



Reviewing professional development programs on inclusive teaching and learning

The Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Centre is conducting a review of in-service professional development programs that help teachers in low- and middle-income countries in the Asia-Pacific region build their competencies in inclusive education of children with disabilities.

One-third of children who are not in school in the Asia-Pacific region have a disability. The education systems in the region, especially in low- and middle-income countries, are witnessing a shift from educating children with disabilities in segregated settings to including them in mainstream schools. Teachers have a key role in this transformation: to ensure that every learner has access to quality education and opportunities to reach their full potential.

The scoping review aims to identify in-service professional learning programs assisting already practising teachers with the inclusion of students with disabilities in low- and middle-income countries in the Asia-Pacific region. The study has been jointly funded by ACER and the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) through the GEM Centre.

The investigation includes examining if the professional learning programs were designed for teachers in early childhood settings, mainstream or special schools, and whether they have reported teacher-or student-level outcomes. The review identifies, describes and categorises evidence on the professional development of teachers for inclusive education of children with disabilities from 41 economically developing countries listed by DFAT in the Asia-Pacific region. Around 692 records have been screened to date. The study includes interventions that:

- target teachers in early childhood or school settings (early childhood care and education services, Kindergarten-12 mainstream schools, and special education schools) working with children between the ages of 0 and 18 years
- support teachers in the provision of inclusive education of children with disabilities in mainstream schools
- belong to low- and middle-income countries in the Asia-Pacific region
- demonstrate improvements in teachers' attitudes or practices and, in ideal situations, student learning.

Policymakers, school leaders and teachers can explore if any of the programs can be adapted to their own settings to support the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schools.

The methodology of the review draws on the work proposed by Levac, Colquhoun and O'Brien in 2010, Joanna Briggs Institute, and Campbell Collaboration's Evidence and Gap Maps.

The results of the study – expected to be published in 2021 – will present the number of interventions in a particular educational setting, the number of interventions in each country, the different forms of disabilities a professional development intervention supports, and the outcomes of the intervention. An online evidence and gap map will provide details about interventions categorised by educational setting, outcomes and forms of disabilities. The project also includes the development of a resource kit – including handbooks, online tools and manuals – from across regions that can assist professionals to provide better educational services to children with disabilities.

'The illustrative and interactive evidence map will provide information on professional learning programs in the region with details such as mode of delivery and duration, and their effects on teachers and students,' says Dr Petra Lietz, ACER Principal Research Fellow. 'The study will help researchers identify gaps and opportunities for further research. Policymakers, school leaders and teachers can explore if any of the programs can be adapted to their own settings to support the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schools.'

The evidence gathered through this study will support governments and development partners when making policy, program and investment decisions in low- and middle-income countries and help to identify the key areas for effective program implementation.

This study could not be more timely, as education stakeholders are working towards meeting the education targets laid out in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, including target 4.5, which focuses on access to all levels of education for children with disabilities. As the pandemic threatens to reverse the advancements made in improving educational equity, this review will help development partners and policymakers to set their sights on specific areas of professional development intervention for inclusive education of children with disabilities in the post-COVID-19 world. ■

Further reading

Read about ACER's review of the effectiveness of early childhood care and intervention program at: acer.org/in/discover/article/using-evidence-to-make-a-difference-to-young-childrens-learning

Read about ACER's thematic review on children with disabilities in the Asia-Pacific region at: acer.org/au/discover/article/assessing-learning-of-students-with-disabilities

This is an edited version of an article first published in ACER Discover at: acer.org/au/discover/article/reviewing-professional-development-programs-on-inclusive-teaching-and-learning

References

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