



University of Macedonia

Department of International & European Studies

Department of Balkan, Slavic & Oriental Studies

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**Inclusive education and the impact of Covid-19 on children with disabilities, a literature review.**

Supervisor: Kalliopi Chainoglou

Student: Eleftheria Doka

Registration Number: mhr20004

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## ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected education systems worldwide and posed greater challenges for students with disabilities. Students with disabilities have long been entitled to inclusive education that was ensured by international conventions and national legislations. However, the implementation is not always a priority for the responsible parties and the pandemic has added a burden to students with disabilities and their families. While shifting to distance learning has offered some advantages, it has also unveiled inequalities and obstacles faced by students with disabilities. The right to be included in suitable quality education is fundamental for students with disabilities, yet the pandemic has exacerbated existing barriers. Moreover, the absence of support and accommodations based on their personal needs has made the remote learning environment even more difficult. Efforts to address these issues and defend the rights of students with disabilities are imperative. This study explores the disability and the various models tried to explain it and the right of individuals with disabilities as students on education. Accordingly, the implications of the pandemic are examined in terms of access to inclusive education. It highlights the need for precautionary measures to safeguard their rights and ensure equal opportunities for learning during crisis situations.

## INTRODUCTION

The situation of Covid-19 had a strong impact on our every-day lives with significant effects related either directly to the disease or indirectly through other unpleasant feelings. Among the negative impacts of the pandemic on global human well being that had disrupted the quality of human life as a whole, some groups have been most strongly affected. Children with disabilities are also included among these groups, because they already had to deal with issues like marginalization and discrimination and with this pandemic they had to face additional challenges, such as limited access to important services like education. This dissertation examines the problems that have risen during the Covid-19 pandemic, concerning children with disabilities and their right to inclusive education. Educational experiences of learners all around the globe were impacted by the pandemic with the transition to virtual learning and online schooling due to school closures. This transition impacted many learners but there is substantial evidence that Covid-19 had a particularly profound effect on children with disabilities (Dvorksy et al., 2023).

This dissertation's topic is related to the problems that have emerged in the lives of students with disabilities during the Covid-19 pandemic and their right in inclusive education. As stated in the introduction of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities "{...} all persons with all types of disability must enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms" (Article 4). Living in the pandemic era was an unprecedented and difficult situation for everyone and especially for vulnerable groups, among them the disabled. This paper is examining in particular disability as a human rights issue starting with a brief review of the models of disability that were studied over the years as well as the human rights on disability including the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). The right to education and the right to inclusive education as human rights are also discussed in particular.

As far as Covid-19 is concerned, it should be noted that it was caused by the SARSCoV-2 virus and causes an infection of the respiratory system. The widespread of the virus has caused global concern and the World Health Organization declared the Covid-19 pandemic on March 11, 2020. This pandemic resulted in a wide range of implementation approaches concerning education which include remote learning having an impact on the education of people with disabilities. The last part of this

literature review is focused on the adaptations made in education for students with disabilities during the Covid-19 situation and also on the challenges on inclusive education along with a review of the current studies.

The selection of this thesis was a result of many different factors. First of all, the Covid-19 pandemic was an uncommon situation for our society and there has been limited researches and studies related to this specific issue. This fact that made it more appealing to implement. Also, my working experience in a Center for creative activities for children with disabilities along with the conversations with my mother concerning her job in a Daycare centre for people with disabilities during the Covid-19 outbreak and of course my studies in Human Rights and migration during the pandemic, contributed to the choice of the specific subject. The present dissertation attempts to concentrate bibliography in order to understand as much as possible the impact of Covid-19 in students' with disabilities right to inclusive education and emphasize on the urgency for preventative measures to assure their rights and provide equal opportunities for learning during crisis situations. This literature review is completed with the citation of the bibliographic sources that were used to write this paper.

## CHAPTER 1: DISABILITY AS A HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE

### 1.1 DEFINITION OF DISABILITY

A disability is a physical or mental condition that limits a person's movements, senses, or activities. This can include conditions such as mobility impairments, sensory impairments, cognitive impairments, and chronic health conditions. The term is often used to describe a condition that affects a person's ability to participate in typical daily activities and may require special accommodations or support (Seligman, M. & Darling, 2009). Children with disabilities are children who have physical, mental, or developmental conditions that impact their ability to participate in typical daily activities. These conditions may include, but are not limited to, autism, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, learning disabilities, and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Children with disabilities may require special accommodations or support in order to participate in school and other activities.

There is not a globally identified definition of the term disability. There are several attempts for a universal definition (WHO, 2019). The World Health Organisation (WHO) in its Classification of Health and Disability poses that disability is not only a medical situation but also takes into account the social aspects of it. More specifically, according to WHO, among the concepts that are quite important, are impairments that include any (physical or psychological) loss or non-typical body structure or functions and disability that includes restrictions caused by impairments in the person's ability to act in what is considered typical for most people.

Historically, disability has been perceived as a deficit, viewed from a medical standpoint. It was a medical condition that the person had to be "cured" in order to function like a typical member of our society (Retief & Letšosa, 2018). Unfortunately, this view that excludes these populations from social, educational and other inequities continues to exist. In education, many students and their families are trying to disclose their disability, in fear of stigma. This has a tremendous effect on children that they could seek additional help and demand better accommodations for inclusive education, they internalize their needs (Fullmer et al., 2021).

Reports of World Health Organization showed that nowadays the population that lives with a disability reached over to 1 billion, which means that 15% of the general population (WHO, 2019) . WHO also underlines that 2-4% of population lives with a disability that excludes them from functioning (2019). There is evidence that 10% of children around the world have a mental health, intellectual or sensory impairment (Olusanya et al., 2022). The numbers indicate the need for more support for people with disabilities and their families and the importance of creating more actions for inclusion and protection acts during health emergencies (UNICEF, 2013).

Disabled people constitute the largest minority of the world and unlikely to other minorities this group is always changing (WHO, 2023). Any human being could acquire any disability through his lifespan because of illness, accidents or ageing. It is believed to be an outcome of social, political, economic, accidental factors while there are researches suggesting that there is a two-way relation to poverty and disability (Banks et al., 2017). Disability may be caused by poverty and poverty could increase the possibilities of disability (WHO, 2011). Some groups could share cultural or social history, such as common language (Sign Language, Braille) or terms that are understood by their communities, they have cultivated their own traditions and customs to celebrate disability, such as disability awareness and disability pride (Andrews et al., 2019). This effort to create their culture between their communities acknowledges the diversity and celebrated their lives with disability as a part of their identity.

It is important for this inquiry to discuss the term of discrimination. Discrimination against disabled people is the unequal treatment of individuals based on their physical or mental disabilities. This can take many forms, including job discrimination, denial of access to public accommodations, harassment, and lack of access to healthcare and education. Such discrimination is illegal under various laws, including the Americans with Disabilities Act in the United States and The Equality Act issued by the UK Government (*Equality Act*, 2010), but still occurs frequently. It is important to raise awareness and work towards ending discrimination against disabled people. Research in social and psychological fields supports the distinction between structural and personal discrimination (Carter & Murphy, 2015; Unzueta & Lowery, 2008). Discrimination on Individualistic terms sets as a priority interactive circumstance where the antipathy for a member outside a certain community or group

outlines a discrimination act (Allport, 1958). As opposed to that, it is linked to policies, procedures, or rules that impact one group negatively towards another (Carter & Murphy, 2015). It is known that injustice made by structural discrimination, that is not identified by dominant members of the group can cause severe psychological consequences. In addition, there is a need to raise awareness about structural discrimination; because research has shown dominant members are more likely to support policies that benefit minorities.

The term “Disablism” refers to discriminatory acts and oppressive behaviours towards disabled people that are considered inferior to typical population (Miller et al., 2004). In literature, this term is not very widely used, but it is important to include it in this analysis. According to the social model perspective, this term is used and refers to disability and its relation to social, economic, political barriers (Campbell, 2009). Discrimination against minority groups is a violation of their human rights, as it involves unequal treatment based on characteristics such as race, ethnicity, religion, or national origin. This can take many forms, including discriminatory laws and policies, hate crimes, racial profiling, and unequal access to education, housing, and employment opportunities. Minority groups often face systemic discrimination and institutionalized bias, which can limit their opportunities and contribute to social and economic inequality. It is important to recognize and challenge discrimination against minority groups, and work towards creating a more inclusive and just society. The majority of the literature on stigma and prejudice towards people with disabilities has promoted an individualistic definition of disability, which is consistent with mainstream understandings of individual discrimination.

## 1.2 MODELS OF DISABILITY

There are several different models of disability that have been proposed over the years. These models provide different perspectives on the nature of disability and how it should be understood and addressed. Some of the most commonly discussed models of disability include (Grue, 2016):



- The Medical Model: This model views disability as a medical problem that needs to be fixed or cured.
- The Social Model: This model views disability as a social construct, caused by the way society is organized rather than by an individual's impairments.
- The Independent Living Model: This model emphasizes the importance of self-determination and empowerment for people with disabilities. It argues that individuals with disabilities should be able to make their own decisions and control their own lives, with the appropriate supports and accommodations in place.
- The Intersectionality Model: This model emphasizes the various ways that different types of oppression, such as racism, sexism, and ableism, intersect to create unique experiences of disability for different individuals.

