

STRATEGIES FOR REDUCING DROPOUT RATE OF LEARNERS WITH MILD INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES IN INCLUSIVE PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN RWANDA

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Children with Mild Intellectual Disabilities (MID) are attending inclusive schools in greater numbers than before, but their dropout rate is significant leading to low level of primary school completion in Rwanda. The purpose of this study was to identify strategies for reducing dropout rate of learners with Mild Intellectual Disabilities in inclusive primary schools in Bugesera District, Rwanda. The study used a descriptive survey design. The target population was 195 respondents. A sample size of 62 respondents was obtained through purposive sampling, stratified random sampling and simple random sampling techniques. Data were collected using questionnaire, interview, lesson observation schedule and focus group discussion. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics while qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis approach. The findings indicated that teachers were not professionally trained to teach learners with MID. They were not using recommended teaching methods for learners with MID. Furthermore, special teaching/ learning materials were unavailable. No additional financial support was allocated to schools to support educational needs of learners with MID. Introducing Special Needs Education courses in Teacher Training Colleges and conducting regular in service training on teaching methodologies would reduce the dropout rate of learners with MID. Moreover, providing additional funding for schools accommodating learners with MID would facilitate schools to purchase specialized teaching and learning materials. Regular supervision of inclusive education would ensure sustainability of the inclusive education initiative.

Keywords: Dropout rate, mild intellectual disabilities, inclusive education

INTRODUCTION

Every individual has a right to education. It is universally recognized that the main objective of education is to provide quality education to all children, including children with Special Needs. This draws global attention to the fact that Education for All (EFA) is a fundamental human right which cannot be realized without enabling all people who are in any way disabled to access basic quality education. This is to enable them attain their full potential and be able to meaningfully contribute and participate in society throughout their lives (UNESCO, 2010).

Making such people access education is important for human capital development for it prepares those who were most likely to be dependents become self-reliant. However this right has hardly been achieved in many countries mostly in Africa whereby in some areas the achievement of EFA goals indicates a declining trend (UNESCO, 2014).

Dropout is a serious problem in the primary education system (UNESCO, 2011). For example, half of the countries in south and west Asia and sub-Saharan Africa register one third drop out of the children enrolled in primary schools before completing the primary cycle. In 2006, 13% and 9% of children enrolled in south and west Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa respectively, dropped out of primary school before completing the first grade (UNESCO, 2010).

While many countries in the world understand that inclusion means all children learning together in the mainstream, they still retain a dual practice of special and ordinary schools. In Denmark, which is a pioneering country in terms of inclusive education, the number of children placed in special classes has been markedly rising (Rustermier, 2002). This shows that though inclusion is generally viewed as a good option for achieving the EFA goal, this has not yet been fully reflected in practice. The existence of legislation supporting inclusive education in this country does not necessarily mean that inclusion is happening in everyday lives of Children with Disabilities (CWD). Such discrimination could lead to either drop out from school, low enrolment or opting to learn in special institutions despite the inclusive education policy discouraging all these. A study done in Norway by Temple and Walkley (1999) revealed that students with Mild Intellectual Disabilities were significantly less engaged than their peers without disabilities in regular class activities and this led to their early dropout from school.

A study carried out by Kalabula and Mandyata (2003) on inclusive practice in schools in the Northern Province of Zambia showed that the required educational materials were not provided or were not enough in ordinary schools where children with Special Needs were being included. The researchers added that this situation was the main cause of dropout of learners with Special Needs in those regular schools.

A study done in Kenya revealed that learners with Mild Intellectual Disabilities were not effectively included in regular classes due to inappropriate

curriculum, negative attitude toward their inclusion and insufficient materials (Maingi, 2012). The researcher added that some of these learners with MID who may be enrolled in regular schools end up dropping out of school due to lack of support in regular schools.

In Rwanda, the Special Needs Education Policy calls for schools to be made physically accessible, and to some extent, effort at increasing accessibility of the built environment has succeeded. However, gaps between inclusive education policy and implementation remain. Learners with intellectual disabilities have very little access to basic education due to the extreme social stigma and exclusion they face and also because educators have neither the training nor the facilities to make reasonable accommodation for them. Because students with Mild Intellectual Disabilities lack the needed support, they struggle in mainstream schools and regularly drop out (Aminta, 2013).

