotional growth, and prepares individuals to navigate a complex and interconnected world. This is happening simultaneously with a rise in the diversity of student populations, as more first-generation learners enter the school system and education systems become more inclusive. These students also need to navigate new complex challenges in the face of global trends in climate change, migration and displacement, ongoing conflicts, pandemics, and advances in artificial intelligence, to name a few.

It is widely accepted that inclusion is needed to improve access to and quality education for all learners – especially for those who are at a greater risk of marginalisation, exclusion, or underachievement. Within this context, the issue of inclusive education has received increasing attention worldwide and is now a pillar of most global education agendas. UNESCO's Convention against Discrimination in Education was passed in 1960, and the more recent Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) and the Education 2030 Framework for Action have enshrined the need to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all (United Nations Department of Economic Affairs, 2025a).

Historically persons with disabilities tend to be the most neglected group in many societies (Munyi, 2012; UNICEF, 2005). **Disability also intersects with many other points of marginalisation, such as gender, poverty, and location, exacerbating the risk of exclusion** (UNESCO, 2024). The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities General Comment 4 of Article 24 states that inclusive education 'requires an in-depth transformation of education systems in legislation, policy and the mechanisms for financing, administering, designing, delivering and monitoring education' (United Nations, 2006). Consequentially, inclusion must be the foundation of approaches regarding access and teaching and learning, rather than relying on piece-meal solutions that do not address the deeper barriers of exclusion. Inclusive education requires openness, participation, and dialogue among different stakeholder groups (Singal et al., 2018). Acknowledging that inclusion is a moral imperative – a prerequisite for sustainable societies – is a precondition for education in democratic societies based on fairness, justice, and equity (UNICEF, 2025).

Little attention has been paid to inclusion within the education workforce, meaning that teachers are not always representative of the population they serve. Though significant efforts are being made to include more children with disabilities in most education systems' provision, diversity among those adults working with these students has been overlooked. The Education Commission's report Transforming the Education Workforce (2019) noted that an increasingly diverse student population's needs will only be met with an equally diversified teacher workforce. A diverse teaching workforce ensures the inclusion of teachers with a wider range of skills, experiences, and backgrounds who can recognise students' unique needs and provide relevant support. There is also evidence showing that doing so nurtures inclusive school cultures where diversity is recognised and celebrated. The report emphasised that inequities in the workforce itself are rarely recognised or addressed in design and planning, training, in-service support, professional development, or career opportunities. Such inequities can lead to a workforce that is not representative of the population it serves in terms of gender, disabilities, and ethnic and linguistic groups, among others. Even when attention is paid to teacher diversity and inclusion, the focus tends to centre on race, gender, and ethnicity, with little attention paid to disability or the intersectionality of inclusion.

Though significant efforts are being made to include more children with disabilities in most education systems, diversity among those adults working with these students has been overlooked.

Persons with disabilities are disproportionately disadvantaged in the wider labour market. Taking a step back and looking at the engagement of persons with disabilities in the labour market more broadly, it is widely accepted that they are disproportionately disadvantaged. Global statistics from the International Labour Organisation (ILO) indicate that 'only 3 in 10 people with disabilities are active in the labour market, [meaning] their overall labour market participation rate is very low and progress towards greater inclusion has been relatively slow' (Ananian & Dellaferrera, 2024). Significantly, those with disabilities are two times less likely to be employed than people without disabilities (Stoveska, 2020). This is more profoundly evident in the case of LMICs, based on both official and unofficial sources. Mizunoya and Mitra (2013), using data from LMICs for World Health Survey, showed that persons with disabilities generally experience lower employment rates compared to their counterparts without disabilities, and the unemployment rate of persons with multiple impairments is even higher than those with single impairment. There is also data to suggest an interaction between disability and other forms of discrimination. Data from the most recent UN Disability and Development Report (United Nations Department of Economic Affairs, 2024) for 190 countries shows that the employment rate for persons with disabilities is lower (27%) compared to their counterparts without disabilities (56%), it is even more serious for women with disabilities (23%).

These disadvantages are the result of complex institutional and sociocultural factors, biases, and norms that persons with disabilities face. As Lamichhane et al. (2016) outlines, a range of factors, such as the lack of access to education and training, workplace environment and inadequate accommodations, and employers' perceptions/misconceptions of disability, could all contribute to the ongoing exclusion from the labour market of people with disabilities. These factors are further explained by Giermanowska et al. (2019) as operating on multiple levels:

The macro level encompasses national factors such as culture, law, social provision and economic development, such as the type of social benefits and public services and the existence of anti-discrimination legislation;

The meso level involves local communities, environments, and labour markets (e.g. the presence of persons with disabilities in public spaces and the openness of local employers to employing and retaining people with disabilities;

The micro level focuses on individual factors, such as the family background, individual socio-demographic characteristics, and personal experiences (e.g. family structure, motivation, and self-esteem).

Challenges to representation of persons with disabilities in the teaching workforce need to be explicitly addressed. The challenges to employment for persons with disabilities are also a reality within the education sector. Despite its emphasis on inclusive education, the education sector has not seen any recent significant increase in diversity, particularly from a disability perspective. This starts with fewer children with disabilities attending school and indeed completing their education. The Disability and Development Report (United Nations Department of Economic Affairs, 2024) states that 'many children with disabilities have never attended school. This was the case when the 2030 Agenda was adopted and remains the case today.' At all ages and levels of education, children with disabilities are more likely to be out of school than children without disabilities. Furthermore, Singal and Wijesinghe (2024a) note that while schools continue to be framed in various discourses as critical spaces in upholding the vision of inclusive education and are seen as crucial in the promotion of an inclusive society, this framing of inclusive education does not extend to adults in these schools, and specifically teachers with disabilities. Thus, the cycle of exclusion for those with disabilities is perpetuated. To disrupt this cycle, inclusion of both students and teachers with disabilities must be prioritised.

Factors such as prestige, accessibility, working conditions, and pay of the teaching profession have been identified as barriers to attracting more and better qualified individuals to education generally (Arnold & Rahimi, 2025). Singal and Wijesinghe (2024a) argue that these and additional factors, such as disability-based discrimination, might also contribute to the low

rates of employing and retaining teachers with disabilities. In Education International's 2024 Global Status of Teachers Survey (2025), teacher unions globally reported that disability is one of the top three most common forms of discrimination alongside political views and sexual orientation.

Without a representative workforce, it is unlikely that foundational learning will improve for all students. Existing evidence suggests that teachers with disabilities are better able to differentiate learning activities for children and shape students' future aspirations and belief in themselves (Burns & Bell, 2010, 2011; Griffiths, 2012; Morgan & Burns, 2000; Singal & Wijesinghe, 2024a).

More research is needed on the impact of teachers with disabilities. A focus on generating this evidence is critical, given existing studies showing that teachers with disabilities can have a positive impact on learning for all children and the wider school culture. A better understanding of teachers with disabilities' professional experiences and their impact on education outcomes can help governments more effectively support teachers with disabilities and learners. This, in turn, could have a spillover effect, increasing the number of persons with disabilities who make it through the schooling system and become future teachers, furthering the cycle of inclusivity.

1.2 The purpose and scope of this synthesis

Globally, there is very limited information on the professional life cycle and experience of teachers with disabilities – from the training opportunities available to them to their recruitment and deployment to career paths to professional development and in-service support. This is particularly the case for teachers with disabilities across LMICs and conflict-affected regions, irrespective of the type of disability or when the impairment was acquired. This research synthesis, funded by the What Works Hub for Global Education (WWHGE), seeks to bring more attention to this critical issue and to contribute new evidence.

The paper begins with a concise summary of the latest empirical evidence on teachers with disabilities. It then provides insights from a review of the available policies and national-level data on teachers with disabilities from several countries in which the WWHGE is working to illustrate the reality on the ground. These include India, South Africa, Rwanda, Tanzania, Ghana, Kenya, and Sierra Leone. Given the lack of teacher voices in existing research, the synthesis draws on a recently developed qualitative dataset from across LMICs to propose recommendations from teachers with disabilities, suggesting what can be done to improve the profession. The synthesis concludes with a road map for how to move forward in terms of strengthening data, research, and policy to better support teachers with disabilities. The final section includes examples of promising practices for each category.

This report aligns with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) definition of ***persons with disabilities*** **as people 'who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments, which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others'** (United Nations, 2006). We use the term ***teachers with disabilities*** rather than disabled teachers to reflect the use of the term person with disabilities, rather than disabled person, where the aim is to emphasise the individual first and foremost, rather than focusing exclusively on the disabilities. This is in line with the person-first language that is more commonly used in many parts of the world and is reflective of the terminology used in the Global Report on Teachers (UNESCO & International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030, 2024).

While we acknowledge that there are persons with disabilities working in many different roles across the education workforce, the scope of this paper explicitly focuses on **classroom teachers with disabilities** working in primary and secondary schools. The synthesis centres **teachers working in mainstream classrooms with all students** and not in exclusively segregated settings, such as special education schools or resource centres, in alignment with the stated principles of inclusive education, and the belief that all children can learn together. We recognise that there are a range of scenarios for how persons with disabilities train to become teachers and are recruited into the education system.[1] However, this paper focuses on those teachers who undertake traditional pre-service teacher education and go on to teach in mainstream schools in order to support the agenda initiated by the UN CRPD, which recognises the right of persons with disabilities to participate in the general education system. Further, in this synthesis, **we acknowledge that teachers can acquire a disability anytime while in the profession** and thus highlight evidence and promising practices that encompass the entire professional cycle for teachers.

Given the limited research on teachers with disabilities in general, the synthesis draws out what lessons can be learned that might be useful for policy and practice across different contexts. However, our review of national policies and data as well as recommendations from teachers focuses on **LMICs** as there is a significant gap in studies from those contexts. The recommendations from this synthesis are intended for a wide audience, including researchers; governments and their partners; the education workforce, including teachers and their representative organisations; international organisations; and donors.

1... In some countries, teacher candidates with disabilities undertake their pre-service education in traditional teacher training programs but are then funnelled to special needs schools. There are also teachers with disabilities who specialise as special needs teachers in traditional teacher training programs and go on to teach in mainstream schools. In other contexts, there are separate pre-service programs for all teachers who will teach at special needs schools.

2

Summary of research relating to teachers with disabilities

This section explores the evidence that emerges from the global literature on teachers with disabilities over the past three decades to highlight insights that can inform policy and practice. The section draws on articles available in the public domain and published in the English language to provide an overview of existing evidence on teachers with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. At the outset, it is important to note that research engaged with teachers with disabilities remains a relatively underexplored field.

Singal, Kwok, & Wijesinghe's (2024) report Being a Teacher with Disabilities: Perspectives, Practices and Opportunities summarizes the latest reviews of the literature in relation to teachers with disabilities. They identify four comprehensive reviews that have been published in education journals over the past five years. The first is a review by Bellacicco et al. (2022) investigating the experiences of teachers with disabilities, which identified 32 studies published between 1990 and 2018. In another systematic review, Bellacicco and Demo (2023), using the same time frame, identified 22 studies looking at teacher training and exploring aspects of 'becoming a teacher with a disability'. Singal and Ware (2021) found 59 articles focused specifically on teachers with disabilities working in mainstream settings. The final review, by Neca et al. (2022), found 53 research studies covering four main research topics: teachers' life trajectories, educational practices, and challenges; teacher's training; perspectives about teachers with disabilities (among students and school principals); and the under-representation of teachers with disabilities in the literature.

Singal, Kwok, & Wijesinghe (2024) own review incorporates and builds on the four existing reviews detailed above and includes an updated search of the most recent articles.[2] They screened literature from all four reviews and the database search, finding **a total of 87 articles that had a focus on teachers with disabilities working in mainstream settings and those undertaking teacher preparation programmes (covering 1990–2024).**

In their review of the 87 papers, the authors note that most (22) focused on the experiences of teachers with learning difficulties, primarily those with dyslexia. Teachers with sensory impairments, such as hearing impairments (15) and visual impairments (12), were the second most frequently engaged with. Eight studies included physical disabilities; a further eight studies discussed a combination of the above listed disabilities; one study related to the autism spectrum disorder; and two studies covered other disabilities, such as chronic fatigue syndrome and mental health aspects. Nineteen studies did not specify the types of disabilities of the sample group. Table 1 provides a summary of the disability types covered by the studies.

