1-1-2023

# Conceptualizing and Reimagining the Future of Inclusive Education in the UAE

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## Recommended Citation

Research Article

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# Conceptualizing and Reimagining the Future of Inclusive Education in the UAE

**Abstract:** The current study explored how students in various universities across the United Arab Emirates (UAE) conceptualized inclusive education and views of the future with participation from twenty-one pre-service teachers from different universities within the UAE. Data collection consisted of an open-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interviews analyzed using a qualitative case study within an interpretive paradigm. Results indicated that students unanimously conceptualized inclusion from a holistic point of view and projected the future to be associated with a higher level of differentiated instruction. However, the conditions of the Education Act and the results were not in agreement with the premise of liberation pedagogy, as students with special needs reverted to a passive state and adopted a dependent relationship with the teacher. In conclusion, teachers' motivation was faith in humanity, the rejection of fatalism, and the belief that all learners can actively participate in the transformation of the world by participating in liberation pedagogy, which caters to the diverse needs of students in present and future environments.

**Keywords:** differentiating instruction, special education, inclusive education, special needs, diversity, liberation pedagogy

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# 1 Introduction

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) global pandemic impacted many students and affected education across the globe (Enos, 2020). Inclusive education is not a new concept, but many students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) had to bear the brunt of the tumultuous instructional transitions caused by COVID-19. Academics, teachers, and researchers were challenged to reconsider inclusion and predict the future outlook, considering inevitable and ongoing instructional changes happening in the education sector.

In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), teachers were encouraged to implement inclusive pedagogical approaches during the pandemic consistent with UAE Federal Law No. 29/2006, which explicitly mandated all students with special needs be accommodated and afforded equal and equitable learning opportunities (Mohebi & Meda, 2021). Although there is a gap between inclusive policies and actual practice, school leadership in the UAE is making significant progress to ensure teachers understand what inclusion entails and how to implement it to support students with diverse learning needs (Meda & Albukhari, 2023; Massouti, Shaya, & Abukhait, 2023).

The UAE Ministry of Education launched an inclusive education initiative with the slogan "School for All," which encourages collaboration and cultivation of critical thinking as described by theorists (Freire, 1985; Vygotsky, 1978). The slogan promotes integration and support of SEND students in general education classroom settings. SEND students are referred to as Students of Determination throughout the majority of the UAE; however, since the term SEND is known internationally and is preferred in some emirates of the UAE, the current study will continue using the term SEND.

# 2 Literature Review

The pedagogy of inclusion emphasizes the equality of educational opportunities that all children should have in a

democratic context. The theory of liberation pedagogy advocates for a system of education that sees learning through empowerment and strongly opposes views aiming to store knowledge in the passive minds of students (Freire, 1985). Having education accessible to all promotes the development of free and critical-thinking individuals who are capable of communication, cooperation, respect, and tolerance. Teachers acquire a dominant role in ensuring the transformative role of the school and the equal learning and personal development opportunities for all students, without exception, in the classroom. The fight against social inequalities lies in the core of liberation pedagogy, aiming at the social and educational reconstruction for fostering inclusive, multicultural school environments. When educators embrace liberation pedagogy in the context of inclusive education, it is crucial not to treat students condescendingly or paternally, but rather to accept them as co-teachers (Freire & Shor, 2008).

## 2.1 Inclusive Education from Different Contexts

Inclusive education is conceptualized differently in various countries around the globe. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2022) argued that between 1994 and 2020, the very definition of inclusive education has evolved. There is a need to relook at the term during and after COVID-19, where instructional strategies have changed. People in different places and at different times conceptualize inclusion in diverse ways. OECD (2022, p. 10) concurs that "different stakeholders in debates around inclusion and the policymaking cycle have different understandings of inclusion in education." In Ethiopia, inclusive education is conceptualized as placing SEND students in mainstream classes for support (Ginja & Chen, 2021). In South Africa, inclusive education is viewed holistically by supporting all children with barriers to learning, such as poverty, disability, racial discrimination, and sexual orientation, together in mainstream classes (Murungi, 2015). Some Asian countries like Singapore, Indonesia, and the Philippines view inclusive education as "being the philosophy, process, and practice of welcoming, valuing and supporting all learners in general education environments" (Faragher et al., 2021, p. 23). The diverse views of inclusive education challenge teachers to accommodate all students, regardless of barriers to learning, making inclusion a key concept in education.