The present study, therefore sought to identify strategies for reducing the dropout rate of learners with Mild Intellectual Disabilities in inclusive primary schools in Bugesera District, Rwanda.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Children with disabilities are attending inclusive schools in greater numbers than before but their dropout rate is significant, leading to low level of primary school completion in many countries (Rose, Sabates, Alcott, & Ilie, 2016). Sarah (2012) in her research in Rwanda mentioned that although children with disabilities have been attending mainstream schools, their problems and needs are often not recognized nor supported, hence contributing to the alarming early school dropout rate in the country. This is even worse when it comes to learners with Mild Intellectual Disabilities where among 85% of learners with disabilities who dropped out, 42% were with Mild Intellectual Disabilities (Sagahutu, 2008). As a result of this high dropout, many learners with MID end up as street beggars, fail to be accommodated in vocational rehabilitation where they can acquire skills for self-reliance and self-dependence, and be productive members of society. Strategies to address the alarming problem of high dropout rate of learners with MID should be established. There is however, a paucity of literature examining possible strategies for reducing dropout rate of learners with MID in Rwanda, hence the need to undertake this study.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study sought to identify strategies for reducing dropout rate of learners with Mild Intellectual Disabilities in inclusive primary schools in Bugesera District, Rwanda. Specifically, the study sought to: (a) establish the teaching methods used by teachers in inclusive primary schools that facilitated retention

of learners with Mild Intellectual Disabilities; (b) identify the availability of learning resources and support services used to accommodate learners with Mild Intellectual Disabilities in inclusive primary schools; (c) to establish whether professional training of teachers prepared them to teach learners with Mild Intellectual Disabilities in inclusive primary schools; and (d) explore strategies for reducing dropout rate of learners with MID in inclusive primary schools in Bugesera District, Rwanda.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on the research objectives, the following research questions were created:

1. To what extent do methods used by teachers facilitate retention of learners with Mild Intellectual Disabilities in inclusive primary schools in Bugesera District?
2. What are the support services available in inclusive primary schools to address the needs of learners with Mild Intellectual Disabilities in Bugesera District?
3. How does professional training of teachers facilitate learners with Mild Intellectual Disabilities in completing primary level in inclusive primary schools in Bugesera District?
4. What are strategies for reducing dropout rate of learners with MID in inclusive primary schools in Bugesera District?

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The participants comprised 6 headteachers, 29 teachers from 6 inclusive primary schools, 2 officers in charge of Child Friendly Schools (CFS) and 25 learners with Mild Intellectual Disabilities.

Purposive sampling was used to select Bugesera District because it had a high number of schools practicing inclusion under the CFS initiative and was among five Districts with a high prevalence rate of dropout of learners with disabilities. Some 6 schools and 6 head teachers were purposively selected, 2 officers in charge of the CFS initiative were purposively selected because they were actively involved in helping learners with Mild Intellectual Disabilities and they were the ones who follow up on this initiative. Simple random sampling was used to select 25 learners with mild intellectual disabilities where all individuals had a chance of being selected to comprise the sample. Stratified sampling technique was used to sample 29 teachers. The population of the teachers was in strata of trained and untrained teachers.

Instruments

To achieve the objectives, questionnaires were used to collect data from teachers, and head teachers, interview guide for officers in charge of CFS initiative, Lesson Observation Schedule and Focus Group Discussions for learners with Mild Intellectual Disabilities. The instruments were adapted from UNESCO's toolkit for creating Inclusive Learning Friendly Environment (ILFE).

Procedures

The first day involved headteachers' questionnaire administration. Headteachers were briefed on the purpose of the study and requested to fill in the questionnaire. The questionnaire was collected immediately after being filled. The second day involved teachers' questionnaire administration and lesson observation. Three lessons, Kinyarwanda, English and Mathematics were observed to examine the methods used by teachers. A Focus Group Discussion with learners with Mild Intellectual Disabilities was organized on the third day. Finally, the researcher organized a two day visit to headquarters of UNICEF & ADRA Rwanda to interview the officers in charge of the CFS initiative. All participants completed informed consent forms after reading an information sheet about the study, or having had it read to them. Participation in the study was voluntary, and the participants were free to withdraw from the study at any time. Respect, confidentiality and anonymity were ensured.