2. The ERIC (Education Resources Information Center) database was further checked, and seven research articles relevant to the above topic that were published after 2021 were identified.

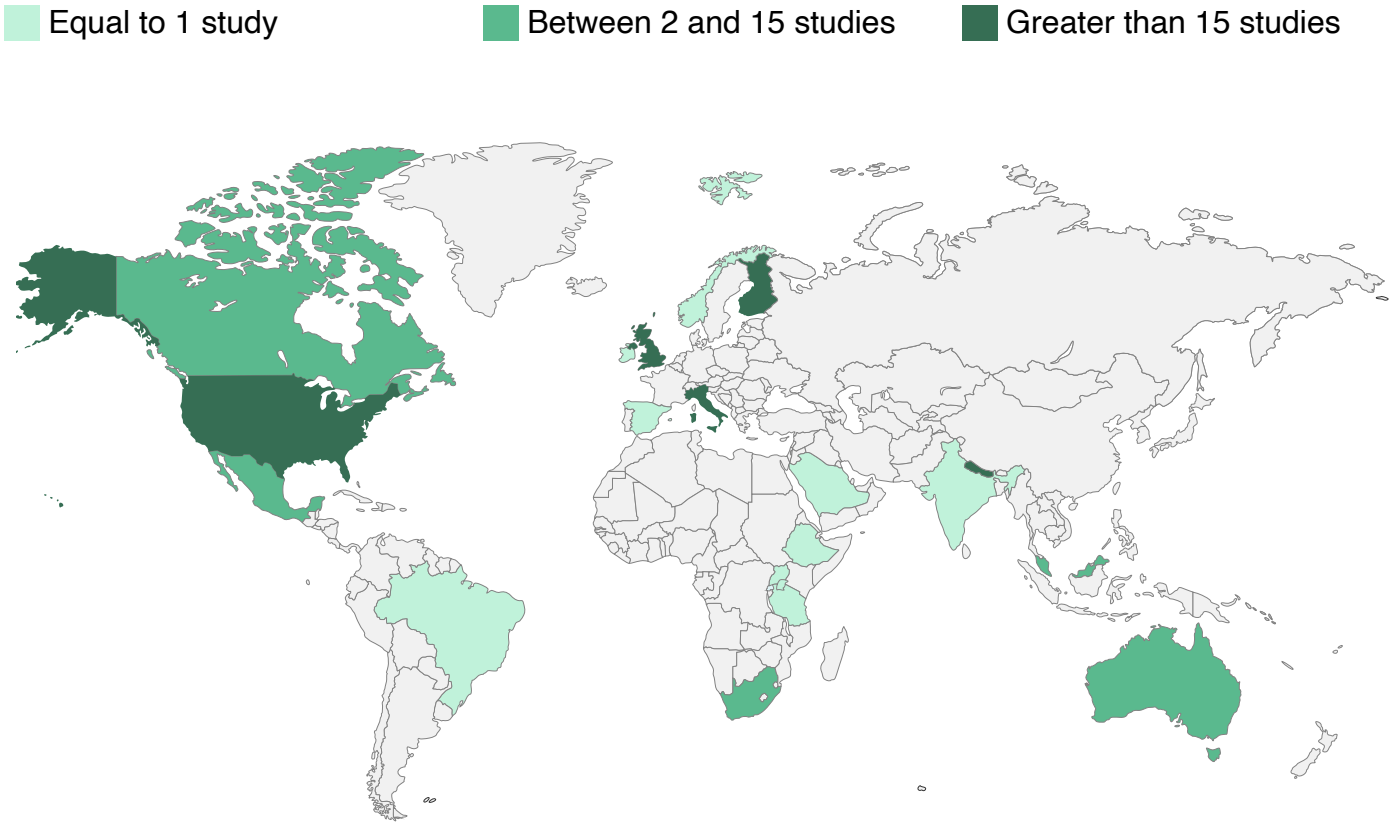
Table 1: Number of studies by disability type from research review

Disability type covered by research	Number of studies
Learning difficulties, primarily dyslexia	22
Hearing impairments	15
Visual impairments	12
Physical disabilities	8
Combination of above listed disabilities	8
Autism spectrum disorder	1
Other (chronic fatigue syndrome and mental health)	2
Unspecified	19

Additionally, **the majority of the 87 studies reviewed adopted a qualitative research design (n = 59) and were carried out in the United States (43)**. Only a few studies focused on teachers in a particular subject area. Three studies focused on physical education (U.S.), two looked at music education (U.S.), six at English education (UK, U.S.) and four at science education (UK, Norway, U.S.), and these studies were conducted across the primary and secondary levels of education. Twenty-nine studies specifically focused on the areas of teacher training and teacher preparation at vocational and tertiary education level.

The review highlights a disproportionate concentration of research within specific regions, such as North America and Western Europe, with a notable gap in evidence from LMICs. In the eight studies specifically located in LMICs, which met the inclusion criteria for the review, the participants were primarily teachers who identified as being visually impaired, deaf or having a physical disability. (It is important to note that the terminology used varied across countries and the participant group.) Seven of the studies were qualitative in nature, and only one was a mixed-methods paper. Figure 1 illustrates the frequency of studies identified for each country.

Figure 1. Number of studies on teachers with disabilities by country (1990–2024)



Across the studies reviewed by Singal, Kwok, & Wijesinghe (2024), a few overarching themes emerge: the first looks at why persons with disabilities become teachers and how they construct their professional identities; the second focuses on the impact of teachers with disabilities; the third explores challenges that professionally inhibit teachers with disabilities; and the fourth highlights enablers for teachers with disabilities. The following four sections provide a snapshot of the main arguments under each.

2.1 Reasons why persons with disabilities become teachers and how they construct their professional identities

Singal, Kwok, & Wijesinghe (2024) highlight three primary motivations for individuals entering the teaching profession: **pragmatic factors (e.g. pay, holidays), personal variables (e.g. passion for working with children, having relevant skills), and a strong sense of social justice (Ferri et al., 2005; Ware et al., 2022)**. For the latter, persons with disabilities' decision to teach can stem from a **desire to challenge societal stereotypes and act as role models for students** (Ware et al., 2022).

In terms of professional identities, **some teachers with disabilities argue that they bring additional qualities to the profession in relation to their counterparts with no disabilities**. Examples include being particularly caring, having empathetic values and a stronger ability to connect with diverse learners (Glazzard & Dale, 2015), and being a positive role model as a person with disabilities (Ware et al., 2022). Glazzard & Dale (2015) also report that teachers with disabilities felt their unique experiences enrich their teaching identity. In the United States, Ferri et al. (2005) report strong evidence that teachers with disabilities describe themselves as competent when viewed through a capability approach lens.

2.2 The impact of teachers with disabilities: Promoting inclusive schools and influencing student perceptions of persons with disabilities

Existing evidence on the impact of teachers with disabilities focuses on how they can act as **powerful agents to shape inclusive school environments** – normalizing diversity within educational spaces and, more broadly, **impacting perceptions of persons with disabilities by challenging societal biases**.

In terms of teaching and learning, some studies highlight how teachers with disabilities are **better able to differentiate learning activities for children and empower students with disabilities** (Burns & Bell, 2010, 2011; Griffiths, 2012; Morgan & Burns, 2000). In the United States, Roberson and Serwatka (2000) found that students who were deaf or hard of hearing perceived deaf teachers as better at teaching and more positive towards them. In Burns and Bells (2010, 2011), teachers from the UK highlighted how they used their own stories of struggling in school to connect with their students who have disabilities and offer additional, differentiated support without making them feel like they were doing something wrong. In Rwanda, having a teacher with a disability helped **shape students' future aspirations and belief in themselves** (Singal & Wijesinghe, 2024a). This ability to create inclusive and responsive learning environments – for students with and without disabilities – reflects the unique strengths that teachers with disabilities bring to their classrooms. Anderson (2006, p. 368) noted that 'pedagogy is also shaped by our life experiences. Teachers with disabilities offer knowledge through their bodies and experiences that isn't usually part of the curriculum. Disabled teachers embody pedagogies of justice, interdependence, and respect for differences'.

In addition to creating more inclusive school environments, teachers with disabilities can impact student perceptions towards disabilities

more broadly. One study suggested that to have a person with a disability as a teacher contributes more to developing positive mindsets towards others with disabilities than exposure to disability in other contexts (Hayashi & May, 2011). Research shows that student perceptions can vary significantly depending on cultural norms and exposure. In Nepal, Lamichhane et al. (2016) found that teachers who were visually impaired were valued by students for their positive attitudes, communication skills, and ability to provide social and moral guidance.

2.3 Challenges that professionally inhibit teachers with disabilities

Systemic challenges in the profession persist for teachers with disabilities, particularly in teacher preparation programs and in-service professional development. Teachers with disabilities face significant barriers as trainees in pre-service teacher training programmes (Brulle, 2006; Haselden et al., 2007; Moore et al., 2020), often driven by ableist expectations and the lack of accessibility for persons with disabilities to the teaching profession (Saltes, 2020). As they progress through the profession they continue to face challenges for participation in in-service training programmes, which are often not designed to accommodate their needs (Singal & Wijesinghe, 2024a).

Negative biases among school leaders often undermine teachers with disabilities' contributions.

The decision to disclose a disability – particularly a hidden disability – at work often presents a significant dilemma for many teachers. A study from Canada with graduate students with disabilities suggests that ableist expectations and attitudes around what makes a capable teacher can present a substantial barrier (Saltes, 2020). Another study from the United States with teachers with learning disabilities presented mixed results, showing some teachers navigating heightened levels of stigma in their work environments and therefore choosing not to disclose their disabilities, while other teachers reflected that disclosing their disability positively influenced perceptions of persons with disabilities (Valle et al., 2004). Finally, teacher standards can impact teachers with disabilities disproportionately, as Glazzard and Dale (2015) note how official 'standards' and accountability mechanisms can work as a deterrent to trainee teachers disclosing their disability.

Negative biases among school leaders often undermine teachers with disabilities' contributions, as was the case in research from Sri Lanka and Jordan (Singal & Wijesinghe, 2024a). Tal-Alon and Shapira-Lishchinsky (2019) note that school principals in Israel feared higher absentee rates and bureaucratic complications when hiring teachers with disabilities.

Ware et al. (2022) found that in England, **schools placed the burden of adaptation on teachers rather than addressing institutional shortcomings**. They further noted that teachers with disabilities reported **seeing other successful teachers with disabilities who were more advanced in their careers as role models as significant. However, this is a rare opportunity for most teachers with disabilities given the under-representation of teachers with disabilities internationally**. Ensuring more persons with disabilities can access teacher training could support the potential pool of role models.

Biases within curricula and societal attitudes also undermine the contributions of teachers with disabilities, highlighting the need for systemic reforms to address these issues. In the United States, students held negative perceptions of teachers with disabilities teaching physical education (Bryant & Curtner-Smith, 2009a, 2009b). The authors noted that as students 'progress through their schooling, their beliefs about Physical Education teachers with disabilities gradually change for the worse because they are socialised into believing that sport, physical activity, and physical education are for what appear to be whole and fit bodies' (Bryant and Curtner-Smith, 2009b: 319). These findings suggest that students' attitudes are shaped not only by the teachers' capabilities but also by broader societal narratives about disability.

2.4 Enablers of success for recruiting teachers with disabilities and supporting them professionally

The literature identifies several enablers of success for better inclusion of teachers with disabilities into the education system. **The importance of teacher training and preparation has been further emphasised** by many, including Subrayen & Suknunan (2019) from South Africa, and Haselden et al. (2007) from the United States. They note that supporting teachers with disabilities right at the start of their training, such as during teaching practicums and teaching internships, was essential. Studies from England and Finland have shown that these structured and supportive environments can also lead to enhanced confidence and empowerment for student teachers with disabilities (Botham & Nicholson, 2014; Burns & Bell, 2010; Glazzard & Dale, 2015). Subrayen & Suknunan (2019) note the importance of developing learning communities, while Haselden et. al., (2007) discuss the need to develop a mentoring program, both of which can support teachers with disabilities to navigate the profession.