It is important to note that these models are not mutually exclusive and some individuals may identify with more than one model. Also, some models of disability may be more appropriate for certain situations than others (Lawson & Beckett, 2020). For example, the social model of disability looks at how society can be more inclusive and accessible to people with disabilities, while the medical model focuses on how to treat disability as an individual issue. Depending on the context of the situation, one model may be more appropriate than the other. (Lawson & Beckett, 2020). There is a need for models in disability because they provide a framework for understanding and addressing the issues faced by people with disabilities. Models can help to identify the root causes of disability, and inform the development of policies and practices that can promote inclusion and equal opportunities for people with disabilities. Models can be useful tools for thinking about and addressing the complex issues faced by people with disabilities, but they should be understood as frameworks rather than definitive explanations. It is important to recognize that people with disabilities are not a monolithic group, and their experiences and needs will vary.

Policies aimed at protecting and promoting the rights of disabled people can take various forms, including (*Disability, Work and Inclusion*, 2022):

Anti-discrimination laws: Laws that prohibit discrimination based on disability, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in the United States and the

framework issued by the European Union Council against any unequal treatment of people with disabilities (*Council Directive 2000/78/EC*, 2000).

**Accessibility requirements:** Building codes and regulations that require public spaces, transportation systems, and other facilities to be accessible to people with disabilities.

**Reasonable accommodations:** Employers and other organizations are required to provide reasonable accommodations to disabled individuals to help them perform their jobs or access services.

**Assistive technology:** Funding and support for assistive technology that can help disabled individuals with activities of daily living and communication.

**Inclusive education:** Programs and policies that promote inclusive education and ensure that disabled students have equal access to education.

**Vocational rehabilitation:** Services that help disabled individuals prepare for, find, and retain employment.

These policies aim to ensure that disabled individuals have equal opportunities and can participate fully in society.

Disability models, some more than others, have been extremely important to the history of disability and the access to inclusion in education, society, etc. Through models there was political mobilisation and formulation of laws related to these matters. Ultimately, this development affected research too creating disciplines like Disability Studies (Degener, 2017). This study will analyse some of the more important models of disability that played a part in how children with disabilities access inclusive education and additional help.

### 1.2.1 MEDICAL MODEL

The medical model of disability views disability as a problem or deficit that is inherent to the individual, rather than a result of societal barriers (Retief & Letšosa, 2018). This model suggests that individuals with disabilities are in need of medical treatment or rehabilitation to correct or overcome their impairments, rather than societal accommodations to remove barriers. It has been developed and adopted by the medical profession and other professionals in the field of rehabilitation. The roots of the medical model can be traced back to the 19th century, with the rise of the medical profession and the development of institutions for individuals with disabilities. The medical model has been the dominant perspective in Western society for much of the 20th century, and it continues to be influential today.

It is important to note that the development of the medical model is not attributed to a single individual or group, but it is rather a historical evolution of the way society has viewed and dealt with disability (Areheart, 2008). Over time, it became the dominant perspective on disability among medical professionals, rehabilitation experts, and other authorities in the field. This model has been criticized for ignoring the impact of societal factors on the experiences of individuals with disabilities, and for reinforcing negative stereotypes and discrimination.

Critics of the medical model of disability argue that it reinforces negative stereotypes and discrimination towards individuals with disabilities. They argue that this model views disability as impairment that needs to correct or overcome. Critics also argue that the medical model of disability ignores the social and environmental factors that contribute to the experiences of individuals with disabilities. It disregards the impact of societal attitudes, policies, and practices that create barriers and limit opportunities for individuals with disabilities (Dhanda, 2006). Another critique is that the medical model can lead to over-diagnosis, where individuals with disabilities are seen as patients first rather than valued members of society. Consequently, they may lack autonomy, self-determination, and control over their lives. This reinforces negative stereotypes and can limit access to resources and opportunities, further marginalizing individuals with disabilities. Additionally, it can lead to a lack of support for disabled people within their communities, and further stigmatization and discrimination.

The medical model of disability (Retief & Letšosa, 2018), which society tries to reject (Haegele & Hodge, 2016), sees disability as a deviation in comparison to normal healthy individuals. Disabled people are excluded from every social situation because of their impairments. According to the medical model, disabilities are still the sole domain of assisting and medical professions, such as physicians, nurses, special education teachers, and rehabilitation specialists (Haegele & Hodge, 2016). As the social disability model was developing, it was stated that the ideological construction of medical disability model was through medicalization or/ and individualism, which constitutes disablement politics (Oliver, 1990). In addition, two assumptions are the basis of the medical model and they can affect negatively human rights progress. The first negotiates sheltering and wellbeing and the second is that legal rights may be lost due to disability. Due to disabled individuals' incapacity, laws about guardianship and the mental health of disabled individuals were created. This was due to the necessity for special education schools, sheltered homes, and institutions (Flynn & Arstein-Kerslake, 2014).

The negotiations in The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities concluded that the medical model was deterrent (Degener, 2016). There were many disagreements during the convention between different parties, professions, etc., but there was an agreement that the medical model was rejected (Tromel, 2009). This convention set the foundations for the social model of disability.

### 1.2.2 SOCIAL MODEL

The social model of disability is an alternative perspective on disability that views it as a result of the interaction between an individual and the environment, rather than an inherent characteristic of the individual. This model emphasizes the need for societal changes to remove barriers and promote inclusion, rather than focusing on individual treatment or rehabilitation (Barnes, 2019).

The social model of disability was developed by disabled people's organizations in the 1970s, as a reaction to the dominant medical model, which views disability as a problem or deficit that is inherent to the individual (Celik, 2017). The

social model argues that the real problem is not the individual's impairment, but the way society is organized and the barriers it creates for people with impairments.

The social model suggests that society must take the initiative to remove barriers and create opportunities for people with disabilities, rather than expecting people with disabilities to adapt to an inaccessible environment (Lawson & Beckett, 2020). This includes physical barriers such as poorly designed buildings and public spaces, as well as attitudinal barriers, such as negative stereotypes and discrimination. It is often seen as an empowering perspective that promotes the rights and full inclusion of people with disabilities in society. It also encourages individuals with disabilities to see themselves as capable and valuable members of society, rather than as dependent on medical treatment or charity.

As it is known through models of disability the last 40 years, politics in disability, Studies and human rights are shaped. This model of disability that indicates that disability is a form of social construction has set the road for evolution on that matter (Barnes, 2019). The term and meaning of disability is re-purposed in political terms and so the term describes the disadvantages that this group of people with “impairments” faces because of society's oppression and their experiences of marginalization (Burchardt, 2004). Furthermore, this highlights the importance of advocating for and acting on behalf of disabled individuals in order to ensure their equal participation in society. Its core is the separation between individuals' unique minds and physical characteristics on the one hand, and socially induced exclusion and disadvantage on the other.

The international movement of Disabled People in 1981, made clear the difference between the limitation in function that are caused by impairments in movement, sight, etc and the limitations in access to normal life as any other citizen of the society because of physical/ mental barriers (Kafer, 2013) . Also, the Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) an organisation based in the UK explained disability as the result of society’s oppression that adds up the person’s impairments. This leads to discrimination and unnecessary isolation from participating in society (UN, General Assembly 3rd Committee, 2017).

From the social perspective, it seems that disability is explained as injustice. There is a way to eliminate this injustice only with radical changes in our society. It is

acknowledged that after the construction of social model it was clear that the meaning of disability would be separated from the one of impairment (Broderick, 2015). The traditional approaches are no longer explaining disability. The social model assisted the understanding the concept of the "Individual model of disability", which locates the difficulty within the person and finds the roots of the problem to mental and physical limitations derived from disability (Degener, 2016).

Since the '80s there is extensive literature on the social model that overcomes geographical or political barriers. However, there are inconsistencies on how it is used and articulated. The fact that the term is frequently used without an explanation of how it is specifically interpreted by the author adds to the confusion that could follow (Bickenbach, 1993). This is why there are researchers who stated that this model as evaluating method is very complicated and difficult to interpret (Shakespeare, 2006).

### 1.2.3 DIVERSITY MODEL

The diversity model of disability is a perspective that recognizes the ways in which an individual's experience of disability is shaped by a variety of factors, including their culture, socioeconomic status, race, gender, and other aspects of their identity (Akhtar & Jaswal, 2013). This model emphasizes the importance of understanding the unique experiences of individuals with disabilities and the ways in which these experiences are shaped by the intersection of different identities and social structures. It also highlights the need for a more inclusive and equitable society that values the contributions and perspectives of people with disabilities.

Although in psychology the diversity in different domains such as culture, and individual characteristics is appreciated, in disability this effort has not succeeded. The movement of disability makes efforts to adopt principles and understand marginalized communities with different cultural backgrounds, to have an agenda with social justice. To this effort, it is believed that the field of psychology has to offer more knowledge on how to approach disability (Andrews et al., 2019).

Researchers that are specialized in social work, political economy and general sociology are extremely concerned about people with disability and how they are

represented in areas such as education, employment and general well-being (Jackson, 2018). There were regulations about plans for accessibility about minorities such as disabled people and political strategies for advocating (Bickenbach et al., 1999). A model that tried to focus on the manner that society's systems interact with diversity in disability is 'Disability as Human Variation' (Scotch & Schriener, 1997). This concept proposes that accessibility in a structured environment is not exclusively addressed by anti-discrimination legislation that calls for a "one-size-fits-all" answer and so the clue of diversity is important to be acknowledged. The same researchers doubt the definition of disability - from a socio-political point of view- in which disabled people face barriers in structured environments are imposed and there is a way to be removed. In addition, they believe that activists and movements of independent living affect with this ideology the accessibility outcomes (Scotch, 2000).