Data Analysis

Data from the field were edited and coded according to themes which emanated from the research objectives and questions. The coded data were analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative techniques. Qualitative data were derived from open ended questions, the interview guide, the observation checklist and the focus group discussion while the quantitative data were derived from closed ended questions. Quantitative data were entered into the Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis. Qualitative data were presented using verbatim reporting.

RESULTS

This section summarizes the findings of the study. Findings are presented focusing on teaching methodologies used by teachers to accommodate learners with MID, the teaching/ learning materials and support services available in schools and professional training of teachers. Finally, views of respondents on strategies for reducing the dropout rate of learners with MID were sought and presented in narrative form.

Methods of teaching learners with Mild Intellectual Disability

Table 1 shows the methods used by teachers in inclusive Child Friendly Schools. The methods used by trained and untrained teachers are compared.

Table 1
Methods used by Teachers in Inclusive Child Friendly Schools

Teaching Methods	Trained teachers		Non trained teachers	
	Freq	%	Freq	%
Direct Instruction	3	17.3	1	8.3
Individualized Education Plan	0	0	0	0
Cooperative learning	0	0	0	0
Peer Tutoring	1	5.9	0	0
Task Analysis	1	5.9	0	0
None	12	70.9	11	91.7
Total	17	100	12	100

In teaching learners with MID, 5 (29.4%) trained teachers and 1(8.3%) non trained teachers indicated that they used special methods for teaching learners with MID. Some 3(17.3%) teachers for example used Direct instruction, 1(5.9%) used peer tutoring and 1 (5.9%) used task analysis. For non-trained teachers only 1(8.3%) used direct instruction. Other methods such as IEP and Cooperative Learning were not used by either category of teachers. However, 11(91.7%) non trained teachers indicated that they did not use any of the special teaching methods recommended for teaching learners with MID.

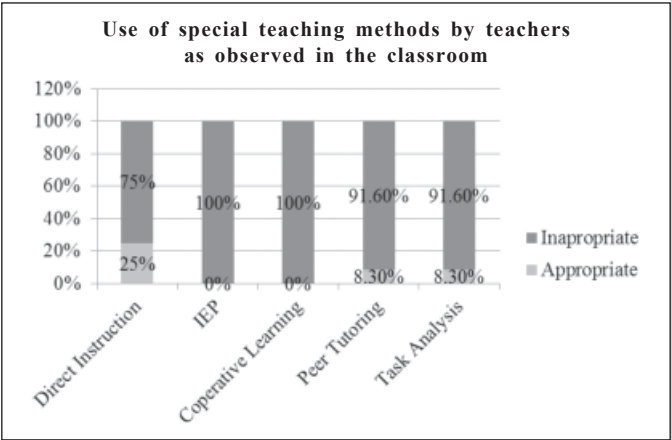


Figure 1. Use of teaching methods.

As indicated in Figure 1, out of 12 lessons observed, 3 (25%) of the lessons observed the use of Direct Instruction method was appropriate and 9 (75%) was inappropriate. In 1 (8.3%) lesson Task Analysis method was appropriately used and in 11 (91.6%) lessons it was inappropriately applied. In 1 (8.3%) of the lessons, Peer Tutoring method was appropriately used while in 11 (91.6%) lessons it was inappropriately used by the teachers. Other special teaching methods such as IEP and Cooperative Learning were 100% inappropriately used. This suggested that the teachers did not understand these methods due to lack of skills. As a result learners with MID get discouraged and dropout of school.

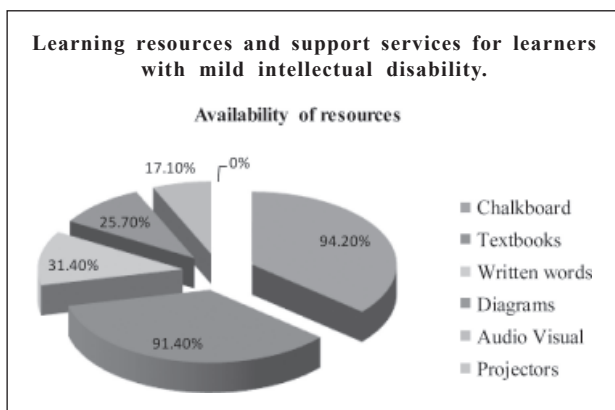


Figure 2. Learning resources and support services.