Support from colleagues boosts the confidence and motivation among teachers with disabilities. Some research has noted that teachers with disabilities appreciated collaborative methods of working with other teachers,

Empathetic leaders and the presence of disabled role models have been identified as critical factors in fostering positive work environments.

which at times meant small acts of support, such as reading aloud text from a book to shifting classes on the timetable to accommodate medical appointments (Singal, Kwok, & Wijesinghe, 2024).

Additionally, inclusive leadership can significantly enable success. **Empathetic leaders and the presence of disabled role models** have been identified as critical factors in fostering positive work environments (Ware et al., 2022). Ware et al. (2022) also report that school leaders who showed a willingness to connect and relate to teachers with disabilities (such as their having a relative with a disability) were positive agents of change. Leadership beyond the school level can also be important.

3

State of policy and data on teachers with disabilities at global and local levels

To complement a summary of the existing literature, we reviewed global frameworks and datasets to explore how teachers with disabilities have been included. We also undertook a high-level scoping of existing national-level policies and data in seven countries – India, Kenya, Ghana, Tanzania, Rwanda, Siera Leone, and South Africa – to identify if, and to what extent, teachers with disabilities are included in education planning at the country level.

3.1 Teachers with disabilities remain neglected in global frameworks and datasets in education

Significant progress has been made in recent decades towards inclusive education, with notable developments at both international and national levels.[3] Currently, two major frameworks anchor this progress. The first is the 2006 UN CRPD. The UN CRPD, adopted in 2006, solidifies the right to inclusive education and is currently ratified by 192 countries. Article 24 guarantees education 'without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity', mandating an inclusive system that fosters dignity, self-worth, and the full inclusion of all abilities (United Nations, 2006). The second is the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals – particularly SDG4 – which aims to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' (United Nations Department of Economic Affairs, 2025a). The SDGs are part of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which pledges to 'leave no one behind' and envisions a world that is equitable, tolerant, and inclusive (United Nations Department of Economic Affairs, 2025b). Figure 2 provides a longer list of important global efforts aiming to address inclusion and disability in education.

Over the past decade, educational inclusion has evolved more rapidly, driven by comprehensive frameworks and reports such as the 2020 Global Education Monitoring Report, Inclusion and Education: All Means All, which highlights the systemic barriers that continue to obstruct full inclusion for individuals with disabilities.

3. While the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1960 UNESCO Convention against Discrimination established education as a fundamental right for all and outlined obligations to eliminate barriers to equality, neither of these instruments explicitly addressed the needs of persons with disabilities (UNESCO, 1960; United Nations, 1948). These were followed by the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 1990 World Declaration on Education for All which called on countries to remove educational disparities (UNESCO, 1990; United Nations, 1989). However, a major turning point came with the 1994 Salamanca Statement, arising from the World Conference on Special Needs Education, which called for inclusive education systems where all children, regardless of ability, could learn together in mainstream schools (UNESCO, 2004). This marked a shift from a predominately segregated approach to educating students with disabilities and special needs to advocacy for including these students in mainstream schools, laying the groundwork for future frameworks on inclusion.

Subsequently, there have been other key reports, such as the United Nations Disability and Development Report (United Nations Department of Economic Affairs, 2024), the UNICEF 2024 report Seen, Counted, Included: Using Data to Shed Light on the Wellbeing of Children with Disabilities, and the UNICEF's 2025 Global Disability Inclusion Report. All of these reports note the need for more robust data and evidence in accelerating progress towards inclusive education.

Additionally, there has been a strong focus on international advocacy to advance the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities through the organisation of Global Disability Summits (GDS). Since 2018, three summits have been held that have provided a strong platform for amplifying the voices of persons with disabilities and advancing discussions on disability inclusion across all sectors. In an analysis of all the commitments under education made at the summits in 2018 and 2022, it was clear that while organisations highlighted capacity building, advocacy and awareness, policy standards, and sector planning; however, less attention was given to funding and research (Singal & Wijesinghe, 2024b). This lack of an evidence-driven approach has resulted in a 'scatter-gun' mentality to programme development and implementation (Singal et al., 2023).

This timeline illustrates the evolution of global frameworks that aim to address inclusion broadly and disability inclusion specifically. It is significant that none of these frameworks – including those specific to education – mention teachers explicitly.

Figure 2: Global efforts that address inclusion and disability in education

1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights

1960 UNESCO Convention against Discrimination

1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

1990 World Declaration on Education for All

1990 Jomtien World Conference on Education

1994 Salamanca Statement/World Conference on Special Needs Education

2000 World Education Forum: Dakar Framework for Action

2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

2015 Sustainable Development Goals

2018, 2020, 2025 Global Disability Summits

Even with the increasing global attention on disability and inclusion within the education sector, data and evidence on teachers with disabilities remain largely lacking.

Even with the increasing global attention on disability and inclusion within the education sector, data and evidence on teachers with disabilities remain largely lacking. This lack of evidence is highlighted in UNESCO's first ever Global Report on Teachers (2024), which states that 'data relating specifically to facilities and services for teachers with disabilities is extremely scarce globally'. A similar issue was raised at the World Congress hosted by Education International in 2015, which emphasised that not only do more teachers with disabilities need to be employed, but more research is needed on the recruitment, retention, and progression (including barriers faced) by teachers with disabilities (Education International, 2015). The Congress was followed by two reports Are We There Yet? Education Unions Assess the Bumpy Road to Inclusive Education and Rethinking Disability: A Primer for Educators and Education Unions, which highlighted employment concerns and conditions for teachers with disabilities, the need for more data on teachers with disabilities, and the inclusion of teachers with disabilities in union leadership (Educational Internation, 2018; Principe, 2018).

We were unable to identify any international dataset that collects information on the status of disability among teachers specifically. As part of this synthesis, prominent global education datasets were reviewed to better understand what data is collected in relation to teachers with disabilities. This included the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, UNICEF data warehouse, USAID's Demographic and Health Survey, the ILO, the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), the World Bank's World Development Indicators and Global Education Policy Dashboard, and the UN Disability Statistics Database. None of these included data on teachers' disability status that we could find. While there are several SDGs with target indicators that apply to people with disabilities, and one which focuses on disability in the context of education facilities and environments (4a), none focus on teachers with disabilities explicitly.[4]

Thus, a continued predominance on the inclusion of students with disabilities is seen at a global level, without an explicit focus on teachers with disabilities. Even where disability is mentioned, it is important to note that there is much to be done in terms of implementation of these frameworks, commitments, and targets. Often there is no funding dedicated to supporting teachers with disabilities, and as we have shown, no data to track commitments or indicate progress.

4. **Target 4.A., 11.2, 11.7: 4**.a: build and upgrade education facilities, which are disability sensitive (. . .); 11.2 provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all (. . .) with special attention to the needs of persons with disabilities (. . .); 11.7 provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, particularly for (. . .) persons with disabilities; **Target 8.5**: by 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value; **Target 10.2**: by 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status ; **Target 17.18**: by 2030, enhance capacity building support to developing countries, including for LDCs and SIDS to increase significantly the availability of high-quality, timeline, and reliable data disaggregated by disability (. . .)

3.2 Coverage of teachers with disabilities is extremely limited in country-level policies and data

To get a better understanding of the extent to which teachers with disabilities are considered in education policy and planning, this section provides details on existing legislation, policy, and data across several countries in which the What Works Hub for Global Education is undertaking research. It draws on previous work on this topic by Singal and Ware (2021) in South Africa, Rwanda, and India and investigates four additional countries: Kenya, Tanzania, Sierra Leone, and Ghana. Annex 1 provides a slightly extended discussion of each country, including consideration of broader employment legislation which often guides education sector planning and policy.

Table 2 provides a snapshot of the extent to which teachers with disabilities are included in country- level education policies. It also shows which country governments collect data on teachers with disabilities in the education sector and how that data is captured.

Table 2: Snapshot of country-level policies and national data on teachers with disabilities

Country	What Extent Are Teachers With Disabilities Included In Education Policy & Planning?	Does The Ed Sector Collect Data On Teachers With Disabilities?	If Yes, How Is The Data Collected?
South Africa	• The Office of the Deputy President's White Paper on the Integrated National Disability Strategy (1997) notes the importance of having teachers fluent in sign language and also emphasises the importance of students accessing adult role models who are deaf and Deaf culture in school. While this paper does not go so far as to call for the active recruitment of teachers who are deaf, it does highlight the positive impact of having adults with disabilities as role models for children with disabilities in school. • The Department of Social Development's White Paper on Mainstreaming the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2016) explicitly mentions employing teachers with disabilities and providing alternative communication, education techniques, and materials to support them. • The National Skills Fund and the National Student Financial Aid Scheme – two government bursary programs – provide funding for individuals with disabilities to access tertiary education, including for prospective teachers. • In education, the Department of Basic Education's White Paper 6: Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (2001) does not mention teachers with disabilities.	Unclear	

Country	What Extent Are Teachers With Disabilities Included In Education Policy & Planning?	Does The Ed Sector Collect Data On Teachers With Disabilities?	If Yes, How Is The Data Collected?
Rwanda	• The revised Special Needs and Inclusive Education Policy (2018b) affirms the sector's commitment to increasing accessibility for both students and teachers with disabilities, advocating for a barrier-free environment.	Yes	Teacher disability status is collected at the point of teacher transfer; however, it is not part of the EMIS or data collected annually in education
India	• The National Review Education for All (2015) speaks to the importance of increasing the representation of individuals with disabilities within the education workforce, but it does not outline specific measures to achieve this, unlike its approach for other marginalised groups, such as female teachers or tribal teachers. • The School Planning and Architecture Act (2014) mandates that all schools be built to accommodate everyone, including those with disabilities.	Unclear	UDISE+ gathers information on teachers with disabilities. However, this data is not extensively detailed in publicly available reports.
Kenya	• The National Policy on Continuous Professional Development for TVET Trainers (2024), the Competency-Based Education and Training Policy (2018a), and the Sector Policy for Learners and Trainers with Disabilities (2018c) all acknowledge the need for better accommodations in teacher training institutions for those with disabilities and increased access to skills development as they transition into the workforce, but none provide actual implementation measures for how teachers with disabilities could benefit from these types of programs. The Sector Policy for Learners and Trainers with Disabilities briefly mentions ministerial financial support for six TVET institutions and three teacher training colleges to support the admission of teachers with disabilities. • Article 54 of the Constitution mandates the inclusion of at least 5% of staff in government institutions as people with disabilities (2024, p. 54). While the Teaching Service Commission (TSC) acknowledges this affirmative action quota and works to uphold it, it is not included explicitly in any education policy. • The TSC Code of Regulations for Teachers (2022) outlines several measures to support teachers with disabilities within schools, including an exemption from taxation, mandatory reporting from school leaders if they hire a teacher with disabilities, and a required retirement age of 65. A TSC memo from June 2024 (2024) specifies updated remuneration guidelines for teachers who are blind or deaf or use wheelchairs. • The TSC mandated a 'Friendly Work Environment' protocol in 2024 within their offices, which incorporates sensor sliding doors, lifts, ramps, and suitable washrooms on all floors (Republic of Kenya, 2024). • The TSC Policy on Employee Wellbeing (2018) aims to remove discriminatory practices against those employees with special needs, including ensuring they have access to the facilities, materials and devices, and the most appropriate communications methods to meet their needs.		Data on teachers with disabilities is collected at the county level by the TSC at the point of employment for the purposes of employment, human resources, and payroll. The data collected is used to consider applications such as tax relief, retirement age, and other allowances. There is a standardised form used to collect personal details that asks teachers if they are registered as a person with disability and what type of disability they have. TSC headquarters and county directors have this data, but it is not shared beyond the TSC and is treated as confidential employee data. TSC headquarters also use the data to determine teacher placement, ensuring teachers with disabilities are posted in easy-to-access areas.