The term of universalism tries to find a middle ground solution between disability and ability. It states that as a development from social model, this theory serves in a better way disabled people based on research and advocacy in comparison to a minority party and civil rights approach (Bickenbach et al., 1999). It also views disability as universal phenomenon of humans and not a problem of a minority. As a typical trait people with disabilities would not be marginalized or discriminated. Universalism recognizes disability as a social construct and aims to ensure the full inclusion and participation of people with disabilities in all aspects of society. According to the universalism model, disability rights should be understood and protected as fundamental human rights. The term was introduced by the World Health Organization in 2011. That report underlined the need for a shift from the medical or individualized approach of disability towards a universalistic framework that emphasizes the rights and inclusion of people with disabilities (as cited in, Bickenbach & Cieza, 2011). However, the term "universalism" as a disability model is not widely used by human rights experts. Instead, experts and advocates in the field of disability rights generally refer to the social model of disability or the human rights model of disability.

Palacio and Carbero (2008) conducted research on the concept of ability and disability, aiming to address the erroneous division between these two constructs. Their study explored various aspects, including the fields of human rights and ethics,

within the framework of disability models. Additionally, they elaborate on a slightly postmodern perspective by using the all-inclusive term "diversity." Although the diversity model and universalism have parallels and contrasts that cannot be discussed in this context, both provide to professionals with fresh perspectives.

Despite the increasing popularity of Universal Design as a strategy applicable to built environments for everyone, there are remain challenges in ensuring accessibility for disabled individuals. This marginalized area faces difficulties when it comes to practical implementation. This intensity between theory and practice of the diversity model might be the result of resistance to the concept of disability that we historically knew and the ideologies of abilities and disability that still exist. The same research points out that the need for cultural political, race, sex have a critical value in the embodiment of disability (Hamraie, 2016).

#### 1.2.4 HUMAN RIGHTS MODEL

The Human Rights Model of Disability posits that disability is not an attribute of an individual, but rather the result of the interaction between individuals with impairments and an environment filled with physical, attitudinal, and societal barriers (Lawson & Beckett, 2020). This model emphasizes the importance of removing these barriers and promoting equal opportunities, full participation, and inclusion of individuals with disabilities in all aspects of life. It is based on the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and is a shift away from the medical and charity models of disability (CRPD, 2021)

Human rights model of disability, similar to the other models of disability, was not decided spontaneously. It was the result of evolution of human rights approach and its continuum (Degener, 2017). Several countries have played pivotal roles in shaping and advancing the human rights model of disability. For instance, Sweden has been recognized as a pioneer in disability rights and inclusion, with policies focusing on independent living and accessibility. Australia, after ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), has implemented measures to promote accessibility and inclusive education. South Africa actively



participated in the drafting process of the CRPD and its constitutional framework upholds equality and non-discrimination. Germany, within the European context, has enacted comprehensive legislation and policies to safeguard the rights of people with disabilities (Tschanz, 2018). USA played an important part because of their strong activism actions and they stated how social responses to disabilities have an impact to Human Rights (Quinn et al., 2002).

The Human Rights Model of Disability was developed by the disability rights movement and is rooted in the social model of disability, which was first articulated by disability rights activists in the UK in the 1970s (Lawson & Beckett, 2020). The concept was further developed and popularized through the work of disability rights organizations, scholars, and activists around the world. The model was later formalized and adopted in international treaties, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which was adopted in 2006.

Nowadays critiques regarding structured environments and laws are affected by rights and discrimination is increased. Researchers acknowledge the disability movement has assisted in the progress of disabled people. However, the power of structured environment is highlighted having a strong discriminative impact on peoples' lives. Built environment can reduce autonomy and opportunities by segregation in strategies and planning mechanisms (Schomerus et al., 2022). Other researchers refer to built environment as a problem in human rights context because of the inaccessibility that is created (Degener, 2017). As humanity has moved on from the discourse of medical or social model, in this era the human rights model is discussed and proposed by the UNCRPD. There is also the danger of this model of disability will be narrowly explained and used. As the requirements refer to better access in built environments by people with disabilities, there is more to it. Disability advocates state that this socio-political approach is not enough because it might accidentally promote social isolation and discrimination (Berghs et al., 2016). Also, there is a danger that advocates of disabled people's rights are limited to safeguard and physical protection and not to use their power to change environments in a more accessible way. This could mean a fall back to disability as a personal matter.

## 1.3 HUMAN RIGHTS ON DISABILITY

### 1.3.1 THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) is a remarkable international treaty which aimed to protect and to promote the rights of individuals with special needs. It was held by the United Nations General Assembly in 2006, it has since been followed by many countries, making it one of the most widely accepted human rights treaty in history (United Nations, 2008).

The CRPD recognizes that persons with disabilities should enjoy all human rights and basic freedoms on an equal basis with others. It makes clear that they have a right to dignity, independency, and individuality of persons with disabilities and underlines the need to ensure their full and effective participation in society. The Convention also highlights the importance of eliminating discrimination against persons with disabilities and promoting their equal opportunities in all aspects of life.

A basic principle of the CRPD is the one about *non-discrimination*. Article 3 of the Convention states, "Persons with disabilities are not to be discriminated against on the basis of disability" (United Nations, 2008). With this principle states must take appropriate measures for the prevention of discrimination and to ensure equal treatment and equal opportunities for people with disabilities in various areas, including education, employment, justice, and in general, participation in all aspects of life.

Another significant aspect of the CRPD is the recognition of the right to *accessibility*. Article 9 of the Convention describes the importance of accessibility in all aspects of life, including the settings of education or employment, transportation, alternative communication ways or technologies, and other services and supports available to the public. This article emphasizes the need for governments to pay attention the barriers in accessibility of people with disabilities and not to the disability as a trait. That way, states can build inclusive environments which enable persons with disabilities to fully participate in society (Byrne, 2022).

The CRPD also addresses specific rights and issues faced by persons with disabilities. An important article (24) discusses about the right to inclusive education,

ensuring that persons with disabilities have access to quality education on an equal basis with others. Article 27 recognizes the right to work and employment, emphasizing the need for reasonable adaptations to promote rehabilitation and employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

Furthermore, the CRPD (United Nations, 2008) highlights the role of international cooperation in realizing the rights of persons with disabilities. To facilitate the exchange of knowledge, expertise, information, good practices that promote the right to fully participate, the cooperation in regional, national and international level is crucial. Some countries need to enhance their technical support, accessibility in buildings and other changes to be able to implement the Convention's suggestions.

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is very important because it sets out a comprehensive framework to protect and promote the rights individuals with disabilities. It emphasizes the principles of non-discrimination, accessibility, and inclusion, and describes how important is the international cooperation to ensure the effective implementation of these rights. The CRPD is as a powerful tool for the advance of the rights and well-being of persons with disabilities worldwide, promoting a more inclusive and equitable society for all.

The term "universal design" is not explicitly mentioned in CRPD, but the principles and objectives of universal design are reflected in several articles of the CRPD. Universal design is an approach in construct products, services, and environments which are accessible, and many people can use, regardless of their age, ability, or other personal trait (CRPD, Article 2, 2006). In the context of human rights, universal design is an important tool to ensure that everyone is entitled of their rights, and they can participate in social activities on an equal basis. By designing products and services to make the environment more accessible, we can help to eliminate barriers and create a more inclusive society. This can include designing public spaces that are accessible to people with disabilities, creating online resources that can be used by people with different levels of digital literacy, and ensuring that information is presented in a way that is easy to understand for people with diverse backgrounds and abilities. Universal design is important to promote human rights and creating a more equitable world for everyone. In the context of the Convention on the Rights of

Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), Universal Design is defined and critiqued, and certain priorities are established (Lid, 2014). However, in practice, there is a requirement to formulate strategies grounded in theories of human-environment interactions to effectively promote Universal Design (Lid, 2014). This necessitates a more comprehensive approach to ensure the successful implementation of Universal Design principles.

The CRPD set certain obligations to governments that participated in the convention. In article 4 is stated that governments must adopt measures in areas such as education, legislation, economy, administration (Sieberns, 2018). In addition, the same article contains a list in which all the obligations regarding Universal Design are documented “To undertake or promote research and development of universally designed goods, services, equipment and facilities, as defined in article 2 of the present Convention, which should require the minimum possible adaptation and the least cost to meet the specific needs of a person with disabilities, to promote their availability and use, and to promote universal design in the development of standards and guidelines” (CRPD, Article 4, 2006) . The convention’s committee must monitor the shift or implementation of strategies and measures in all states that participated in CRPD. A much known mechanism used for monitoring is the” examination of state reports”. The committee examines all reports sent by states every 4 years. In addition, other organisations like Disabled person’s Organizations sent their report that present facts more strictly (Sieberns, 2018).

States are accountable for national organisation to care for individuals with disabilities by exercising and creating legislation, regulation, research and adjustments, planning and take under consideration criminal matters.

### 1.3.2 EDUCATION AS A HUMAN RIGHT OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Education as a human right for people with disabilities is a fundamental principle that was adopted by many international conventions and declarations. The recognition of education as a right for everyone, regardless of personal characteristics, is crucial to promoting inclusivity, empowering individuals, and fostering a more

equal society. This right is emphasized in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, 2008), which recognizes the importance of inclusive education and calls for the removal of barriers that hinder full participation.