Figure 2 shows different categories of teaching and learning resources available in the learning environment according to the respondents. The teachers and headteachers responses on availability of teaching and learning resources were as follows: Out of the number of teachers and headteachers sampled 33 (94.2%) indicated that chalkboard was available in their schools, 2 (5.8%) indicated that they were unavailable. However, the indication by 2 (5.8%) teachers and headteachers that chalk board was not available at all raised some concern because the researcher visited almost all the schools and confirmed that in every school there was at least a blackboard for teachers to write on.

As for written words (either on flash cards, charts or pupils' exercise books, 11 (31.4%) responded that they were available, 24 (68.6%) indicated that they were unavailable. As for textbooks 32 (91.4%) of the respondents indicated that they were available, 3 (8.6%) indicated that they were unavailable. Diagrams, Audio Visuals and projectors were the most unavailable resources in almost all schools.

Table 2

Support Services for Learners with Mild Intellectual Disability

	Available		Not available	
	f	%	f	%
Support services offered by the school				
Guidance and counselling	5	83.3	1	16.7
Medical support	0	0.0	6	100.0
Financial support	0	0.0	6	100.0
Support received by the school				
Training support	3	50.0	3	50.0
Monitoring and Evaluation	4	66.7	2	33.3
Financial Support	0	100.0	6	100.0

In Table 2, 5(83.3%) headteachers reported that the school offers guidance and counselling services to learners with Mild Intellectual Disability. This was because every school had a teacher trained in Guidance and Counselling. However, 1(16.7%) headteacher reported that the school had no guidance and counselling service for learners with Mild Intellectual Disability. All headteachers reported that they did not offer medical and financial support to learners with MID. This is a clear indication that schools had no professionals who assist in identification, referral and treatment.

On the support schools received from outside for them to be able to accommodate learners with Mild Intellectual Disability, half of headteachers reported that they have received training support for their teachers and half reported that they did not. This is because cluster schools did not acknowledge the training they have received from trained teachers as confirmed by the officers in Charge of the CFS initiative.

We have three model schools in Bugesera District and we have trained at least one teacher from each school. Those teachers were supposed to train other teachers from neighboring schools. However, that training was very short and teachers from those school clusters need more training in inclusive education. (Headteacher A)

In relation to monitoring and Evaluation support, 4 (66.7%) headteachers reported that they received monitoring and evaluation support and 2 (33.3%) reported that they did not. This is because two schools are very far from Kigali city and it was not easy for officers in charge of the CFS initiative to make a follow up regularly.

As for financial support, all headteachers reported that they did not receive any additional financial support allocated specifically to help learners with mild intellectual disability.

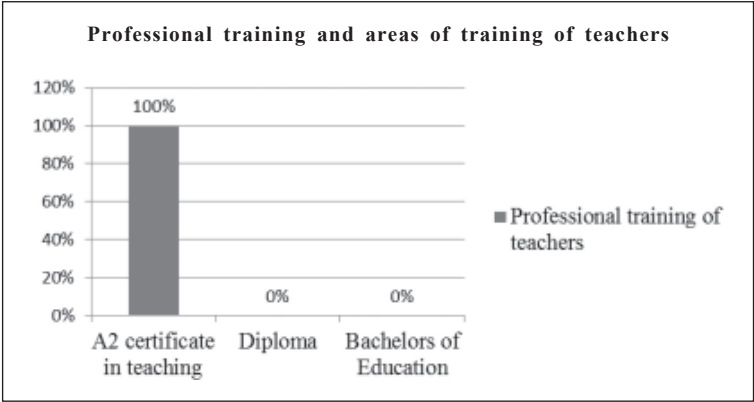


Figure 3. Professional training of teachers.

Figure 3 shows that all (100%) teachers had advanced level in teaching. This shows that the personnel were academically qualified to teach in primary school.