Country	What Extent Are Teachers With Disabilities Included In Education Policy & Planning?	Does The Ed Sector Collect Data On Teachers With Disabilities?	If Yes, How Is The Data Collected?
Tanzania	• The National Strategy on Inclusive Education (2021–2026) lays the groundwork for creating an inclusive learning environment for both students and teachers with disabilities. It calls for specific interventions to be provided for teachers and staff with disabilities and for schools to be physically accessible. It does not, however, specify the interventions or how schools should be made accessible.	Yes	Data on teachers with disabilities is collected through various methods and agencies including the Ministry of Education (MoEST), the National Bureau of Statistics, and PORALG Special Education Units. The data is collected annually during national education surveys or assessments. Additional data may be collected through periodic reports submitted by schools and educational institutions. Data is often entered into centralised databases – BEMIS and BEST – managed by PORALG for analysis and reporting. The collection of data on teachers with disabilities is used by the government in resource mobilization and teacher allocation.
Sierra Leone	• The National Policy on Radical Inclusion in Schools (2021) tasks the TSC with exploring viable ways to increase the number of teachers with disabilities. At the local level, the policy requires schools to take 'appropriate measures to employ teachers, including teachers with disabilities, who are qualified in sign language and/or Braille, and to train professionals and staff who work at all levels of education.'	No	
Ghana	• The Inclusive Education Policy and Implementation Plan (2015) suggest that financing mechanisms and initiatives should support teacher candidates with disabilities in enrolling in teacher training colleges. The policy does not provide specific guidance on implementation or outline progress goals.	Yes	Data on teacher disability status and type of disability collected nationally through Annual School Census as of 2024.

Policy

Across the countries reviewed, all had some form of inclusive education policies, but only a few explicitly mention teachers with disabilities. The extent to which teachers with disabilities are included varies, and the policies tend to cover one or two issues from a range of topics, including infrastructure and access, representation of teachers with disabilities in the workforce, remuneration and allowances, and pre-service teacher education and professional development.

Four of the seven countries have policies that deal specifically with issues of infrastructure and access. For example, in Rwanda, the Revised Special Needs and Inclusive Education Policy (Ministry of Education, 2018b) affirms the sector's commitment to increasing accessibility for both students and teachers with disabilities, advocating for a barrier-free environment. In India, the 2014 School Planning and Architecture Act mandates that all schools be built to accommodate everyone, including those with disabilities (Ministry of Education, 2014). In Kenya, the Teaching Service Commission's (TSC) Policy on Employee Wellbeing (2018) aims to remove discriminatory practices against those employees with special needs, ensuring they have access to the infrastructure, materials and devices, and the most appropriate communications methods to meet their needs. It requires TSC facilities to comply with the Persons with Disability Act (National Council for Law Reporting, 2003). An audit on compliance of legislation in relation to persons with disabilities in public institutions found that the TSC has also mandated a 'Friendly Work Environment' protocol within their offices, which incorporates sensor sliding doors, lifts and ramps, and suitable washrooms on all floors (Republic of Kenya, 2024). In Tanzania, the National Strategy on Inclusive Education (2021–2026) lays the groundwork for creating an inclusive learning environment for both students and teachers with disabilities. It aligns with UN CRPD Article 24 on the Right to Inclusive Education, outlining that 'specific interventions should be provided to teachers and staff with disabilities' and calling for schools to be physically accessible. It does not, however, specify the interventions or how schools should be made accessible.

Half the countries have policies that speak to issues of representation of teachers with disabilities, but only Kenya sets specific targets for their recruitment.

Half the countries have policies that speak to issues of representation of teachers with disabilities, but only Kenya sets specific targets for their recruitment. In Kenya, Article 54 of the Constitution mandates the inclusion of at least 5% of staff in government institutions as people with disabilities. While the TSC acknowledges this affirmative action quota, they do not have an explicit policy on it themselves; however, during hiring, if there is a tie between two potential applicants, they indicate that teachers with disabilities will get preferential treatment in alignment with the 5% quota (Republic of Kenya, 2024; Teachers Service Commission Kenya, 2025).

However, it is unclear what placement of these teachers looks like and how many are recruited into mainstream classrooms versus special schools.

Other countries, such as India, stress the importance of increasing the representation of individuals with disabilities within the education workforce but do not outline specific measures to achieve this, unlike the approach for other marginalised groups, such as female teachers or tribal teachers (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2015). Sierra Leone's National Policy on Radical Inclusion in Schools (Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education, 2021) tasks the TSC with exploring viable ways to increase the number of teachers with disabilities. At the local level, the policy requires schools to take 'appropriate measures to employ teachers, including teachers with disabilities, who are qualified in sign language and/or Braille, and to train professionals and staff who work at all levels of education'. However, it does not set specific targets for hiring teachers with disabilities or provisions for supporting their recruitment. In South Africa, the White Paper on the Integrated National Disability Strategy (Office of the Deputy President, 1997) notes the importance of having teachers fluent in sign language and also emphasises the importance of students accessing adult role models who are deaf and Deaf culture in school. While this paper does not go so far as to call for the active recruitment of teachers who are deaf, it does highlight the positive impact of having adults with disabilities as role models for children with disabilities in school. More recently, the White Paper on Mainstreaming the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Department of Social Development, 2016), while not an education-specific policy, does explicitly mention teachers with disabilities, calling for '[e]mploying teachers, including teachers with disabilities, who are qualified in South African Sign Language and/or Braille, and to train professionals and staff who work at all levels of education. Such training shall incorporate disability awareness and the use of appropriate augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of communication, educational techniques, and materials to support persons with disabilities'.

Kenya is the only country this review found to include information on renumeration and allowances for teachers with disabilities in policy. The TSC's Policy on Employee Wellbeing (2018) requires the Commission to pay prescribed allowances to employees with special needs where such is considered necessary for effective performance of duty, and to help them apply for PAYE tax exemption from the Kenya Revenue Authority (KRA) or any other benefits due from the government. Additionally, the TSC recently signed a memo in June 2024 specifying specific remuneration guidelines for teachers who are blind, deaf, or use wheelchairs. These teachers are allotted an allowance of Ksh20,000 per month (Ratemo, 2024). The TSC Code of Regulations for Teachers also outlines several other measures to support teachers with disabilities within schools, including an exemption from

taxation, mandatory reporting from school leaders if they hire a teacher with disabilities, and a required retirement age of 65 for teachers with disabilities (compared to 60 for other teachers;(Teachers Service Commission, 2022).

Of the seven countries reviewed, three have policies that mention pre-service education and/or professional development for teachers with disabilities. In South Africa, the National Skills Fund and the National Student Financial Aid Scheme – two government bursary programs – provide funding for individuals with disabilities to access tertiary education, including for prospective teachers. In Kenya, the National Policy on Continuous Professional Development for TVET Trainers (Ministry of Education, 2024), the Competency-Based Education and Training Policy (Ministry of Education, 2018a), and the Sector Policy for Learners and Trainers with Disabilities (Ministry of Education, 2018c) all acknowledge the need for better accommodations in teacher training institutions for those with disabilities (i.e. accessible infrastructure and other adjustments, such as flexible schedules and assistive devices, to ensure those with disabilities can fully participate) and increased access to skills development as they transition into the workforce. However, none of the policies provide actual implementation measures for how teachers with disabilities could benefit from these types of programs. The Sector Policy for Learners and Trainers with Disabilities briefly mentions ministerial financial support for six technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions and three teacher training colleges to support the admissions of teachers with disabilities (Ministry of Education, 2018c). In Ghana, the government introduced the Inclusive Education Policy (Ministry of Education, 2015a) and an Implementation Plan (Ministry of Education, 2015b), both of which suggest that financing mechanisms and initiatives should support teacher candidates with disabilities in enrolling in teacher training colleges. However, they fail to provide specific guidance on implementation or outline progress goals.

It is important to note that where education policies do mention teachers with disabilities, **often there is little to no guidance given for how to implement policies and no benchmarks or targets provided to track progress. Furthermore, few policies recognise the fact that individuals could also acquire a disability at any time during their teaching life cycle**.

Data

Systematic data collected on teachers with disabilities at the national level is rare in general and in the countries reviewed in this section. We were unable to confirm national collection of data on teachers with disabilities for Sierra Leone and South Africa. In Sierra Leone, we confirmed at least one program run by external partners working with government schools that does collect data on teachers with disabilities, although this data is not included in national education databases.

In Tanzania, the education sector collects data on teachers with disabilities through various methods and agencies, including the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST); the National Bureau of Statistics; and PORALG Special Education Units. Data on teachers with disabilities is typically collected annually during national education surveys or assessments. Additional data may be collected through periodic reports submitted by schools and educational institutions. Collected data is often entered into a centralised databases – BEMIS and BEST – managed by PORALG for analysis and reporting. The collection of data on teachers with disabilities is an ongoing effort aimed at improving inclusivity in the education sector. By understanding the demographics and needs of these teachers, the government can better support them and enhance the overall educational environment. The government uses data on teachers with disabilities in resource mobilization and teacher allocation (D. Kimathi, personal communication, February 2025).

In Ghana, data on teachers with disabilities has just been collected nationally for the first time in education through the 2024 Annual School Census, which includes a question on whether a teacher has a disability and a follow-up multiple-choice question to indicate the type of disability.

In India, the Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) is one of the largest education management information systems initiated by the Department of School Education and Literacy, Ministry of Education. **Although the system gathers information on teachers with disabilities, the data is not extensively detailed in publicly available reports, so it is unclear if and how it is used**. It is also unclear what data on teachers with disabilities exists at the state level.

In Kenya, data on teachers with disabilities is collected at the county level by the TSC for the purposes of employment, human resources, and payroll. **The data is collected at the point of employment and used to consider applications such as tax relief, retirement age, and other allowances**. There is a standardised form used to collect personal details at the point of recruitment that asks teachers if they are registered as a person with disability and what type of disability they have. TSC headquarters and county directors have this data, but it is not shared beyond the TSC and is treated as confidential employee data. TSC headquarters also use the data to determine teacher placement, ensuring teachers with disabilities are posted in easy-to-access areas (D. Kimathi, personal communication, February 2025).

Beyond the TSC, schools, in theory, should capture data on learners, infrastructure, and staff for input to the Ministry of Education's NEMIS (National Education Management Information System). This data is supposed to be collected by head teachers and quality assurance and

standards officers (QASOs), but staff data is not always captured accurately as there are no incentives, given that staff data has no impact on capitation, unlike learner data. As a result, NEMIS's staff population data on teachers with disabilities does not accurately reflect reality and is not used by the ministry. The new system, currently under development – KEMIS (Kenya Education Management Information System) – plans to bring the various datasets together (including TSC payroll data) and will give a more accurate and comprehensive view of reality on the ground. In the future there might be an opportunity to disaggregate teacher/staff population data via KEMIS, an early version is under testing now.

I**n Rwanda, data on teacher disability is not collected systematically at the national level; however, it is captured through the teacher transfer process**. Box 1 provides more details on this case.

Box 1: Integrating data on teacher disability into the Teacher Management Information System in Rwanda

A central objective of Rwanda's Teacher Management Information System (TMIS) is to harmonise information about teachers across the various sections of government and the education ministry, particularly in relation to enhancing the payment of salaries. All 160,000 schoolteachers in the country are registered on TMIS.

The process is very streamlined, wherein each teacher fills in an online survey form. The form requires them to provide information on factors, such as gender, marital status, date of birth, date of employment in education, degree programmes attended, certified or not. The portal also includes the name of the school where they are working at, and the subject they are teaching. This information is then verified by the head teacher for all teachers in their school. This is further verified and approved at the district level.

Interestingly, when a teacher submits a request for school transfer, the portal prompts the teacher to answer the following questions:

- Do you have a disability?
- Do you have a chronic disability?
- Does your child has disability/ chronic disease?
- Does your spouse has disability/chronic disability?

If the teacher responds positively any of these options, they are required to submit the appropriate certificates.

While the main teacher profile in the TMIS does not collect data on disability status, plans are underway to make this possible.

Reference: N. Singal meeting at Rwanda Basic Education Board (REB), February 2025

Gathering reliable data on disability can be challenging due to several intersecting dynamics, such as the different ways each country defines disability and the willingness of individuals to disclose a disability. Box 2 outlines these challenges and how researchers and countries are addressing them.