Education plays an outstanding role in the lives of individuals with disabilities. It provides knowledge, skills, and opportunities to reach their full potential, contribute to society, and enjoy a dignified life (Ainscow et al., 2000). The right to education is a fundamental human right that is recognized and protected by various international legal instruments. According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Article 26, "Everyone has the right to education" (United Nations General Assembly, 1948).

The International Disability Alliance and its members played an active role in the development of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). This document aims to provide clarity on the interpretation of Article 24 of the CRPD, which calls for the establishment of an inclusive education system at all levels, emphasizing lifelong learning (IDA, 2015). Both national and global efforts to educate students with learning should contribute towards the achievement of an inclusive system that upholds the following principles. The adoption of a comprehensive and coherent strategy or programs to promote inclusive educational settings. This could be assisted by collaborations between stakeholders coordinated by the Ministry of Education. Responsibility of the education system to cater to the needs of all students at every level of education, ranging from preschool to primary, secondary, and higher education. Quality education should be provided with consistency across the nation. The environment in schools should be welcoming, by providing the necessary accommodation to each individual. A non-rejection clause should be incorporated in regulations and training of educational staff, avoiding the discrimination of students with disabilities. Provision of inclusive preschool programs and early intervention support for children and parents should be a priority. Children should be educated in regular schools by well-trained and prepared with diverse learning styles.

Inclusive education practices ensure that persons with disabilities can learn together with their peers, have additional support and adaptations, be actively

motivated and engaged in the educational process (Ainscow et al., 2000). The ensuring education as a human right for people with disabilities requires the commitment and collaboration of governments, educators, families, and the broader community. Available resources, training, and support must be provided to facilitate the inclusive educational environments. More efforts on raising awareness should happen, implementing inclusive policies, and changing educational systems to accommodate the diverse needs and abilities of students with disabilities.

The right to education for people with disabilities goes along to the recognition of inclusion. This matter has been studied and discussed extensively the last decades and it has been authorized by the CRPD, as it was the first official instrument that underlined the importance of it (CRPD, 2016). Additionally, the Organisation Sustainable Development Goal (Goal 4) supports inclusive and quality education, as a response to CRPD's comments (Scigliano, 2020). There has been a lot of progress on accepting and implementing inclusive education, but there are some challenges that persist. For example, there is a great part of disabled people that are still denied access to education.

Although states are trying to overcome these challenges, they need to develop policies, provide resources and training to educational staff and develop a culture of inclusivity and respect of diversity. It requires collaboration between many stakeholders, including educators, parents, communities, and policy-makers, to make inclusive education a reality. One challenging factor could be that governments struggle to find sufficient resources to meet the needs of all students in an inclusive environment. Second, there are still negative attitudes and biases that lead to discrimination, exclusion, and marginalization of certain groups of students in education. Also, some governments have already enacted policies for promoting inclusive education, but there is often a lack of effective implementation and monitoring of such policies. Many teachers are not trained or have that expertise on disabilities or transforming education and they do not know how to effectively teach students with diverse backgrounds and abilities. Some stakeholders, including parents, educators, and policymakers, may be resistant to change, preferring traditional models of education (Hrabovets et al., 2020; Mamadjanovna et al., 2022).

Change attitudes, policies and cultural beliefs is not an easy task, and it is the only way to ensure the human right to education for all. Also, it requires changes in policies and practical transformations of educational environments so they could implement new theoretical accommodations. It is important to state that these accommodations might differ from person to person, so besides the context, the educational staff must evolve similarly. In that way, this commitment could collectively move towards the inclusive education for all. This article in General Comments targets the empowering of educational system in order to be accessible to all learners. It foresees that if the educational system is accessible and every student participates fully in school and social life eliminating the barriers, then the marginalization and exclusion of students with disabilities will fade away (CRPD, 2016).

The meaning of inclusive education refers to quality education both formal and informal that is accessible with no discrimination. Practises of educational inclusion is expected to spread into other systems or structure, so communities could include all people, embrace diversity, alter stereotypes and eliminate barriers to participation. The focus of inclusion is the well-being of every person with or without disabilities, different backgrounds, ethnicity, sex.

Despite the recognition of education as a human right for people with disabilities, there are significant challenges in the implementation of this right by responsible parties. While progress has been made, there are still barriers and gaps that are not helpful to the full realization of inclusive education. Addressing these challenges requires a organized effort from responsible parties, including governments, educational institutions, and civil society organizations. It assists the development and implementation of inclusive policies, allocation of adequate resources, capacity-building programs for educators, and the promotion of positive attitudes and awareness about disability.

## 1.4 INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

### 1.4.1 DEFINITION

Inclusive education is a way of teaching and learning that aims to the access of all students regardless their abilities or differences, and participation in the learning process (Bui et al., 2010). In an inclusive education system, all students are provided with the necessary supports and accommodations to help them succeed in their academic and social lives.

Inclusive education goes beyond of just providing access to education for students with special educational needs. It also recognizes and values diversity and equity, by addressing the needs of students with different socio-economic backgrounds, cultures, and languages. It tries to create a welcoming and supportive environment that fosters learning and social interaction among all students. It also involves the creation of a curriculum that is suitable to the needs and interests of all students, and that provides opportunities for them to develop a range of skills, including social, emotional, and academic skills. This approach to education not only supports students with disabilities but also benefits all students by promoting a sense of community, fostering mutual respect and understanding, and preparing them for life in a diverse society (Bui et al., 2010).

Inclusive education includes various strategies, processes and activities targeting to make the right to suitable, quality and relevant education a reality for all (Stubbs & Lewis, 2008). It recognizes the importance of the continuum of learning, which begins when a person is born and throughout his life, including learning not only at formal situations, such as school but also learning in non-formal context such as in the community and family. It constitutes a dynamic process that affected by context and culture evolves constantly. Also, inclusive education has an influence on communities and systems to provide solutions against discrimination, it promotes the right of all people to participate and celebrated diversity. It acknowledges and respects personal differences such as language, gender, socio-economic status, disability, religion. As a component of a bigger strategy, a more inclusive development is promoted and hopes to create a reality that peace, recourses and social justice prevail, and peoples' rights and needs are met. All in all, it is an effort to change the way the educational system works to fit all the students, not the other way around. This process underlines the exclusion as a problem of the system and not a personal disadvantage of the person.



The concept of Universal Design, attributed to an educational strategy and a practical societal change and it presents significant challenges. Its broad scope encompasses all individuals to varying degrees, making it difficult to define its wide-ranging applications while maintaining specific terminology. It is important to acknowledge that practicing social justice on this argument is linked to the implementation of inclusion. This means that in any practical implementation of inclusive education, we should consider if at the same time social justice is promoted.

#### 1.4.2 HUMAN RIGHTS AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

The reality in adapted education for individuals with disabilities is the experience of a continuous segregation or an exclusion from the educational process (Mezzanotte, 2022). This fact contradicts the fact that governments have an obligation to protect this group of people and offer the most suitable, accessible education that includes every learner. It is known that exclusion and segregation of children with disabilities from quality education violates the international law, but also people with disabilities' human rights (*Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*, 2004). The provision of communities about inclusive education, means to discover ways to make it accessible, as it is stated in the international law. This part of education is also a holistic approach or attitude to meet with all learners' needs and to provide them with opportunities in education. Therefore, inclusive education does not constitute only an educational system, it is a prevention policy against exclusion promoting the participation first in the school setting and then in the community (*The Rehabilitation Act of 1973*, 1973).

The most valid treaty at international level is the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Also, it is the first formal reference of the United Nations Convention on people disabilities (CRC, 1989). The goal of this convention is the promotion of the rights of all children and their enjoyment. These rights are legally established and monitored by governments or independent authorities. Also, it promoted the acts towards awareness- raising, the development of changes in trainings, policies and services regarding this issue.

The CRC includes some articles that address the rights of children with disabilities. The second article requires States Parties to find solutions so that all children are treated without discrimination of any kind, including discrimination due to disabilities. This means that children with disabilities have the same rights as other children and must not be excluded from any rights or services because of their disability. Additionally, article 23 addresses the rights of children with disabilities specifically. It requires States Parties to recognize the right of children with disabilities to enjoy a full life in conditions that promote their dignity, self-reliance, and active participation in the community. States Parties are also required to provide children with disabilities with the means they need to ensure their full participation in society, including access to education, health care, rehabilitation services, and opportunities for social integration. Also, recognizes the right of all children to be protected from all forms of discrimination, exploitation, and abuse, including those with disabilities. States Parties are required to take measures to ensure that children with disabilities are protected from all forms of violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation, and to provide them with appropriate support and assistance when necessary.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations & Treaty Series, 2008) (CRPD) was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 13, 2006, and it entered into force on May 3, 2008. The CRPD is a legally binding international treaty that sets out the human rights of persons with disabilities and seeks to promote their full and equal participation in all aspects of society. The CRPD includes several articles that address the right to education for persons with disabilities. First, it recognizes the right of people with disabilities to education without discrimination and their right to equal opportunities, such as suitable accommodations, assistive technologies, learning materials and anything else that could assist in a full participation in education. States Parties are required to ensure that individuals with disabilities have access to inclusive, quality, and lifelong education, including early childhood education, primary and secondary education, and vocational and tertiary education. In this article is stated the right of persons with disabilities to receive the necessary support to facilitate their effective education. This includes support in the form of individualized support plans, peer support, and specialized training for teachers and education professionals. In another article CRPD

refers to the right of persons with disabilities to accessibility in all areas of life, including in education. Inclusion here means the provision for suitable educational facilities, materials, and technologies are accessible to persons with disabilities.

