Session 1, Track 1 | Paper Session: Inclusion | Disability | Teachers' perspectives

Time: Friday, 25th Sept. 2026
11:00am - 1:00pm

Chair: Chatranee Nunjamnong, University of Vienna

Inclusive Leadership and Social Dialogue in Education: Examining Democratic Participation in School Organisations

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the relationship between school administrators' inclusive leadership characteristics and the social dialogue processes taking place in schools, based on teachers' perspectives. The increasing need for diversity, equity, justice, and participation in educational organisations necessitates addressing school leadership not only from an administrative perspective but also through an inclusive and democratic lens. In this context, inclusive leadership is conceptualised as a leadership approach that recognises differences, supports stakeholder participation, and fosters a school culture based on trust. Social dialogue, on the other hand, is considered a fundamental component of joint decision-making processes in educational settings through information sharing, consultation, and negotiation.

The research was conducted within the framework of a mixed-methods approach using an explanatory sequential design. In the quantitative phase, data were collected from 396 teachers working in Istanbul, while in the qualitative phase, data were gathered from 39 teachers. The study employed the Inclusive Leadership Scale and the Social Dialogue Scale, both developed by the researcher, along with a semi-structured interview form. Quantitative data were analysed through descriptive statistics and structural regression analysis, whereas qualitative data were examined using content analysis.

The findings indicate a significant and positive relationship between school administrators' levels of inclusive leadership and the social dialogue taking place in schools. Teachers described inclusive leadership through dimensions such as cultural awareness, supportiveness, trustworthiness, power sharing, collaboration, and the creation of a shared vision. Social dialogue was found to occur primarily in the forms of information sharing, consultation, and negotiation.

The results of the study reveal that inclusive leadership is an important factor in strengthening democratic participation, organisational trust, and a consensual school culture within educational organisations. This study aims to contribute to international discussions on the role of leadership in creating inclusive and peaceful school environments.

Inclusive Education Specialists in Higher Education: Developing a Participatory Qualification Model for People with Intellectual Disabilities

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Abstract

Access to education for all and equity in education are closely linked to how inclusive (or excluding) an educational system is. In Austria, several national (e.g., NAP 2012-2021 and 2022-2030) and international (e.g., UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN-CRPD)) policy documents form the basis for the implementation of inclusive education in schools and beyond. However, in the field of inclusive education, the question arises as to how internationally formulated human rights standards – especially those of the UN-CRPD – are interpreted and transferred into the national context. The current educational system in Austria is still characterised by exclusionary practices such as the exclusion of certain groups of people from certain educational domains. An example is the extremely limited access of people with intellectual disabilities to tertiary education.
In this presentation we present a concept for including people with intellectual disabilities in a higher education context. The starting point is an internationally unique qualification model for "inclusive education specialists" that has been implemented at the Institute for Inclusive Education (Kiel) since 2013 and is now established at numerous locations across Germany. There, people with learning difficulties are trained in a three-year qualification programme to become educational professionals who, as experts in their own field, participate in university teaching and actively help to shape it (Institute for Inclusive Education, 2025). Studies confirm the effectiveness of this approach: the involvement of education specialists in courses leads to a more positive attitude towards inclusion among students, reduces inhibitions and increases awareness of barriers (Kloska et al., 2022; Mechler et al., 2023).
This presentation focuses on the design phase of an Austrian pilot project, which was developed as a collaborative initiative between a university of education and an organisation in the field of disability services. The current preparation phase (qualification programme will be starting in 01/2027) of the project includes the adaptation of the German concept to the Austrian context and participatory development processes, consistently guided by the UN-CRPD. A project team comprising people with and without disabilities is conceptualising a multi-stage, accessible application process and working on the development of the curriculum. Unlike in Kiel, people with disabilities will not solely be learners during the qualification phase but rather help shaping the content and delivering the courses. The application process and the curriculum development are accompanied by research activities. In this presentation, we will present the initial findings of the accompanying evaluation.

Navigating Inclusive Education Across the Globe. A Transcultural Study on Teachers' Approaches to SDG4.

Eva Kleinlein, University of Vienna, Austria

Abstract

Internationally, teachers face the challenge of accommodating diverse learners and creating meaningful learning opportunities for the variety of students in their classrooms (Ainscow, 2021). Although student diversity has always been present, international frameworks such as the SDGs (United Nations, 2015), as well as the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) and the UN-CRPD (United Nations, 2006) have intensified the global focus on inclusive and equitable education. Yet,

despite these commitments, significant educational inequities persist across and within contexts. Structural barriers such as limited financial, human, and temporal resources, rigid curricula, and insufficient support structures continuously challenge teachers' work. This, however, limits how teachers can meaningfully accommodate student diversity and design pedagogical approaches, materials, and interventions that address learners' individual needs (Ainscow, 2021; Muskin, 2015).