Box 2: Challenges to defining and measuring disability

Countries define disability differently, and definitions change within a country with evolving legal, political, and social discourse. Notably, challenges exist not only in establishing cross-national rates, but differences also exist between national contexts due to varying definitions of disability used in surveys. For example, in India, Jeffery and Singal (2008) explain how the census and National Sample Survey used radically different definitions for four of the five major kinds of impairments.

Linguistic challenges in gathering data on disability in different settings has been discussed by Lwanga-Ntale (2003), based on his work on chronic poverty and disability in Uganda. He noted that defining disability was 'rather problematic' (p. 4), as the term when translated into the local language was commonly used for those with physical impairment, mostly of upper and lower limbs. Hence there was an increased likelihood of ignoring individuals with learning difficulties or who are blind, deaf, epileptic, etc. He observed that in most dialects, there was no single word that translated into the English word disability (Lwanga-Ntale, 2003). Similarly, in Hindi the word viklang, commonly used for disability, does not encompass all types of disabilities; it is only indicative of physical disabilities. Moreover, some of the language used to identify people with disabilities is inherently stigmatizing. Kiarie (2004) notes that the original Kiswahili word wasiojiweza (p.18), used to refer generally to persons in all categories of disabilities, embodies an assumption that the individual is incapable of gainful employment and incapable of caring for themselves.

Other studies aimed at establishing prevalence rates of disability suggest that it is not only local perceptions and definitions of disability that influence the identification of disability. Jeffery and Singal (2008) suggest that 'social dynamics, particularly those of gender and age, type of disability and the associated social implications and stigma of that disability' also influence identification. This was clear in the findings of Kuruvilla and Joseph's (1999) study in rural South India. Similarly, Erb and Harris-White (2002) established that in rural Tamil Nadu the reported rates of disability were significantly biased toward upper caste Hindus. They inferred that 'scheduled caste people have to be more severely disabled than inhabitants of the caste settlement before they will publicly acknowledge their infirmity' (p. 16). It is not clear why this discrepancy exists. However, it is likely that a greater willingness to define one as disabled exists when there are certain benefits in doing so. For instance, in richer industrialized countries where social security benefits are available, the issue of stigma is balanced against the advantages in identifying oneself as disabled (Yeo & Moore, 2003).

Box 2: Challenges to deþning and measuring disability (continued)

Another factor which inÿuences peopleîs decision to disclose information regarding disability in family-oriented cultures is related to the presumption that there will be an inevitable transfer of the îdamagedî life of the individual with disability to that of the other individuals in the family network. Here, Das and Addlakhaîs (2001) notion of îconnected body-selvesî is very useful, as it þrst links the physicality of the body to an individualîs identity and experience, and second, the meaning of personhood is fused to a network of other body-selves. Thus, by acknowledging the existence of an individual with disabilities in the household, there is an increased risk of the exclusion of other members from the community. Elwan (1999) notes that îhaving a disabled person in the family is sometimes thought to damage marriage prospectsî (p. 29), and such an observation is supported by anecdotal evidence from India and Kenya.

Given the difþculties noted above, it is not surprising that a common observation in a range of research papers and national and international reports is the lack of data on disability (United Nations Department of Economic Affairs, 2024; World Health Organization, 2011). Traditionally, data on disability has been gathered by asking a generic question on disability to all members of population as part of a national census. In India, like in many other countries, it was common in the census to ask the question (or its variant),îAre you disabled?î However, over time, such an approach has been criticized as limiting given that the underlying assumptions draw on a medical approach to disability, where disability is seen as a consequence of disease or an individualîs inability to do something that is considered înormalî. Additionally, disability in such a framework is assumed to be dichotomous in nature, identiþed purely by the presence or the absence of a condition, and hence does not capture its complexity.

Since 2001, Washington Group (WG) on Disability Statistics, a United Nations-sponsored City Group formed of representatives of National Statistical Ofþces (NSOs), has been forging the development of a common language around disability that can be incorporated into population-based surveys to improve the quality and international comparability of disability measures. The þrst task that the WG undertook was to develop a short set of questions and a long set of questions on disability for adults (Washington Group, 2017b, 2017a). To date, the WG questions have been used in censuses or surveys in over 75 countries. As of March 2022, the UNICEF-sponsored Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) have included the UNICEF/WG Child Functioning Module (CFM) in 63 countries.

Reference: Updated and adapted with permission from Singal et al., 2017.

4

What could make things work? Recommendations from teachers with disabilities

The voices of teachers with disabilities remain largely unheard, yet their lived experiences are a vital source of authentic knowledge. Centring their narratives is not only an act of inclusion but a recognition of their unique expertise and the value of their perspectives in shaping more equitable educational practices.

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The previous section discussed enablers to success drawn from the global literature reviewed by Singal, Kwok, & Wijesinghe (2024). However, given that much of that evidence is concentrated in higher-income contexts, this section intentionally aims to highlight teacher voices from low- and middle-income contexts.

This section draws on an analysis of data collected as part of a series of projects (shown in Table 3) undertaken since 2020 across nine countries and led by Nidhi Singal. Each of these projects used semi-structured interviews and different participatory activities with teachers with disabilities working in mainstream schools. In these discussions, teachers shared their experiences, perspectives, and practices. Study 1 (Singal & Ware, 2021) and Study 3 (Singal, Kwok and Wijesinghe, 2024) are available in the public domain, but elements of the data were re-analysed to highlight a specific focus on recommendations put forth by teachers. For Studies 2 and 4, although data collection has been completed, these are not yet available in the public domain. Therefore, specific analysis was undertaken to understand what teachers highlighted could be done differently to support them in being effective teachers.

Table 3: Overview of studies used in analysis of teacher recommendations

Study	Countries covered	Number of participants	Methods used
Study 1 2020–2021	India, Rwanda, Nepal, and South Africa	9	Semi-structured interviews
Study 2 2022–2023	Ethiopia	19	Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions
Study 3 2023–2024	Kenya, Sri Lanka, Spain, and Brazil	25	Semi-structured interviews and photo voice/audio note elicitation
Study 4 2024–2025	India	19	Semi-structured interviews and photo voice/audio note elicitation

Across all the countries, teacher participants were working in primary or secondary mainstream schools – that is in schools which included all children and were not specifically for children with disabilities. Each country sample differed in relation to participants' gender composition, years in the teaching profession variations, and nature and type of impairments and the impact these had on their day-to-day functioning. All interviews were conducted in English and addressed the same themes e.g. motivation to join the profession, teaching experience, type of teaching style, and so on). In instances when photo elicitation was used (Studies 3 and 4), participants were given a few prompts, largely around the following: things that help support them as a teacher, challenges at work, and things that can help them be a more effective teacher with disabilities at school? Each teacher took around 10–15 photos, which were followed by interviews to understand what the photos meant to the teachers and to engage in co-reflection. Across all the studies, semi-structured interviews and photo-elicitation interviews were transcribed. This was followed by using a reflexive thematic analysis approach.

The aim in presenting the following findings is not to generalise experiences of teachers with disabilities within or across these countries but rather to highlight similarities observed, with the aim to strengthen our understanding of what teachers with disabilities experience and need and to foster learning for change. In constructing this section, we were intentional about centring the voices of teachers. Rather than reducing individuals to nameless labels such as 'Respondent A' or 'Participant B', we use pseudonyms and include details such as gender and type of impairment wherever possible. This approach not only humanizes the participants and brings their stories to life for the reader, but also allows for a richer, more nuanced understanding of how experiences of exclusion and requests for support intersect across different identities and impairment types.

We start by fronting the immediate recommendations made by teachers which drew on direct experiences of being in school, with factors related to infrastructure, teaching and learning materials, educational technology, head teachers, and professional networks taking centre stage. These recommendations are then followed by what teachers with disabilities believed should be mandated in official policies to better support their inclusion in the teaching workforce.

4.1 Need for accessible school infrastructure

Across countries, the majority of participants noted physical barriers to working in schools. These included inaccessible school buildings and gates for those with mobility problems and inaccessible roads to reach schools safely, for example, teachers working in Ethiopia region talked about waterlogged roads. All teachers working in India, Nepal, Rwanda, and Ethiopia mentioned the lack of accessible toilets, the lack of clean toilets with water, no restroom or place outside the class for the teacher to rest, and the lack of a comfortable desk and chair to sit at in their classroom.

> **Infrastructural inaccessibility is the core barrier which hinders participation and success' for teachers with disabilities.** (Fevan, female teacher with physical disability from Ethiopia)

'Infrastructural inaccessibility is the core barrier which hinders participation and success' for teachers with disabilities (Fevan, female teacher with physical disability from Ethiopia).

Ganza, a male teacher with physical disabilities from Rwanda, mentioned how it is 'a very big challenge' when schools do not have sufficient resources for inclusive mobility, such as the lack of handrails on staircases. He talked about the lack of funds at the school level to address these basic needs. Similarly, Fadel (a male blind teacher from Jordan) highlighted the need for 'accessible toilets, car parking spaces', all of which were currently lacking.

Several teachers, specifically those working in Indian schools, noted the need for a physical safe place to rest, restore, and recover in a school setting. For example, Dharamjeet, a male teacher with physical disability noted: 'Some schools give teachers a place to rest…It should be there. It should be there in every department. Either private or corporate. It should be there'.

Similarly, Rekha a female teacher with a physical disability also highlighted the need for some minimal space: 'So, there should be...a space, even if it's just a corner in the classroom for the teachers to rest and that should be like the teacher's private zone. I think that would really help'.

4.2 Ensure the availability of accessible teaching and learning resources and assistive devices

An important concern that emerged across interviews was the lack of accessible teaching and learning resources to teach. Prakash, a male blind teacher in India, reflecting on his experiences noted that 'Blind teachers face a lot of problems. The curriculum is not available in the braille. It is difficult to teach students. Such things should be taken care of'.

Blind teachers face a lot of problems. The curriculum is not available in the braille. It is difficult to teach students. Such things should be taken care of.

In Sri Lanka, teachers often talked about the lack of Braille textbooks, which resulted in students having to shout out page numbers from textbooks when they were teaching. In some cases, it also meant relying on partners/friends to help with the preparation of teaching aids prior to the lesson. For instance, Asiri noted: 'If I am going to give a small written note, I prepare it earlier and take it to class'. Similarly, Chathura (Sri Lanka) described how his wife, a graduate of media studies, helps him draw diagrams in advance, rather than having his students miss out on seeing visual representations. Amina, a blind teacher from Jordan said, 'I write things on cards ahead of lessons', instead of having to write on the board, which she finds challenging. Having these pre-prepared cards allows her to display them to the students.

Teachers were also conscious of the significant impact that the lack of accessible teaching and learning materials had on students with disabilities who were attending their schools. As Mahlet, a deaf teacher in Ethiopia noted, 'lack of sign language textbooks in her school's library means that deaf students did not use the library'.

Teachers across country contexts talked about how their hearing aids and

Braille-enabled laptops had been incredibly useful. Haniya from Jordan noted that once she had been provided a laptop, 'my situation improved, and I began to communicate well, whether with my colleagues or with my students'. Asiri and Sanhitha from Sri Lanka further highlighted how using scanner software for reading text had helped them access significant amounts of new material. A few noted how ICT facilities, particularly projecting devices, had helped them with written text. For example, Ganza (Rwanda) mentioned, 'I don't even write on the blackboard. I just use a projector to display e-books on the screen for students to copy notes'. Using typed notes, Buddika (Sri Lanka) talked about how it was possible to share these with students more easily. Sanhitha, who is also blind and based in Sri Lanka, shared how he was among the very few teachers who had significantly benefited from having ICT facilities because these facilities were only available in a very few schools.

4.3 Strengthen the availability and use of educational technology

An overall recommendation which emerged in discussions with the teachers was the need for better availability and training in the use of educational technology. Teachers across the different countries, but more so in Sri Lanka, India, Rwanda, and Ethiopia, were very aware of the lack of edtech in their school settings. For example, Rakesh, an Indian male teacher, noted how technology was supporting those with disabilities in other sectors but was yet to be used in schools.