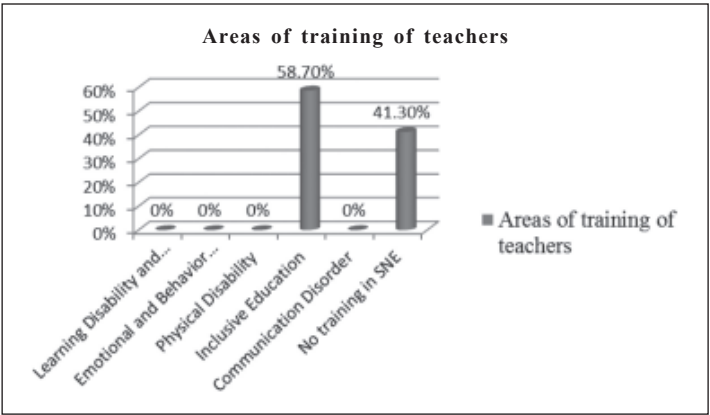


Figure 4. Areas of training of teachers.

Findings on the areas of training as shown in Figure 4 indicated that 12 (41.3%) or nearly two thirds of teachers had no training in Special Needs Education. Those teachers with training in inclusion numbered 17 (58.7%). That training was not even enough as reported by officers in charge of CFS, since the training on Inclusive Education was organized in 2011 for only two weeks. The fact that

there were no teachers trained in Intellectual Disabilities meant that learners with MID were not effectively catered for and this led to their early drop out from the school.

Views of respondents on strategies for reducing dropout rate of learners with Mild Intellectual Disabilities

Use of appropriate teaching methodology Strategy

All teachers and Headteachers (100%) strongly agreed that using appropriate teaching methodologies would reduce the dropout rate of learners with Mild Intellectual Disabilities. This was confirmed by the Officer in charge of Child Friendly Schools in an interview:

'In inclusive schools where teachers have received enough training on inclusive methodologies, the dropout rate of learners with MID has reduced dramatically. For example teachers were able to develop an Individualized Education Plan and this promoted participation of learners with MID in classroom activities. When learners are engaged in classroom activities, they enjoy class and hardly drop out' (Officer in charge of Child Friendly schools, ADRA Rwanda).

When learners with MID were asked their views during the Focus Group Discussion, their responses confirmed that of CFS officers.

'My parents forced me to come to school. I have repeated classes more than three times because I fail in all subjects. I am always the last in my class. My teachers are not helping, it is like I am not part of the class. If not for my parents, I would have dropped out long before' (Class five learners with MID, Nyiragiseke Primary school).

Availability of teaching/learning resources and support services strategies

The majority of respondents (97.7%) were in agreement that the availability of teaching/ learning resources and support services would reduce the dropout rate of learners with MID. For example, one teacher said:

Teaching learners with MID requires special and enough materials for example the visual materials. We are struggling with limited resources in our classes and it is almost impossible to engage learners with MID and take care of their needs. As a result, many get discouraged and drop out. However, I believe that with enough and appropriate materials, learners with MID would remain in school (A teacher in class five, Gitwe Primary school).

Similarly, one head teacher noted that:

‘We receive the same amount of capitation grant with no consideration that we are accommodating learners with MID, yet we need to provide special services for these learners. It is impossible to take care of their educational needs without additional funds from the government. I strongly believe that with enough support services, learners with MID would remain in schools’ (A headteacher, GS Mayange, A)

DISCUSSION

Children with Mild Intellectual Disabilities have improved in inclusive school attendance than before. However, the majority of them are dropping out before they complete primary education (UNESCO, 2015). In Rwanda, several studies indicated that learners with Special Education Needs are more likely to drop out before completing primary school (Voluntary Services Overseas, 2015). Findings from this study established that teachers were not using special methods recommended to teach learners with MID. For example, the Individualized Education Plan and cooperative learning were not used. Motala (2011) in South Africa noted that learners with Intellectual Disabilities were deposited in regular schools with no accommodation at all to successfully include them. He added that teachers in regular schools were using methodologies inappropriate for learners with Mild Intellectual Disabilities, making them fail all subjects, repeat class and eventually dropout. Muchiri (2000) observed that learners with MID who have been integrated into regular school were often placed in large classrooms where individual attention cannot be adequately provided. Swanson (2001) also found that teachers in regular classrooms should have a variety of special teaching methods to motivate learners with MID to learn and hence reduce their dropout rate. The American Dropout Prevention Center (2015) highlighted that using appropriate instructional methods can greatly prevent the dropout of learners with Special Education Needs.