The CRPD (CRPD, 2008) was developed through a participatory process involving people with disabilities and relevant organizations from around the world. This process was led by a working group of the United Nations, and the final text of the convention was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. This convention represented a significant milestone in the recognition of the human rights of persons with disabilities, and it has had a significant impact on the development of laws, policies, and practices that promote the inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities in society.

Inclusive education is considered a human right under international human rights law (Davis et al., 2019). The right to education by every child, including children with disabilities is protected by several international human rights treaties, like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Inclusive education is not only a matter of human rights, but it is also considered to be a key element of sustainable development. Inclusive education promotes social cohesion, reduces poverty, and helps to build more inclusive and equitable societies. The insurance that all children could have access to quality education, without barriers, due to background or abilities, can contribute to the achievement of a wide range of social and economic goals.

In literature, it has been discussed that the right to education can function as an empowerment right. This means that apart from human right can also be seen as an instrument for the vesting of other human rights. Therefore, education is seen as an anchor for the agenda of other human rights (Motakef, 2006)

In a report on quality education (Tomasevski, 2001), illustrated a four stages development related to the right education in the spectrum from exclusion to inclusion and this information has inspire UNESCO and the report on how to ensure the access to education (Guidelines for inclusion: ensuring access to education for all, 2005).

The implementation of inclusive education for individuals with disabilities has confronted numerous barriers. Despite the existence of opportunities and supportive legislations, the realization of inclusive education cannot be guaranteed because of various challenges coming from a lack of awareness, commitment, and collaboration. One significant barrier is the prevailing lack of awareness among stakeholders, including educators, parents, and the community, about the benefits and principles of inclusive education. This lack of understanding can lead to resistance and reluctance to embrace inclusive practices. Also, the lack of commitment from schools and communities to invest in the necessary resources, training, and other adaptations harm the successful implementation of inclusive education. Insufficient collaboration and coordination sustain the barriers, as inclusive education requires a collective effort from teachers, administrators, support staff, policymakers, and the community. Overcoming these challenges requires comprehensive efforts to raise awareness, make commitments and promote collaboration to create an inclusive educational environment that meets the diverse needs of individuals with disabilities (Mitiku et al., 2014).

These exceptions include instances where disabilities are quite complex or the objection of students themselves, because they prefer a safer, homogenous educational setting. Additionally, “typical” students have the right to quality education that answers their needs and that provides the tools for job opportunities. Some might claim that typical students acquire the right education slower due to interferences by students with special educational needs.

The matter of this collision of rights between “typical” and students with disabilities and their right to quality education is discussed in literature. Some of the most important pros and cons are presented below to gather more information on whether a successful mediation between the two opinions can occur. Fundamental arguments on inclusive education will be described, concerning specifically factors that might lead to discrimination, marginalization, stigmatization (Gordon, 2013).

While inclusive education offers various benefits, it also poses challenges that need to be addressed to ensure its effective implementation and positive outcomes for all students. Inclusive education offers several benefits (Gordon, 2013). Firstly, it can lead to improved academic outcomes and higher achievement as students with

disabilities learn alongside their peers in the same environment (Wanzer et al., 2019). Secondly, inclusive education provides more opportunities for socialization and interaction with peers, helping students with disabilities develop important social skills and build friendships. Additionally, inclusive education promotes the acceptance of individual differences, reducing the stigma associated with disability and fostering a culture of diversity. Students with disabilities who are included in general education classrooms often experience an increased sense of self-esteem and belonging, positively impacting their overall well-being (Hanisch, 2007) . Inclusive education also ensures greater access to resources such as assistive technology and specialized instructional support, which can contribute to students' success in school. It empowers students with disabilities to fully participate in the community, promotes equality for all students, and respects human dignity (Macklin, 2003). Recognition and understanding of disability are deepened through inclusive education, fostering diversity and respecting the autonomy of students with impairments to choose inclusive education.

However, there are some challenges associated with inclusive education. Firstly, teachers who lack specialized training or experience working with students with disabilities may struggle to provide necessary support and accommodations (Hanisch, 2007). Furthermore, social integration of students with disabilities is not always guaranteed, and they may still face challenges related to social isolation and exclusion. Inclusive classrooms may also present increased behavioral challenges, which can disrupt the learning environment and require additional support and resources. Modifying the curriculum to ensure accessibility for all students can be difficult without proper resources and training. Limited availability of resources, such as specialized materials and equipment, poses another challenge in implementing inclusive education. Special schools may be better equipped to provide care for people with disabilities through trained staff, but this may not always be feasible due to high costs associated with adjustments in educational settings (Moriña, 2017) . Inclusive education might hinder the academic outcomes of typical students due to repetitions, increased attention, and additional time required for students with special educational needs. The realization of inclusive education can be challenging in practice, and there may be limitations in fully encompassing its spectrum. Complex impairments can present difficulties in achieving the goal of inclusion, as the regular

educational setting may become overburdened with the inclusion of students with various disabilities. Furthermore, there is limited evidence to suggest that students with disabilities have better learning outcomes in a heterogeneous educational setting. Unfortunately, students with learning difficulties and disabilities in typical schools may gradually become social outsiders, negatively impacting their self-esteem and self-conception. This may be due to the fact that genuine friendship and inclusion cannot be forced (Moriña, 2017).

### 1.4.3 INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: CURRENT STATUS

The status of inclusive education today varies by country and region (Mezzanotte, 2022), as well as by the relevant policies and practices of individual schools and education systems. However, there are several global trends and initiatives that highlight the increasing focus on inclusive education.

First, there are several international agreements and frameworks that promote inclusive education, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Sustainable Development Goals, 2019). Additionally, there are national policies in place to address this issue. Many countries have developed policies and legislation aimed to promoting inclusive education (European Agency for Special Needs & Education, 2016), such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in the United States and the Inclusive Education Policy Framework in South Africa (Lipkin et al., 2015). Furthermore, there is a growing recognition of the importance of provide the access to education for all children, including those with disabilities. This has led to efforts to increase enrollment and participation of students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. The professional development has also played an important role. There is a growing emphasis on providing professional development and training for teachers and other education professionals to support inclusive education practices (Crews & Butterfield, 2003).

The familiarity of people with disability and the need to inclusion has also been promoted by groups like International Disability Alliance, or other global

movements by people with disabilities or their advocates together with groups that were excluded for reasons such as ethnicity, sex, socio-economic background, etc (World Autism Organization, Black Lives Matter, LGBTQ + Rights Movement). By drawing public's attention to the matter, their fights on the right to equality and inclusion became important. The shift to change is happening not only in the classroom but also in the community (Lang et al., 2022).

There also challenges that are rising. Despite these positive observations, there are still significant challenges to implementing inclusive education, including inadequate resources and support, lack of teacher training and experience, and persistent attitudes and beliefs that perpetuate discrimination and exclusion. There is a great number of countries with millions of students with disabilities that even today they have not ensured the access or their right to quality inclusive education. There are laws and certain policies that have not change the focus from exclusion and segregation to inclusion. Students in some countries are denied the right to education because there is no infrastructure, transportation, no accessible classrooms or even material for adapted learning. Additionally, there is a part of the population of students with disabilities who find the way to attend and manage to go to inferior education, without assistance, accommodation or any support for them or their family, getting an education from untrained educational staff that sometimes were unwilling to make the classroom more suitable for the student's special educational needs. Communities should consider focusing on inclusion education because without it individuals with disabilities will not be able to participate in society fully and they will be considered the margins of society. In CRPD discussion and fourth commitment these challenges that the world faces regarding inclusion and disability are stated and analyzed (Kanter, 2019).

In higher education the change to inclusion is happening in slow pace. Although, there are policies to underline the needs and some awareness on the topic, it is a personal matter and it is expected that teachers must be actively make the change and include students with special needs not because it is mandatory or required be research funding associations (Lang et al., 2022). There is some change reported in literature for students with disabilities, but there is a lot of space for more accommodations, improvements, more given opportunities that need to be done.

An example, in higher education is the subject IT. There are many neuroatypical students that choose this subject apart from typical who do not need any accommodation. Research proved that teachers were not prepared to make changes due to lack of information or autism awareness and the students' special needs. Autistic students can be very comfortable with subjects like technology and they cope well academically, but they struggle with social interaction. They might face difficulties in group work, discussions or presentations, or even comprehend the perspective of others. Also, they might find it difficult to plan their work schedule, or to regulate their anxiety over deadlines. Another matter that might occur is their sensory issues in a sensorially challenging environment of the classroom or even the campus of the faculty (Anderson, 2020). Educators should be prepared to recognize their students' difficulties and manage to facilitate them with any way possible and at the same time to leverage their strong abilities and work with them on that.

Nowadays, the diverse environment that society tries to build in education and the practice that experience people with disabilities have very complex connections. There are many factors that can influence these experiences and there are various answers in each of them. There is the factor of educators, the classmates and their social interaction, the school environment and the classroom and the additional support from the family and society. By research these people perspective and experiences, a way to explain why there are still barriers to inclusion can be found (Shrestha & Bhattarai, 2022).