> **I am not efficient in using technology, like using the computer, smart classroom and all. So, I need better training for this.** (Subham)

In Jordan, Amina expressed a desire to learn how teachers with visual impairment could use different tools effectively as an alternative to writing on the board. In Sri Lanka, Chaminda recommended that teachers with visual impairment should be taught teaching methods that could work specifically for them. Likewise, in Rwanda, Mugisha wished to learn about a wider range of strategies to address the difficulty when teaching using activities or games that are not adaptable.

Across countries, participants also recognised that training to upskill all teachers in using inclusive means of communication would be helpful not simply for teachers with disabilities but also for students with disabilities. For instance, teachers with visual impairment, such as Asiri and Chathura in Sri Lanka, discussed the need for Braille to be taught in school to help support students with disabilities' independence. In Asiri's words, 'Anything that we put on the blackboard or the whiteboard, if these can be given in Braille, it would be so much easier for us. If not, we depend on someone else'. This change would need policy support in terms of embedding disability inclusion in the existing teacher training structure and school curriculum. While Chathura had initiated his own efforts to teach students Braille, he pointed out that 'there is no time allocated to teach this officially'. Two teachers in India, recognising the potential of how technology could support their teaching, noted the following:

> **Those who are aware of technology should be called to schools. Training should be given to update what kind of new software and applications are available. What kind of new equipment has been introduced, which we can use to make our teaching better.** (Parmod)

I am not efficient in using technology, like using the computer, smart classroom and all. So, I need better training for this. (Subham)

Those who are aware of technology should be called to schools. Training should be given to update what kind of new software and applications are available. What kind of new equipment has been introduced, which we can use to make our teaching better (Parmod).

4.4 Raise disability awareness among school leaders

It is important to note that in all four studies, across different countries, the biggest challenge identified by participants were issues related to school leaders/head teachers. Latifa (Jordan) noted, 'When I came to my school, the school manager didn't know how to deal with me, how to deal with disabilities, how to deal with what kind of work I can do'. Another Jordanian teacher, Chandia, expressed frustration as she recalled how the first headmistress she had worked with called on her services only as an alternative teacher, only if another teacher was absent. She described this experience as 'very difficult' and it made her feel 'useless', because this reduced her responsibility to merely 'controlling the students in the absence of their teacher', even though she was qualified as a teacher. Similar experiences were narrated by teacher participants in Sri Lanka, who recalled that even though they were qualified teachers, the head teacher in their respective schools would not give them classes to teach as the head teachers were not confident about their skills and did not trust them to do their job. Chamninda (Sri Lanka) 'Me not having a timetable can't be my fault. It is the principal who should be giving the timetable at the start of the year. I have been here for the past seven years and people know that I have knowledge of my subject'.

Working on contractual hours and being underpaid even when they had all the right qualifications were also noted by teachers in Ethiopia: One deaf teacher said, 'I still work in this school without any profession or job position. So far, I couldn't find anyone who is able to solve my problem or respond to my request. I am still working on a very small salary with contractual employment, which is the lowest of all other employees. These situations are strange and makes me feel inferior and impact my morale'. In a similar vein, Afia, a female teacher from Ethiopia, noted: 'I have been demoted to elementary school teaching despite being trained as a high school teacher'.

Addisu, a male teacher in Ethiopia, narrated how he lost both legs in an accident, and the head teacher refused to let him continue teaching due to the possibility of students missing out on learning as a result of his check-ups and hospital visits. The principal gave him an alternative facilitator role in the school instead, but the teacher was not happy and argued that he should not have been removed from teaching, given that 'my disability is not with my mind. I didn't lose my memory, my knowledge, and my love of teaching'. While Yeshi (a female teacher from Ethiopia) talked about how the head teacher dismissed her problems, 'They even try to remind me that I should consider myself healthy and thank the creator for not having more than the impairment I have'.

Trying to resist negative attitudes and ableist leadership took its own toll both psychologically and financially. The teacher mentioned above went on to note how he felt confused and frustrated after the principal ignored his request to construct a wheelchair-friendly school gate. He ended up building and paying for it himself. The same pattern happened with his own office gate in the school. He was promised by the principal that he would be reimbursed, but this did not happen.

Most of the time, those in leadership are seen as ignoring and not responding to the issue of disabled teachers'. While Amara, also from Ethiopia, put it down to lack of empathy: 'School administrators and senior staffs didn't have awareness, understanding and readiness to support me and consider my needs. They have no empathy.

Addisu summed up his frustration by stating: 'Most of the time, those in leadership are seen as ignoring and not responding to the issue of disabled teachers'. While Amara, also from Ethiopia, put it down to lack of empathy: 'School administrators and senior staffs didn't have awareness, understanding and readiness to support me and consider my needs. They have no empathy'.

In many cases teachers felt that if they requested any accommodations, there was a tendency of school leaders to associate it with inefficiency as well as managerial resistance to accept and address their rights. Requests for accommodations were not seen as a right but as a burden or an act of charity by the management.

Thus, not surprisingly, when talking about recommendations to make things better, participating teachers emphasised awareness raising and educating the senior management – and crucially school leaders. Teachers' suggestions ranged from including a disability awareness training component in head teacher training programmes, providing them the opportunity to acquire the necessary disability-sensitive attitudes, knowledge and skills and extending this to empowering heads to make person-specific adaptations for inclusion-related needs. This may include reallocating existing school budgets, sharing resources with other schools, making internal arrangements, such as encouraging teachers to share responsibilities collaboratively, and allowing teachers with disabilities to have some flexibility in their schedules and so on.

4.5 Foster professional networks among teachers with disabilities

Across all countries, teachers reported a lack of organised networks or platforms for teachers with disabilities to meet with each other. This was particularly the case in Ethiopia, where several teachers explicitly noted the lack of associations at the school, regional, or zone level.

‘Simply knowing there were other teachers like me would help (Serkalem, Ethiopia).

Simply knowing there were other teachers like me would help. (Serkalem, Ethiopia)

Even when teachers were aware of the existence of teacher unions, these spaces were not experienced as supportive. For instance, when one teacher was assigned faraway, she noted that the teacher unions ‘refuse to help even when they see my disability’.

In contrast, during the interviews, the majority of teachers talked about how mentors, which in some cases were older teachers, teacher trainers etc., had played an integral role in supporting them. If mentors themselves had disabilities, they could also draw on their own experiences to help teachers with disabilities perform effectively in their classrooms by sharing pedagogical approaches and assisting in implementing various accommodations and adaptations.

Recognising the need for such mentorship programmes or networks is important given that teachers with disabilities are most often isolated in their school. Thus, such opportunities could ensure that teachers with disabilities have a safe space for non-judgemental conversations with an experienced person or others who are having similar challenges to help them navigate their own journeys. For example, many teachers noted how the development of communities of practice could enable supportive conversations around the needs of teachers with disabilities and could also foster skill building among peers, collate good practices, and stimulate innovations. The development of such networks could empower teachers with disabilities to become active pioneers of change rather than passive recipients of support.

4.6 Develop clear policies, promote awareness, provide resources, and monitor implementation

While most governments have policies and legislation recognising the rights of people with disabilities in employment, these do not specifically address teachers with disabilities. Within the education sector, the focus tends to be on the rights of learners with disabilities. As a teacher participant from India noted,

> *In the new education policy, we are talking about inclusive education. A lot of changes are being talked about. We are talking about children with disabilities, and a lot of things are happening for them. But there is no mention of teachers with disabilities anywhere.*

Addisu from Ethiopia talked about the big divide between policies and practice: 'What is being talked about and what is actually being done is as different as heaven from earth'. A Sri Lankan female teacher reflected how, 'The policy is there. But there is no enforcement body and it is on a case by case basis'. A female teacher in India reflecting on the difficulties in purchasing an assistive device recalled the following:

> *They [government] have done a lot of provisions like … accessibility, assistive devices, etc. But, it's just on paper.... Actually, if we apply, what do they (officials) say? You first purchase (the equipment) and then you'll get the bill. When we get the bill to claim, then they say, they don't have grant. Or they take out some or the other queries and put it in the cold bag.*

Providing some concrete policy suggestions, teachers in Rwanda, for instance, noted that there should be a disability allowance for teachers with disabilities to meet the additional costs. For example, Shyaka, who needs crutches to walk, mentioned how often these were unaffordable. He described this as 'a big problem' and wished that teachers with disabilities would be supported with mobility aids that were adapted to their needs. Discussing various issues with her hearing aids, Haniya (Jordan) talked about the discomfort and inflammation she experienced and expressed her inability to buy new ones because of the costs.

…In a University, if you are a blind Professor you are given reader's allowance separately for marking students work. But, at our school level, there is no such facility from the government. We have to pay from our own pocket because the government or the school is not providing this facility.

Few teachers recommended enhancing financial support to cover the cost incurred from using (private or public) transport. Keza (Rwanda), for instance, highlighted that financial support to attend medical appointments was needed. This was similarly raised by Nshuti (Rwanda), who is unable to walk long distances and discussed the need for a travel subsidy.

Additionally, Viren from India emphasised the need for a reader allowance – which provides for someone to read out written text for teachers – and made a case for such things to be similar across different areas of work:

…In a University, if you are a blind Professor you are given reader's allowance separately for marking students work. But, at our school level, there is no such facility from the government. We have to pay from our own pocket because the government or the school is not providing this facility.

Most teachers argued that such changes would have positive ripple effects across the system, as noted by Paramjeet (India): 'It will also encourage and motivate students with disabilities to be committed and dream to be like us. It will have a message for the young that the government and as well as the society have special support and privileges for hard hardworking and successful persons with disabilities'.

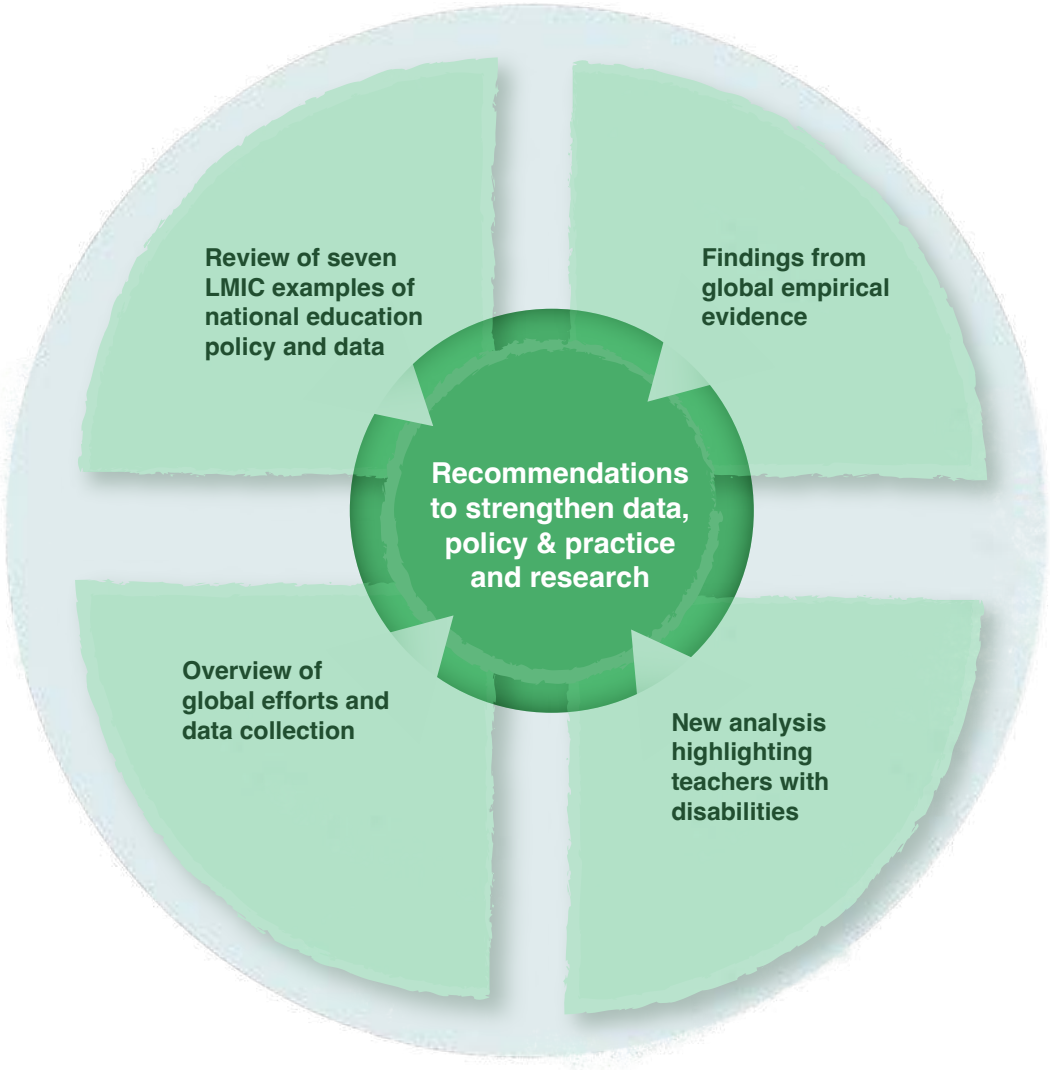
Although this section has focused on teachers with disabilities in LMICs, it is important to note that all the factors discussed – including those related to structural issues and to individual agency – are similar across all contexts. While there are differences in the types of research and extent of evidence available across these contexts, all factors are relevant to supporting teachers with disabilities globally.