Despite these challenges, educators worldwide develop thoughtful and often highly innovative strategies to support their students' participation and learning (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Muskin, 2015). Although such practices are shaped by local cultural and institutional contexts, they may also provide valuable insights for advancing inclusive education internationally (Ainscow, 2021; Crossley & Watson, 2003). Building on this premise, the present study examines how teachers across diverse contexts perceive and respond to challenges related to inclusive and equitable education.

Drawing on a transcultural adaptation of Grounded Theory Methodology (T-GTM; Kleinlein, 2026), the study analyses asynchronous narrative audio-messages (ANAs; Kleinlein, 2023), written accounts, and in-person interviews with 77 teachers from 15 countries across Asia, Africa, America, and Europe. Following a practice-oriented bottom-up approach, the study examines the diverse inclusive educational challenges (IECs) and inclusive educational approaches (IEAs) that shape the field internationally. The findings reveal shared patterns of IECs across contexts, including systemic and institutional barriers, social inequities, language-related challenges, and difficult domestic environments. Simultaneously, participants also describe shared pedagogical responses, such as restructuring learning environments, fostering open communication, initiating multiprofessional collaboration or adapting their teaching practices.

While acknowledging the persistence of contextual differences across educational contexts around the globe, the study emphasises the shared dimensions and commonalities of inclusive educational challenges and approaches (D'Alessio & Watkins, 2009; Dinkelaker et al., 2011). Therefore, transcultural professional exchange and systematic analysis of educators' practice- based knowledge can contribute meaningfully to international debates on SDG4 and to achieve the goal in the future. By focusing on teachers' individual experiences, the study demonstrates how qualitative transcultural research can support collaborative learning and the development of inclusive educational theory, policy, and practice (Artiles & Dyson, 2005).

Honeybees as a Catalyst for Inclusive STEAM Education: A Nature-Based Learning Project in an Austrian Primary School

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Abstract
As the 2030 deadline for SDG 4 approaches, persistent inequalities in access to quality STEAM education remain a major concern. Students with special educational needs and those from low science-capital backgrounds often face limited opportunities for meaningful engagement with science. Recent educational shifts, including increased digitalisation after lockdowns, have reduced children's time in nature, despite the importance of nature-based experiences for healthy development. While education for sustainable development is increasingly emphasised, inclusive, practice-oriented approaches that address both participation and equity remain under-researched, particularly in primary education.

This study examines the inclusive, year-long educational model “Learning with Honeybees,” implemented as a voluntary enrichment course in an Austrian primary school. The project combines hands-on, inquiry-based learning with live honeybee colonies (Apis mellifera), integrating ecological education, experimentation and creative expression (e.g., painting, design). The qualitative study draws on semi-structured interviews with 11 children (upper primary level, Grades 3–4; 6 female, 5 male), including students with special educational needs, German as a second language and diverse learning profiles.

Data were analysed using qualitative content analysis combining deductive category application and inductive category development. The study investigates how learning experiences and personal development processes are shaped within an inclusive, nature-based STEAM environment.

Students developed knowledge about pollination and bee behaviour. Nine of 11 children reported reduced fear of bees; all described calmer reactions and helping behaviours (e.g., rescuing bees). Direct contact with bees was the most valued element (10/11), and all participants preferred hands-on learning over books or videos. Notably, all children expressed pro-environmental action intentions and many reported transferring their knowledge to family members.

Beyond cognitive gains, the project fostered self-efficacy, environmental awareness, social cooperation and language development, particularly for learners with diverse needs and for learners with German as a second language, by embedding language use in hands-on activities. The inclusive design enabled meaningful participation across heterogeneous groups, highlighting the potential of experiential, nature-based STEAM learning to reduce barriers to engagement.

The study contributes to current debates on equity and access by demonstrating how such approaches can help compensate for unequal access to science-related resources and support participation among underrepresented learners. At the same time, it highlights structural challenges for broader implementation, including limited resources and teacher training. The paper argues that inclusive, nature-based STEAM education offers a promising equity-oriented strategy within SDG 4 but requires systemic support for sustainable impact.