## CHAPTER 2: THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

### 2.1 BRIEF REVIEW OF HISTORY ON COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic is caused by a novel coronavirus called SARS-CoV-2, which was first identified in December 2019 in Wuhan, China. The virus quickly spread around the world, leading the World Health Organization to declare a pandemic on March 11, 2020 (Zhu & Liu, 2020).

The early response to the pandemic is not the same from country to country. Some countries, such as South Korea, quickly implemented aggressive measures such as widespread testing, contact tracing, and quarantine to slow the spread of the virus. Other countries, such as the United States, initially did not see the severity of the outbreak and were slow to take public health measures. By the end of 2020, the pandemic had claimed over 1.8 million lives worldwide and had a profound impact on economies, societies, and daily life. Vaccines against COVID-19 began to be developed and given to governments in late 2020, but as of early 2023, the pandemic continues to affect many parts of the world, with new ways and public health measures remaining important in controlling its spread.

In regard of public health measures, governments around the world have implemented various public health measures to slow the spread of the virus, such as lockdowns, mask mandates, social distancing guidelines, and restrictions on large gatherings. These measures have disrupted daily life and have had significant economic and social impacts. The pandemic has had a significant impact on mental health, with increased rates of anxiety, depression, and stress. Isolation and uncertainty have been particularly challenging for many people, including people with disabilities. There were also travel restrictions that have been implemented around the world to slow the spread of the virus. This has set barriers to travel industry and has had significant economic impacts. Also, the healthcare systems have been overwhelmed in many parts of the world due to the severity of situation of COVID-19 patients (Javurek & Mendenhall, 2020).

This has led to delays in non-COVID-19 treatments, shortages of medical supplies, and challenges for healthcare workers. Many companies and schools have shifted to remote work and online learning to be safe and to minimize the risk of transmission. This has led to changes in work and study habits, as well as challenges for people with disabilities and others who don't have access to reliable internet or technology (Kolak et al., 2021). Overall, the pandemic has had far-reaching impacts on many aspects of our lives, and it will likely continue to shape our world for years to come.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also had a significant impact on our social lives. Lockdowns, social distancing guidelines, and restrictions on gatherings have led to increased feelings of isolation and loneliness, particularly for people who live alone or who are at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19, or who has special needs. The pandemic has led to changes in social habits, such as avoiding physical contact, wearing masks, and meeting outdoors instead of indoors. This has disrupted social norms and made it more difficult to connect with others.

The pandemic has had a significant economic impact, with job losses and financial insecurity leading to increased stress and anxiety for many people. This has also affected social dynamics, as people may have less disposable income for social activities. The pandemic has led to an increase in stigma and discrimination, particularly towards people of Asian descent who have been unfairly blamed for the virus. Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, it has also brought people together in new ways. Communities have rallied together to support each other, whether it's through mutual aid groups, volunteering, or other forms of solidarity (He et al., 2020).

The pandemic has disrupted our social lives in numerous ways, both negative and positive. It has highlighted the importance of social connection and the need for creative solutions to stay connected in challenging times.

## 2.2 EDUCATION IN COVID-19

National agencies' policies and decisions related COVID –19 impacted education, teachers, students and families, because of the changes to educational system in general and local school functions. When this pandemic kept all of us in lockdown, schools were closed, and the process of learning had to be reorganized in the distance learning format (Javurek & Mendenhall, 2020). Distance learning refers to learning activities in the concept of institutional education where the subjects of this act - students and educators- as long as learning tools and materials gathering with the support of information communication technologies (Akcil & Baştaş, 2020). The term of distance learning is a meaning synonymous with the COVID-19 and education. National authorities had to explain to students and parents that the school year 2019- 2020 was not over and introduce the term distance learning that all stakeholders should transition (Holland, 2020). As it is known it began as something like substitute learning and then it became the main learning activity for months. Of course, as its name indicates it requires physical distance between teachers and students (Dhawan, 2020). It constitutes a delivery system that gives to students the opportunity to take part in programs and courses, using technological needs and internet (Kamble et al., 2021). Distance learning is defined as an instructional delivery system that offers learners the opportunity to participate in courses and programs from remote locations with the support of digital technology such as an internet connection (Kamble et al., 2021).

In order to make distance learning efficient schools and families used "instructions information communication technologies", like video- conferencing tools that is based on internet connection (e.g. Zoom, Webex) (Serhan, 2020). The opportunity given for the participation in classes and various programs from home using internet connection and technologies like video-calls was challenging for some learners (Kamble et al., 2021). Most of the schools implemented distance learning using tools like Zoom and students and their parents were left to pick up a lot of new information, adapting in a new reality. Issues they faced include the unavailability of technological equipment or facilities in students' home, the familiarity of teachers regarding technological means and the preparation of school for this type of learning.

These matters were important to be answered for a smoother transition from regular to distance learning during the Covid-19 (Lepp & Luik, 2021). The experiences of students were noted both positive and negative during the pandemic.

For example, in research is proved that students' lives were affected both ways. The disadvantages they reported were the lack of social interaction with classmates and teachers, communication difficulties with educators, time schedule and management, habits and routines of school so far and difficulties to solve their questions and reflection on any educational matter (Tümen, 2020). Some advantages from students' perspective were the flexibility that distance learning provide regarding time and place, the fact that they were more responsible for their own learning and the comfort of their personal space. Results from other research state that the online learning experience during the pandemic was a situation that students were not prepared (Akcil & Baştaş, 2020). The support given to students with special educational needs, the practices that were used and the process of learning influenced drastically by the pandemic.

This situation created new learning experiences both for students and for teachers. It is known that teachers faced numerous challenges during this unanticipated situation. These difficulties involve their journey on learning to use technological means, the lack of support and preparation to teach remotely and the increase of work-stress during this transition to remote learning (Whalen, 2020). In research there is evidence that state the negative impact of Covid-19 in students' lives. An example is the that students were unprepared for a distance learning experience, and they were not learning very effectively or were not very engaged to the learning process (Akcil & Baştaş, 2020).

One of the main concerns of parents was their child's social development. Also, they played an important role in their child's everyday education, and they had to balance their work- from home situation with children not leaving home. Of course, they were also unprepared and unsupported because of this emergency. Teacher, parents and students and their experiences indicate the need for more support regarding their well-being (Kolak et al., 2021).

Because of Covid-19 many most of the students were educated through distance learning and their parents faced difficulties both because their children stayed only at home but also because they were unprepared to participate in their learning process. The flow of life changed because of the pandemic because of the curfews, the working and way of working, etc (Zhao, 2020). The responsibility to work efficiently

and make sure their child is learning through distance education. Family routines and schedules were abruptly disrupted all around the world and one of them is the routine of children attending school every day.

Education in Greece was abruptly interrupted, at all levels, for 2 weeks in March 2020 as part of the Ministry of Education's measures to limit the spread of covid-19 (Taxheaven, 2020). The exception was the education of high school students, which was interrupted for less than a week and then transferred to online education in order not to waste further valuable time, especially for the students of the 3rd high school who were preparing for the pan-Hellenic exams. Subsequently, the remaining education levels gradually joined distance teaching (Ministry of Education and Religion, 2020). In Greece, there is no stable legislative framework for distance education. The measures against Covid-19 in all sectors, including education are constantly changing depending on the number of cases and the corresponding decisions of the infectious disease specialists, which were set by the government of the country in order to coordinate the critical situation during the pandemic.

The basic stakeholders of education indisputably faced difficulties that are understood mainly through their experiences. The school years that Covid-19 played an important role in the transition from typical to distance learning were challenging for many reasons. The relationship between teacher and students, the way that local authorities and schools dealt the matter and the support that was offered in students with special educational needs. Of course, the more prepared and technologically equipped a family was the more easily transitioned into distance learning.

## CHAPTER 3: EDUCATION AND PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

### 3.1 ADAPTATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a large impact on everyone worldwide, with certain groups facing increased health-related risks and unique challenges (Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2022). One of the challenges was the access to education. Among those truly affected are individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). While protecting their health and their well-being remains a basic priority, it is also crucial to recognize their fundamental right to education. The pandemic has forced a series of adaptations to ensure that individuals with IDD receive the educational support they need, despite the challenging circumstances. This chapter explores the intersection of the COVID-19 pandemic, how the educational system and the states responded on those exclusive needs and of this group of people and the imperative to address their educational needs through necessary adaptations and accommodations. By examining the ongoing efforts to balance safety and inclusivity, we can gain insights into the importance of providing equitable educational opportunities for this vulnerable population during times of crisis.

During this crisis, the world had to face new phenomena, both in social and psychological area. Especially in education both advantages and disadvantages were reported (UN Human Rights Office, 2020). Most states around the world used distance learning during this time and the research started to investigate this topic trying to find answers on issues like the way that education, affects well-being in self-isolation (Global Initiative, 2020), or if there is a difference in how the students behave being the first-generation experience that, or how the students react when they are responsible for their studying on remote (Denisova et al., 2020).

Students with special needs traditionally had problems and barriers accessing suitable education, because they need additional support and adapted tools or technologies to meet their specific needs (United Nations, 2008). The pandemic period gave the opportunity to disabled students to be educated with digital

technologies that were designed for this purpose. However, students with disabilities faced a lot of difficulties when educated on remote and the research, the last three years is trying to assess the way disabled students experienced distance learning, searching for adaptation that were successful and new barriers on that matter (Unesco, 2020).