5

Addressing the gaps: a road map for future research, policy, and practice

This synthesis has provided a summary of the latest literature on teachers with disabilities as well as an overview of global level efforts and seven country-level examples of data and policy focused on teachers with disabilities. It has provided insights from existing research evidence as well as the gaps that persist. Importantly, the voices of teachers with disabilities from LMICs were highlighted, capturing their recommendations to help address challenges faced in their professional lives (see Figure 3). This next section outlines a road map to provide guidance on ways to strengthen data, policy and practice, and research for teachers with disabilities. It suggests key considerations and recommendations for those working in the education sector globally and locally.

Figure 3: Recommendations based on multiple strands of evidence



5.1 Data: Getting the basics in place

As detailed in this synthesis, there is a lack of basic information collected on teachers with disabilities both globally and at country level. To facilitate evidence, planning, and programming, ensuring data on teachers with disabilities is collected is a clear first step. **Given that most countries do collect data on teachers for various purposes, such as salaries, deployment etc., including a category on disability – that has a clear purpose for how it will be used – should be encouraged**. Including a focus on teachers with disabilities can help countries push forward the implementation of their goals of inclusive education, which are commonly articulated across contexts.

At the global level, UN agencies and key funders, such as the GPE, should create high-level indicators on teachers with disabilities to support advocacy in this area and ensure foundational data is collected across countries to allow for better targeting of investments and efforts for supporting these teachers. This could include the percentage of persons with disabilities completing pre-service teacher qualifications and the percentage of teachers with disabilities as part of the education workforce, which could be disaggregated for gender, type of school they are working in, and other relevant characteristics. This also requires an acknowledgement of the fact that individuals can acquire a disability at any time during their teaching life cycle.

Multilateral organisations, NGOs, philanthropists and donors should encourage the collection of data on teachers' disabilities within their programming and research, even if projects are not specifically targeting teachers with disabilities. This would allow researchers, governments, and country partners to access critical data where it does not already exist and could help in identifying and targeting support for those teachers.

At the country level, questions on disability status and type should be included in routine data gathered on teacher demographics.

At the country level, questions on disability status and type should be included in routine data gathered on teacher demographics as part of teacher registration and licensing, annual school census, school quality monitoring, and other sources of EMIS or TMIS data. Collecting data through regular education censuses or surveys also supports identifying teachers who acquire disabilities during their teaching career. Where data is collected at specific points in a teacher's career (see Box 1, the example from Rwanda), this data should still be included in EMIS systems, even if the data is not available for all teachers. Box 2 provides guidance on how reliable data on disability can be collected. Box 3 provides an example from Ghana of how data on disabilities among teachers is collected nationally.

While in some countries, data on the disability status of teachers is gathered, it is often done in an ad hoc manner, meaning it is not part of the EMIS and therefore might not be used for education planning and management. **Including questions on teacher disability status and type in education sector routine data collection is feasible and could be done with little to no extra cost**. This data is a powerful way of ensuring that there is representation in the education workforce, and in many cases, this data can support the strategic deployment of teachers with disabilities.

For organisations representing teachers, it is critical to ensure participation of teachers with disabilities and to collect data on the status of disabilities in their membership. At the global level, Education International's annual Status of Teaching report could go beyond issues of discrimination based on disability to include questions around teachers with disabilities' experiences with recruitment, pre-service training, professional development, allowances and additional support, and school environment, including relationships with students, colleagues, parents, and school leaders. This would assist in ensuring that such organisations can become powerful advocates for meaningful change. Additionally, teachers with disabilities also recommended that one concrete way to support them is through peer networks, such as communities of practice, mentorship programs, and professional platforms, which such organisations can help develop.

Box 3: Ghana Annual School Census includes data on status and type of disability for teachers

Ghana's Ministry of Education has collected data on teachers with disabilities nationally for the first time through their 2024 Annual School Census, which includes a question on whether a teacher has a disability and a follow-up multiple-choice question to indicate the type of disability. The full list is shown below.

The types of disabilities listed in ASC

ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder)	Intellectual disabilities
Albinism	Leprosy
Autism	Little persons
Autoimmune disease	Mental disability
Bipolar disorder	Multiple disabilities
Burns survivors	Osteogenesis imperfecta (brittle bones)
Cerebral palsy	Physical disabilities
Chronic health conditions	Psychological disabilities
Communication disabilities	Schizophrenia
Deaf	Seizures
Developmental disabilities	Severe kyphosis
Down syndrome	Specific learning disabilities
Dumb	Spina bifida
Epilepsy	Turner syndrome
Hearing impairment	Visual impairment

Since 2020, the Ministry of Education in Ghana has focused on improving their Gender, Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) approach and revising their inclusion policy. During the COVID-19 pandemic, one of the key questions that arose when attempting to support teachers, was how to reach teachers with disabilities who might need additional support. However, the basic data on who these teachers were and where they might be was not available at the national level in a government data system but held by teachers with disability associations. This was especially concerning as the government was trying to not only support teachers professionally but ensure their welfare as well. In 2022-2023, the Innovative Pedagogy Project in Ghana came across a surprising number of teachers with disabilities but there was no accurate data to support them systematically. These challenges led to a push for collection of data on teachers with disabilities nationally. In 2024, the culmination of these efforts resulted in the addition of questions capturing the disability status and type for teachers in the annual school census. This government plans to use this data primarily for planning purposes, including teacher support and welfare.

Reference: Personal communication with Ghana Ministry of Education EMIS Director and Sam Awuku, Principal Technical Advisor at T-TEL, K. Godwin, 19 February 2025

5.2 Policy and practice: Focusing on investment and implementation

Country level

In addition to constitutional and employment legislation, countries should ensure they have education sector policies explicitly supporting teachers with disabilities, and these should cover the full life cycle of teachers' professional lives. As illustrated in Section 2, there is a lack of consistent and comprehensive legislation and **educational policies** to support teachers with disabilities. Globally, countries have extensive policies to support children with disabilities in mainstream schools, but teachers with disabilities are rarely addressed. When policies do mention teachers with disabilities, they often cover one or two topics and tend to be high-level and vague. Policies should identify specific interventions and cover the full life cycle of teachers' professional lives, including representation and recruitment, initial education, training and qualifications, deployment, in-service support, renumeration and allowances, career pathways, and teacher professional development.

For **recruitment and representation policies**, some countries provide quotas or targets, but equally important is providing guidance for those in charge of recruitment. For example, guidance could include how to ensure teachers with disabilities access vacancy announcements and submit applications, or how to ensure teachers with disabilities are aware of the renumeration and allowances that would be available to them. **This type of guidance should be included in training and professional development for those officials and school leaders supporting recruitment**.

Investment in disability allowances, adequate and accessible infrastructure, and accessible teaching and learning materials, including edtech, are foundational support mechanisms that should be included in policy, planning, and budgeting. The **provision of edtech and associated training** was emphasised by teachers in Section 4.3. Training for edtech – especially for how teachers with disabilities can leverage it – and needs to be included in pre-service teacher education curriculum and in-service professional development policies. Furthermore, the need for ensuring that teachers have access to accessible teaching materials is also a basic requirement that needs to be met.

Providing disability awareness and inclusion training for senior management, especially school leadership. This was a key recommendation raised by the teachers with disabilities themselves. Ministries of Education could include leadership for inclusion components in head teacher training programmes to ensure they acquire the necessary disability-sensitive attitudes, knowledge, and skills. This training could also cover practical approaches to supporting teachers with disabilities, such as how to reallocate existing school budgets, share resources with other schools, and make internal arrangements, such as encouraging teachers to share responsibilities collaboratively and allowing teachers with disabilities to have some flexibility in their schedules.

In all policy and planning, representation of teachers with disabilities voices is key. For organisations representing teachers, **participation of teachers with disabilities should be promoted and their voices represented in dialogues with governments and other education stakeholders**.

Importantly, there is often little or no guidance given to how to implement policies relating to teachers with disabilities and no benchmarks or targets to track progress. **Countries should provide detailed policy guidelines and use disaggregated data on teachers with disabilities to support implementation**.

Global level

Multilateral, International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs), and donor frameworks on inclusion should be explicit in calling for the inclusion of all students and adults with disabilities in the education sector – especially teachers. Global-level agendas often set the tone for country-level education sector plans and goals. Ensuring teacher voice at the global level through representative organisations such as Education International can help advocate for inclusion in these agendas.

Box 4: British Council investment in programming and policy influence for teachers with disabilities

Recently the British Council has emerged as a leading organisation in investing in inclusive education for teachers with disabilities. They have highlighted the challenges faced by teachers with disabilities and actively worked to provide solutions and concrete steps for policymakers to dismantle systemic barriers for both teachers and students.

To date, the British Council has funded some of the largest research studies on teachers with disabilities, including Being a teacher with Disabilities: Perspectives, Practices and Opportunities and English Language Teachers with Disabilities: An Exploratory Study, and it has used the findings from this research to influence policy and programme design (Singal et al., 2024; Singal & Ware, 2021). A notable milestone was the organisation's recent policy dialogue 'Leading Inclusion and Belonging in Schools', held in Kenya, involving stakeholders from around the world (British Council, 2025). One of the dialogue's most prominent takeaways was the need to focus more directly on supporting teachers with disabilities.

Beyond research and advocacy efforts, the British Council has also embedded disability inclusion for teachers across several of its programmes. The English Connects Programme in Sub-Saharan Africa serves as a model for equitable access to online professional development opportunities to ensure that disability inclusion is not just an afterthought but an integral part of education systems. The programme works in partnership with English Language Teaching Associations (ELTA) to make teaching resources more inclusive and includes regular engagement with teachers with disabilities. Additionally, the program is supporting countries during the planning stage of their CPD projects to better integrate disability and gender inclusion strategies. In a series of ELTA case studies, several teachers with disabilities were interviewed about their teaching journeys and experience with the programme. For many teachers, especially those with visual impairments, assistive technology has opened up access to a wealth of online resources and CPD opportunities.

'Professional development is essential because the world is changing day and night. Teachers need to build network, find a mentor and gain personal and professional experiences...Moreover,

Box 4: British Council investment in programming and policy influence for teachers with disabilities (continued)

I want to encourage all teachers with disabilities across the world that whatever you do, stay motivated, whatever you dream, do well to pursue and live your dream' (Mahona Joseph Paschal, Tanzania).

The Secondary Teachers English Language Improvement programme (STELIR) in Rwanda (2022–2026) aims to enhance English proficiency among lower secondary teachers, with a strong emphasis on inclusivity. From the programme's first year in 2022, when 68 teachers (1.4% of participants) self-identified as having a disability, engagement has grown significantly, reaching 445 teachers with disabilities (5.34%) in 2024 (British Council, 2023, 2024). A key focus has been supporting visually impaired teachers by ensuring accessible assessments, providing necessary accommodations, and fostering an inclusive learning environment.