Findings on availability of teaching/ learning resources revealed that these instructional resources were insufficient in the inclusive regular primary school. Kalabula and Mandyata (2003) in Zambia concurred with the findings and established that required educational materials were not enough in ordinary schools where children with special needs were being included. Randiki (2002) in Kenya also rightly observed that insufficient resources and poor facilities have undermined the professionals’ efforts to provide services for students with Special Education Needs as required. Availability of various kinds of instructional resources in regular schools will enhance participation in learning for learners with MID and will attract them to school (Rose & Ilie, 2016). Using

teaching/ learning resources generally enhances learning of those with MID. These resources enhance understanding through the use of more than one sense: sight, touch, hearing and feeling.

Findings of this study revealed that learners with Mild Intellectual Disabilities were not given support services to accommodate their educational needs. Schools were not receiving additional financial support to cater for learners with MID. Other support services such as administration support were not regularly provided to schools. Mwangi (2014) in Kenya observed that besides the academics, special services such as guidance and counselling should be offered in order to address cognitive, physiological, social and affective domains of the children with Intellectual Disabilities. Mattingly and Suubi in their report for UNICEF (2016) also stated more inspections are needed on project based inclusive schools. As established by Mazrui (2014), regular monitoring and evaluation should be done to ensure that schools are successfully implementing inclusive education initiatives. This will ensure sustainability of good initiatives that most of the time stop when the project ends. UNESCO (2014) noted that insufficient funding hampers provision of special education services in Sub Saharan Africa. In India and Zambia for example, only the affluent can afford to send their children with disabilities to private institutions. Mutisya (2008) asserted that community or other stakeholders should help in providing financial support because it is critical in progressive implementation of inclusive education for learners with MID. UNICEF (2016) stated that different support services should be available in regular schools to support educational needs of learners with disabilities.

Findings on professional training of teachers established that teachers were not professionally trained to teach learners with MID. Consequently, learners get discouraged and then drop out. Korir and Mukuria (2007) established that many special education teachers in Kenya are ill-equipped to simultaneously handle the multiplicity of academic and behavioral challenges presented by individuals with Intellectual Disabilities. In Uganda, Moyo (2012) also noted that only 1% of teachers trained in Special Needs Education have received specific training on how to include and work with children with Intellectual Disabilities. The World Bank (2004) affirmed that adequately trained professionals are required in providing meaningful educational services to children with special needs in regular schools. Teachers hence require appropriate training and support to be able to deliver child-centered quality inclusive education to children with disabilities and prevent dropout.

LIMITATION

In Rwanda, the policy of inclusive education was in the initial stage of development. Similarly, lack of previous studies addressing similar concerns in Rwanda was a major limitation, due to shortage of useful literature that

would enrich this study. Time constraints also did not permit the researcher to cover all the schools in the selected district.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study throws light on the various strategies for reducing dropout rate of learners with Mild Intellectual Disabilities (MID) in inclusive primary schools. It revealed that the majority of teachers did not use special methods recommended to teach learners with MID. As a result of poor teaching methods, learners with MID get discouraged and drop out from school. Teaching/learning materials were lacking in all-inclusive schools and this affected participation of learners with MID. Lack of additional funding and other support services also make inclusion of learners with MID practically impossible in inclusive schools. Lack of teachers professionally trained in Intellectual Disabilities leaves learners with MID unsupported. Their educational needs are not taken care of and this led to repeated failure and eventually early dropout.

Several steps can be taken to reduce the dropout rate of children with Mild Intellectual Disabilities. Introducing Special Needs Education courses in Teachers Training Colleges would increase the number of qualified Special Needs Education primary teachers. Conducting regular in service training focusing on teaching methodologies would equip regular teachers with the skills to effectively accommodate learners with Mild Intellectual Disabilities. Provision of additional funding for schools accommodating learners with MID would allow schools to purchase specialized teaching/learning materials. Regular monitoring of inclusive schools would promote ownership, accountability and sustainability of good inclusive education initiatives.

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