The volume of literature regarding the specifics of the distance learning for students with special educational needs has an informational tone in association with both the designing and assessment of the patients, mainly through digital tools that were made so the group of students with disabilities can participate in education (UNESCO, 2020). The result of this research is linked to the priority said by many countries that practised distance, learning on students with special educational needs such as Japan, Europe and USA. The analysis of the problem that occurred during the pandemic has additional value and it is a basic component of the evolution of society, but also the development of an economy that is based on the digitalisation (Blinova et al., 2022; EADTU, 2022).

In today's digital age, creating an accessible environment digitally and fostering digital tolerance are important to ensure equal access for people with disabilities. The pandemic created the conditions to embrace in fast pace inclusive practices and technologies, moving quickly towards solutions, breaking down barriers such as self-isolation and provide individuals with disabilities the opportunity to fully participate in the digital realm.

An accessible digital environment refers to the design and implementation of digital platforms, websites, and applications that can be navigated and used by people with various disabilities (Blinova et al., 2022). This encompasses technologies such as screen readers for individuals with visual impairments, captioning for those with hearing impairments, and keyboard accessibility for individuals with motor disabilities. Additionally, adjusting the digital environment for students with sensory issues. By incorporating these accessibility features, individuals with disabilities and their caregivers were motivated to access information, communicate, and engage with digital content independently or with assistance.

Adaptable education during the pandemic has brought about significant advantages for students with disabilities, addressing some of their barriers that often

face in traditional educational settings. One major advantage is the better access to specialized support and resources (Greer & Deshler, 2014). With remote learning, students with special educational needs could receive more easily accommodations adapted to their individual needs, such as screen readers, captioning, or assistive technologies. This level of adaptation promotes inclusion and ensures that students with disabilities can fully participate in educational activities. Additionally, adaptable education served well the unexpected situation during the pandemic, but it can be used as a choice of a more flexible learning environment where students can work at their own pace, reducing the levels of anxiety and stress that may arise in a regular classroom setting. It has also allowed for increased communication and collaboration between students, educators, and support staff through digital platforms and tools. Interactions through virtual settings can provide a comfortable space for students with disabilities to express their thoughts, ask questions, and engage with their peers and instructors. Furthermore, adaptable education has given students with disabilities the opportunity to develop self-advocacy and self-management skills as they navigate their learning journey independently. By embracing adaptable education, we empower students with disabilities to overcome barriers, maximize their potential, and actively participate in the educational process, fostering a more inclusive and empowering learning experience.

Adapted education had benefits on social interactions for students with disabilities that work differently than in the traditional educational setting (Miller, 2017). Increased independence and enhanced social-emotional competency are among those advantages. Students are in control on what they share with the group of students or the educational staff. Through adaptation they might feel more self-regulated, engaged and motivated. There are studies that indicate that the relationship with their educators feels more direct and personal (Kapetanaki et al., 2022).

However, the access to a digital environment is not enough. Digital tolerance is equally crucial in fostering an inclusive and accepting community to diversity. Through adaptations in digital environments there is an opportunity to cultivate educational settings where students with disabilities are respected, valued, and provided with equal opportunities to participate in online or regular spaces. It involves promoting awareness, understanding, and empathy towards the diverse needs and abilities of individuals with disabilities.



By promoting an accessible educational environments and building tolerance in any setting, we can assure the right to inclusive education for children with special educational needs, giving the opportunity of an education that is tailored in their needs and is more effective. These changes could enhance the quality of life of students with disabilities and their families' wellbeing. Social inclusion, independency, equal participation, are promoted. The major movements towards adaptations during the pandemic give hope that research evidence will be used by developers, content creators, policy makers and states in general to collaborate and prioritize accessibility and tolerance to ensure that no one is left behind in the digital landscape.

### 3.2 CHALLENGES ON THE RIGHT TO INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly disrupted education systems worldwide, and children with disabilities have faced challenges in accessing remote education. The transition to remote learning has presented a range of barriers that hinder their right to inclusive education (UN Human Rights Office, 2020). These barriers include limited access to specialized support, technological limitations, communication difficulties, and reduced social interaction (Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2020). As a result, children with disabilities have coped with significant obstacles in their educational journey, impeding their ability to fully participate, engage, and thrive in inclusive learning environments. This chapter explores the barriers that children with disabilities have encountered during remote education during the pandemic, bringing light to the impact on their right to inclusive education. By understanding these challenges, we can work towards implementing effective strategies and interventions to ensure that every child, regardless of their disability, can access quality education and have positive experiences on a truly inclusive learning environment (Porter et al., 2021).

The biggest minority worldwide is the group of individuals with disabilities, but to this day, there is little educational outcomes adjusted for this minority. Barriers that students with disabilities face are, for example, the possibility to never participate primary or secondary education till the end or to have more possibilities to encounter with economic issues and reduced quality of life than other individuals (Azoulay,

2017). The right of individuals with disabilities to education was not only written, but adopted by many nations' laws and it is represented by multiple educators and activists around the world (UNESCO, 1994). The right to inclusive education is also assured in order to achieve social justice rights.

Efforts to eliminate segmentation and exclusion have been made, and many people with disabilities can participate in educational setting with the assistance they require, but situations like the pandemic have brought a surge of access to learning environments and inclusive education for students with disabilities (International Disability Alliance, 2022). The percentage of students with disabilities in the classroom is quite large, so there is a need to ensure the right to always adapted education for them. That includes laws that secure the existence of the adapted settings or appropriate supports assistive services.

When school settings changed to remote learning, due to the pandemic, a reduced access was experienced by individuals with special needs to inclusive education. Problems like limited Internet access has been an issue to many students with or without special educational needs because of economic issues or cultural backgrounds or location (Ajaz, 2021). The reality was that families with a student with disability were in high risk of having more than one situation to handle during that time. In many cases for many months, there were interruptions in educational services for students with special needs, with no access at all in learning, leading to social and educational isolation. Later there was guidance though statements in order to clarify options for students with disabilities to access education with little success. Through that time, important learning time was lost with negative outcomes in social, educational areas for people with disabilities and their families (NCES, 2020).

Individuals with disabilities and their families, fought for their right to quality education, access to assistance and accommodations during pandemic. False decisions and incapability by governments' during an international crisis had led to the denial of education rights of students with special needs for inclusive education for a long period of time. Once more, the ongoing struggles of people with disabilities and their families made a difference to services that assist students with special needs to practice the right and have access to digital or no digital educational settings. It is evident that families and advocates of students with special need to pressure

governments to bring on their obligations under any circumstances or to succeed in social justice for their children (Easop, 2022).

In social emotional area, students both with and without disabilities were significantly affected. There is evidence that there were mental health and emotional impacts in a negative way in a large percentage of primary school students. High levels of stress and low levels of self-regulated situations were reported. Depression and anger in adolescents were also reported, and in extreme circumstances, suicide attempts.

The socio-cultural dynamics found within physical classrooms and school environments, which catered to the unique needs of children receiving special education services, such as tailored instructional materials, specialized supports, and targeted therapies, did not seamlessly translate to the home setting or virtual learning environments (Nelson & Murakami, 2020). Consequently, parents or other caregivers of students with disabilities had to make the adaptations inside their home to recreate an effective learning environment for their children, often feeling isolated and lacking adequate support. As a result, families with school-aged children with disabilities reported heightened levels of stress, anxiety, and increased concerns regarding their child's education compared to families with non-disabled school-aged children. This shift of responsibilities placed additional burden on families, highlighting the challenges encountered by children with disabilities in accessing appropriate education and the differences between their educational experiences and those of their non-disabled classmates (Goldberg et al., 2021).

Literature evidence had shown that educators during the pandemic, regardless their experience, had limited knowledge and IT skills to provide an effective inclusive teaching online (Donitsa-Schmidt & Ramot, 2020). The harmful impacts of the loss of learning time can be a result of unprepared educators to date in virtual environments. Evidence concluded that losing valuable learning time can affect more disadvantaged students such as students with disabilities (Kuhfeld et al., 2020). One researcher developed a model testing the learning loss named "Covid Slide" (Kuhfeld et al., 2022) and the results could predict the low level of development on reading and math. The results of this model in group of students in primary school showed that they achieved 60% of their expected level of development in reading and a 35% in

mathematics. His results also showed that students who face difficulties accessing online learning, especially when the parental support is limited, was more likely to present great learning loss. Although the results did not report specific data on students with disabilities, other research evidence supports that this category of students is on high-risk. Conclusively, disability is a predictor that students are in high-risk of experiencing learning loss in situations such as a pandemic (Catalano et al., 2021).

### 3.3 REVIEW OF THE CURRENT STUDIES

With the outbreak of the most recent pandemic with spread around the world, most of the countries were affected. After the first identification of the virus in Wuhan China, many countries worldwide took measures of responsive care. Strategies like physical distancing, avoiding assemblies, washing hands, were mandatory in lockdown was needed to control the disease transmission (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). There were some periods of time that schools, reopened, but the online teaching was the safest choice. Learning was affected during these academic years, and this has implications today in regular teaching, because of valuable learning time that was lost (UN, 2020d). The experience from face-to-face to digital learning is quite different for both educators and students, and transition time from one system, or another, demands a time to adjust and find the most effective alternatives for the students (Dhawan, 2020).

During the pandemic, the educational system implemented during the crisis was commonly referred to as "education in emergency." It is widely recognized that educators were ill-prepared for this sudden shift. Students who require additional support, tools, and a structured routine found it particularly challenging to adapt to this new mode of learning (Subedi et al., 2020). It is important to state that online learning as a singular way of teaching and learning cannot adequately accommodate the needs of all students. Specific approaches of digital learning can only be used on certain groups of students. After the crisis many organizations made a framework of suggestions, so that education can be fully inclusive in the period of recovery after Covid-19 (United Nations, 2022).