STELIR team ensured they used Aptis Braille as well for assessment. The team shared feedback on lessons learned from delivering Aptis Braille to the Aptis team. This effort has not only allowed more equitable access to testing for students but also resulted in a trained pool of invigilators who can effectively scribe and guide visually impaired students. Additionally, the programme offers comprehensive support for visually impaired teachers who require guides, covering their travel, food, and accommodation expenses for all STELIR activities.

To further promote inclusion, trainers across the education system, who are secondary-level or teacher-training college teachers, receive awareness-raising training on fostering an inclusive classroom environment. In 2024, this included a session delivered by one of the project trainers who is a visually impaired secondary school teacher and school-based mentor delivering CPD on the STELIR project, training both visually impaired and non-impaired teachers. He spoke about his lived experience as a visually impaired teacher and trainer and how he can contribute to CPD of all the teachers at his school.

In addition, the STELIR project has recently completed an accessibility and an Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) review of its online course materials and how they can be used with assistive technology. Online trainers will receive specific training in inclusive online teaching delivered by a global expert in inclusivity, and trainer guides and materials will be incorporated into all future online delivery by the project.

Finally, a newly launched initiative, in collaboration with Ghana's Ministry of Education and Ghana's Education Service, aims to enhance English language teacher training while explicitly including teachers with disabilities to promote greater inclusivity in the education sector.

Reference: N. Singal, personal communication with British Council staff, February 2025

5.3 Research: Targeting priority issues

The summary of evidence from Section 3 illustrated what has been covered by recent research. The gaps in this evidence point to several areas and research questions that should be prioritised by future studies, which are outlined below. More broadly, teachers with disabilities should be considered as part of the wider research on and with teachers (pre-service education, pedagogical practice, professional development, motivation, well-being, etc.), and data should be collected and disaggregated by disability as well as other characteristics (gender, language, age, etc.) to better understand the interactions between disability and other points of marginalisation.

Priority issues

A critical gap is evidence on the impact of teachers with disabilities on learning and wider education outcomes. While research exists on the impact of teachers with disabilities on promoting inclusive classrooms and schools, especially in supporting children with disabilities and other diverse needs, there is little evidence beyond these benefits, especially in lower-income country (LIC) and LMIC contexts. Research is needed to illustrate the nature of relationships that teachers with disabilities share with students, teachers, colleagues, and parents of children attending their school and how these relationships impact student learning and well-being. Additionally, there is much more to be learned about the influence of teachers with disabilities on pedagogical approaches, supporting students with specific learning needs, and student and wider societal perceptions of disability. **The role of edtech in supporting teachers in their professional lives** – such as with access, teaching, and professional development – needs to be better understood. From a **system's perspective**, more evidence is needed to better understand how an inclusive workforce promotes inclusive education outcomes.

Studies on teachers with disabilities should ensure that **impact is captured across all student groups and for the school environment as well for parents, caregivers, and the wider community** where relevant. Studies should include the perspective of teachers on their impact. The views of students, parents, community members, school staff, and especially education leadership are important to understanding the full range of impact that teachers with disabilities can have.

Research is needed on the experience of teachers with disabilities across all stages of their professional life cycle, including their well-being and access and use of edtech. Much of the existing research focuses on why persons with disabilities choose to teach and their challenges navigating school environments, but evidence is also needed on the experience of teachers with disabilities across all stages of their professional life cycle – recruitment, pre-service training and qualifications, school placement, professional development, renumeration and career pathing, school environment, and their relationships with colleagues and the wider school community (parents, community leaders, etc.). Research should include critical questions of teacher **well-being**, including their sense of identity, peer relationships, self-esteem, and socio-emotional status among other factors.

Evidence is needed to understand how awareness raising, sensitization, and training can effectively challenge and change ableist beliefs, attitudes, and leadership and provide clear guidance on how school leaders can meaningfully include and support teachers with disabilities.

As discussed in Sections 2 and 4, the **role of school leadership** has been identified as critical to fostering positive school environments for teachers with disabilities. Negative attitudes and actions of school leaders and head teachers are also the one of the biggest challenges that teachers with disabilities say they face in schools. Evidence is needed to understand how awareness raising, sensitization, and training can effectively challenge and change ableist beliefs, attitudes, and leadership and provide clear guidance on how school leaders can meaningfully include and support teachers with disabilities.

There needs to be a better understanding of the system enablers and their implementation to support teachers with disabilities. Existing research often focuses on the level of the individual but more needs to be understood about **the role of system level elements** – such as policies and legislation, infrastructure, resources, union support, engagement with other relevant sectors – in supporting teachers with disabilities. Importantly, research on how these system elements are implemented is critical.

The intersectional dynamics of disability should be explored. We know that there are compounding challenges when disability intersects with other marginalisations. These intersectional dynamics need to be further explored, including how race, gender, geography, and ethnicity interact to create additional barriers for teachers with disabilities and how these can be addressed.

Beyond education, further research could be undertaken on the positive impact of teachers with disabilities on societal perceptions and assumptions of people with disabilities. This area needs more research to understand the interaction between teacher influence and local cultures, policies, and norms. In addition, **lessons could be drawn from other sectors, such as health and other social sectors, on how they support their professionals and staff with disabilities**. This area of inquiry might also lead to greater insights into the intersections of education and other sectors, and how education could facilitate cross-sectoral efforts to support both teachers and students with disabilities.

Contexts and populations

Based on the recent reviews of the literature, we know that existing research on teachers with disabilities does not adequately cover a number of specific contexts and populations. This includes low- and middle-income contexts as well as emergency, crisis, and conflict-affected contexts. Non-physical types of disabilities and teachers with disabilities who are part of other marginalised populations, such as refugees, are also not well represented in existing research. Finally, evidence from non-English language-speaking populations is also limited. Importantly, there needs to be a better understanding of **the needs of those who acquire a disability during their professional lives in comparison to those who join the profession with a disability**. Future research should focus on these geographies, contexts, and populations to ensure adequate attention is paid to the diversity of experiences by teachers with disabilities worldwide.

Methodological considerations

Academics and researchers should consider how to actively involve teachers with disabilities in every stage of research, from design to interpretation of the findings.

Academics and researchers should consider how to actively involve teachers with disabilities in every stage of research, from design to interpretation of the findings. Researchers with disabilities should also be included and might provide additional guidance and insights. Including teachers with disabilities in research can range from co-creation of the entire research project – from co-framing the main questions being addressed to all other aspects of the research – to enabling the active participation of teachers with disabilities in specific areas of the research cycle. Researchers should consider the use of **accessible and participatory approaches and methods** and, at times, **additional support to ensure meaningful engagement**. Box 5 provides a recent example of research done with teachers with disabilities in Tanzania and insights on methodological adaptations and best practices.

Box 5: Research on continuous professional development with teachers with disabilities in Tanzania

MEWAKA (Mafunzo Endelevu kwa Walimu Kazini), or Teachers' Continuous Professional Development (TCPD) programme, is a nationwide school-based technology intervention implemented by the Tanzanian government. The programme includes semi-structured Communities of Learning (CoLs), where teachers gather to discuss and reflect on issues most relevant to their schools as well as learn and improve their pedagogical skills. A learning management system (LMS) houses CoL modules, self-learning modules, and peer facilitator guides and manuals. These materials provide some structure to the teacher-led conversations. The EdTech Hub, Aga Khan University, and the Tanzania Institute of Education are undertaking a two-year research project to explore the program's impact on issues related to teacher agency. A central question of this research looks at how well the programme supports the diverse needs and equitable participation of teachers with disabilities. This includes exploration of how well the materials and activities are adapted, including access to the online learning management system that hosts the TCPD materials.

The study identified several adaptations made by schools that employed teachers with disabilities to ensure equitable participation in CoL sessions. These included strategies such as offering peer support and ensuring clear communication. For instance, peer teachers read materials aloud or acted as scribes to support peers with visual impairments, or schools provided a sign language interpreter or adjusted seating to facilitate lip reading for hearing-impaired teachers. No adaptations to the actual CoL materials were reported; however, this was in the context of low usage of the materials.

The study also highlighted barriers that teachers with disabilities in the programme faced, including challenges in using the technology for TCPD. They noted that tablets, LMS modules, and software were not sufficiently accommodating teachers with hearing and visual impairments. The study also reported significant challenges in accommodating teachers with disabilities during CoL sessions due to a lack of appropriate guidelines and systemwide support mechanisms. Finally, the study found a level of hidden disability, with 14 teachers in their sample reporting disabilities but head teachers only reporting 11 teachers. Perceived stigma around disabilities contributed to a reluctance to reveal them (Swai et al., 2024).

The study also captured **several important learnings on how best to undertake research alongside teachers with disabilities**. This included adaptations to both the research instruments and methods.

Box 5: Research on continuous professional development with teachers with disabilities in Tanzania (Continued)

Research instruments

The study's teacher survey aimed to better elicit responses related to the unrecognised, invisible, and undiagnosed disabilities that teachers might face by incorporating items from the Washington Group on Disability Statistics Short Set on Functioning, which questions functioning across six foundational capabilities. The survey underwent several adaptations to align with the Tanzanian context. In one example, follow-up questions were added about whether participants had aids, given that many people cannot afford or access glasses or hearing aids. In addition to the survey, observations of community learning sessions captured the frequency of contributions of teachers with disabilities and disaggregated these by gender. Piloting the tools with hearing and visually impaired teachers highlighted that more time was needed to accommodate specific disabilities.

Research methods

The research team intentionally included schools in the sample that had teachers with disabilities; these teachers were deliberately over-represented given the specific research question on equity and inclusion of teachers with disabilities.

Researchers adjusted the physical and communicative aspects of the research setup to ensure the full engagement of hearing and visually impaired teachers. This included discussions with school leaders ahead of school visits to understand the accommodations required for teachers with disabilities and discussion with teachers at the school to check what adaptations suited their needs. The research team had consent forms and text read aloud and also used sign language interpreters where available.

In one focus group activity, a Braille version of the participatory mapping cards was printed with Kiswahili text translations underneath the Braille print for use by the whole group. This helped avoid singling out teachers with vision impairment and asked teachers without disabilities to adapt to those with disabilities instead of vice versa.

References: Hennessy, S. (2024); Swai, C., et al. (2024).

Funding for research

Global-level funding mechanisms often direct the potential research avenues available at the country level. These organisations and funds in education, such as GPE's Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX), should consider inclusion in the education workforce, and specifically teachers with disabilities, as a critical gap that can be supported through their agendas.

6

Call to action

We call on the global community, country governments, and all education sector stakeholders to prioritise inclusion in the education workforce – and specifically teachers with disabilities – as part of the inclusive education agenda.

DATA: Collect information regularly on teachers with disabilities

- Multilateral organisations, NGOs, philanthropists, and donors encourage the collection of data on teachers' disabilities within their programming and research, even if projects are not specifically targeting teachers with disabilities.
- Countries include questions on disability status and type in routine data collection as part of teacher registration and licensing, annual school census, school quality monitoring, and other sources of EMIS or TMIS data. Collecting data through regular education censuses or surveys also supports identifying teachers who acquire disabilities during their teaching career.

POLICIES & IMPLEMENTATION: Ensure education policies for teachers with disabilities and provide investment, resources, and support to implement them

- Countries have education sector policies explicitly supporting teachers with disabilities, and these policies cover the full life cycle of teachers' professional lives – from recruitment to training to career development.
- Disability awareness and inclusion training are provided for education officials and school leaders, especially for those participating in teacher recruitment, training, and professional development.
- Investment in disability allowances, adequate infrastructure, and accessible teaching and learning materials, including edtech, are included in policy, planning, and budgeting.
- Establishing peer networks, mentorships, communities of practice, or professional platforms included in both pre-service teacher education and in-service professional development policies.

RESEARCH: Grow the limited evidence on teachers with disabilities

- Research is needed on the experiences of teachers with disabilities across all stages of their professional life cycle, including on their well-being and access and use of edtech and other accessible teaching materials.
- Priority research topics include the impact of teachers with disabilities on learning and wider education outcomes for all students; inclusive leadership at the school level; intersectional dynamics of disabilities; and system enablers to support teachers with disabilities.

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