Evidence showed that students that are effective in their own learning with limited guidance did not affect negatively at the same level as group of students with learning difficulties. The group of students with disabilities suffered more due to lower guidance from educators and reduce face-to-face interactions of learning. Evidence also showed that groups of people that were traditionally marginalized through these difficulties to access education has a greater risk of dropout, and many negative outcomes to their wellbeing and their inclusion to society (Reuge et al., 2021).

More specifically, in Cyprus, distance education due to the quarantine was accompanied by several negative emotions, mainly anxiety and stress, while the transition from the conventional way of learning became more difficult due to the general unpreparedness at all levels of the educational system, insufficient provision of supporting material, technical problems and lack of instructions (Nikodemou, 2021). Also, Nikodemou discusses the effects of the implementation of distance education on teachers and students. These include, the widening of inequalities, since children did not all have the same access to the online platform, while insufficient care was taken for children with special needs. At the same time, negative effects were also observed in the field of mental health, with the appearance of anxiety and sadness in both teachers and children, who had lost their motivation to learn (Nikodemou, 2021).

Karagiannis (2023), in his dissertation pointed out barriers due to lack of infrastructure and equipment, as well as difficulties in communicating with students and assessing student progress during the distance learning period in Greece. Also, the need for training teachers in distance education matters was highlighted. Karagiannis discussed as well the need to create a specific plan capable of achieving a smooth transition from live teaching to distance teaching, which will pay attention to the special needs of special education students, the upgrading of the system and the training of teachers in distance learning (Karagiannis, 2023).

Report on how to protect the educational needs of students with disabilities as their human right, was issued by the World Health Organization (World Health Organization, 2021). Apart from critical advice for teaching staff and students' safety, this report highlights the importance of teaching and learning in the school setting to

be safeguarded. In addition, in the chapter on students who belong to a vulnerable social group, it refers to students with special needs because they are at greater risk of getting sick. The changes in social and school life seem to affect them to a greater extent and with distance education they are at risk of being excluded or adding pressure on their caregivers.

The pandemic crisis has uncovered the level of exclusion, made existing inequities worse, and underscored the urgent need for disability inclusion efforts (UN, 2020c). In our society, one billion people with disabilities are marginalized, and death records indicate that they are particularly vulnerable. A policy brief was conducted in 2020, where significant recommendations and relevant actions are outlined, so disabled people could be included (UN, 2020b). Firstly, this statement makes clear the how this marginalized group is affected by the pandemic. People with disabilities are in high risk of contracting the virus, because of their need of physical support, or being unable to obtain or understand public health information. As a result of this crisis, they are long-term affected. Their daily routines could be adversely affected by the socio-economic effects, such as being excluded from their work environment. This brief, also, mentions the impact on their education, because of the low rates of effective distance learning for students with disabilities (UN, 2020a). Recognizing and combating disadvantages suffered by people with disabilities requires proactive efforts, such as providing reasonable accommodations, to ensure they are protected and included from global measures around recovery from COVID-19. The recommendations cover many areas to guard the rights of people with disabilities in the "post-Covid era", but here the proposed actions regarding education will be mentioned. Students with disabilities need adjustments in distance learning with specialized programs (UNICEF, 2020), technical support, internet connection. Also, it is important to prepare programs to reintegrate students into lifelong learning, which may require fine-tuning for students who struggle with this transition (UN, 2020b).

There are three dimensions on why disabled people are in a more demanding situation than other groups (Alexander, 2021). The first reason is that disabled people are not a priority when it comes for medical care in extreme circumstances. Secondly, basic technical or other support that was vital for their routines were removed and physical support was eliminated due to physical distancing, during the pandemic. That severely affected their quality of life and led to isolation. The last reason is that

responsible parties tried to implement measures that “fit” everybody so they did not make adjustments to individual needs. This plan did not meet the wide range of needs of people with disabilities. Individual programs and support work better with persons with disabilities, but in order to design such programs, health services, education, social services, and other organizations should cooperate to provide solutions, so people with disabilities won't be discriminated against or isolated.

After the first report on how to protect the inclusion of individuals with disabilities during COVID-19, this report by the UN highlights how critical it is to ensure strong coordination (United Nations, 2020). By implementing previous recommendations, governments and other responsible parties can assess and discuss the challenges, opportunities, and changes that need to be made. A strong coordination relies on leadership to ensure effective communication, shared knowledge between entities, and access to training and resources. Of course, the report refers to the access to adequate technical support and collaboration between governments. This is so the rights of people with disabilities can be promoted by tools and organised programs that were developed aiming the inclusion of persons with disabilities. In conclusion, the statement reports that majority of governments demonstrated some progress regarding the inclusion of people with disabilities.

Social rights were severely impacted by the pandemic in the government's response to this crisis (European Committee on Social Rights, 2021). The European committee suggests measures governments should take to protect social and economic rights in the post-pandemic era and precautionary measures for future crises. In this statement, the need to design and implement special measures for groups and persons most vulnerable is prioritised. Especially in education, as a human right that accepts and realises other basic rights, such as social rights. Although inequalities in education existed, they became more apparent during COVID-19. This right should be protected as it is very important for a child's development. It is also important, because if the governments can ensure access to adjusted education for everyone, then the mother of employment can be settled, providing inclusion and security for everyone, especially for groups of disabled people.

Another document issued by the European Council, discusses the importance of protecting the right to education for the most vulnerable students (Council of

Europe, 2020). Inclusive education is embedded in quality education, which is a priority for everyone. As the key strategy to building more inclusive societies in the future, inclusive education must be accessible to everyone in all situations. This is why the European Council created tools, useful resources on inclusive education accessible to educators and caregivers. This framework (Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture) provides information and tools supporting the development of useful life skills for students of any level and abilities in many languages and sign language. Digital citizenship is also promoted, giving the opportunity to everyone to participate in online or offline societies. Also, affected by an article commenting on the Human rights' convention ("Inclusive education vital for social cohesion in diverse societies") (Council of Europe, 2015), this project tries to implement education strategies adjusted to personal needs, building suitable programs and empowering the existing policies on the matter.

However, there are a lot of opportunities created because of the pandemic to improve the system of e-learning for a beneficiary purpose (Petretto et al., 2021). One opportunity refers to improve relationships between parents and educators, that in that period, they had to work very close, especially parents with children with disabilities or additional needs. Online platforms can create a digital environment or forums that students can feel safe to seek and explore additional resources, coaching and emotional support (Hollweck & Doucet, 2020). Many online tools were tested, a shift to a more universal design is suggested and a lot of innovative ways of both teaching and learning were offered, discovering an interactive and engaging way of creating inclusion (UNESCO, 2020). In conclusion, pandemic, created many additional problems for students with disabilities, but educational system tried to support and include their needs as well as possible, given the moment in the unprepared educators.



## CONCLUSION

Although there are many treaties and international conventions to support the right of every individual in an inclusive and quality education, to this day opportunities on this area are out of reach. Many students with disabilities are excluded from educational systems around the world. The percentage of students with special needs that cannot access school and any education is big and the problem is even greater in low-income countries. They are not practicing their right to inclusive education, facing problems with transportation, untrained educational staff. Eventually, children with disabilities especially those with a physical or intellectual disability are in high risk to not get any form of education in several countries. Inclusion in terms of disability constitutes an intersectional issue which is linked to other discriminations like gender or cultural background.

Inclusive education is a pivotal approach that provides equal opportunities and promotes the full participation of students with disabilities in any educational setting. It emphasizes the assurance of necessary support, accommodations, and resources to make sure that all students, regardless of their abilities or any other personal characteristic, can access quality education. Inclusive education recognizes and values the personalized learning needs and strengths of students with disabilities, fostering an environment that celebrates diversity and promotes positive interactions among students. By embracing inclusive education, we create inclusive classrooms and educational systems that empower students with disabilities to reach their full potential, build self-confidence and be useful in their own way to the community like any other individual.

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented unprecedented challenges to the realization of the right to inclusive education for students with disabilities. The abrupt shift to remote learning disrupted the socio-cultural landscape of inclusive classrooms, leaving many students with disabilities without the necessary supports and accommodations. This difficult time not only impacted their progress academically but also affected their well-being and social interactions negatively. The barriers on their inclusive education were the limited access to specialized services,

lack of adapted technologies, and the burden placed on families, have magnified the existing inequalities in educational opportunities for students with disabilities.

It is crucial to recognize that inclusive education goes beyond physical classroom settings and extends to virtual environments. Efforts must be made to address the specific needs of students with disabilities, ensuring equality in access to quality education in any learning setting. This requires comprehensive strategies that include adapted support, professional development for teachers, accessible learning materials, and strong partnerships between schools, families, and communities.

Moving forward, it is essential to learn from the challenges faced during the pandemic and use this knowledge to improve inclusive education practices. Investments in technology, infrastructure, and training can enhance the capacity to provide inclusive education to all students, regardless of their abilities. Additionally, collaboration among stakeholders, including governments, educational institutions, is crucial in developing inclusive policies to ensure the right to education for students with disabilities (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021).

By adopting good practices of inclusion, ensuring accessibility, and fostering supportive learning environments, we can create a future where every student, regardless of their disability, could reach inclusion in their community and contribute to society their own way.

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