## 2.2 Inclusion as a Key Concept in Education

Education has a significant influence on how societies function and how future generations will live. Education benefits societal members by providing the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of education needed to participate in social, economic, and political activities. A sense of belonging is derived from a sense of value and respect every student feels in education. Despite benefits, education has long been plagued by inequalities, including ensuring access for all, which forms the foundation of inclusion (Martin-Howard & Farmbry, 2020). Considering how educational systems are designed is critical. Inclusion is the process of transitioning from traditional schools of achievement to open schools of achieving collective goals (Ball & Collet-Sabe, 2021). The purpose of the inclusion process is to transform learning into experience, resulting in self-realization for SEND students. To ensure SEND students have all the support needed to achieve educational goals, teachers and specialists have to be at the forefront. Alhammadi (2023) suggests a need for adequately trained inclusive teachers and specialists to ensure the proper inclusion of students with SEND. Woodcock, Gibbs, Hitches, and Regan (2023) echo the same sentiment that the presence of adequately trained teachers with high levels of self-efficacy makes inclusion goals realizable.

A teacher's presence in the classroom is considered a social good that reinforces the pedagogical principles of cooperation, acceptance, and empathy (Dar, 2015). Most education systems continue to reproduce educational models that focus primarily on the transmission of knowledge and preparation for vocational rehabilitation, forgetting that the goals of education also include preparation for life as active citizens, personal development, and retention of a lifelong perspective. Teachers are challenged to always remember what inclusion means when teaching students in diverse classrooms.

Inclusion refers to the removal of barriers, establishing equal opportunities, promoting knowledge, ensuring every student is involved in the learning process at every level, and creating a climate that makes knowledge accessible to everyone (Ainscow, 2020). As the school is called upon to accept and welcome students from different abilities and backgrounds, the goal is to cultivate respect and tolerance toward otherness, encouraging an integrated society with equal educational opportunities (Barrett, 2018). Utilizing Freire's theory, changing and transforming modern society where democracy, social justice, equality, tolerance, and acceptance of diversity and cultural otherness, solidarity, and the harmonious association of people could be promoted.

## 2.3 Teachers and Inclusion

In inclusive education, teachers' roles are both vital and complex. Teachers recognize the characteristics of each student and use interventions to enable them to be independent, active members of a constantly changing society (Ainscow, 2020). Interventions may include the designing of individualized teaching approaches or other educational techniques tailored to diverse learning differences, the systematic application of strategies in the classroom, the planning of comprehensive evaluations of similar approaches, and most importantly, the development of an inclusive educational environment (Nash, Patterson, Flittner, Elmer, & Osborne, 2021). Teachers are the key to the success or failure of students (Woodcock et al., 2023), making inclusive education a particularly challenging endeavor (Rowan et al., 2021). Consequently, when teachers lack psycho-pedagogical and teaching training, the school failure of SEND students takes on greater dimensions. International recognition has been reached that training of special education teachers and substantial preparation of all teachers at all levels of education is necessary for the implementation of inclusion in the general school setting (Crispel & Kasperski, 2021).

According to Freire (1985), teachers must be in full control of not only professional development but also the transformation of society. Liberating teachers must self-reflect and demonstrate agility to engage in enlightenment and continuous re-creation to see social change (Freire, 1985). Teachers and students are not creators of knowledge, but carriers and consumers of information already available. Currently, education does not seem to meet the needs of a society with diverse learning demands, in which both independent and collaborative learning is essential, as is communication and openness to new knowledge (Appova, Lee, & Bucci, 2022).

Inequalities caused by a technocratic education will result in social and economic inequalities for all failing or dropping out of school. Democracies are critical to eliminating educational inequality (Darder, 2017). Educating for life does not only refer to basic education but also includes all levels and types of instruction. An emancipatory conception of education must be interwoven with democratic administration. Inclusive education aims to establish a culture of equality, eliminate prejudices against diversity and heterogeneity, and promote differentiated teaching. Teachers could create a more inclusive world by deepening reflection, improving practices, and self-empowerment.

There is robust research on the conceptualization and how the future is envisioned in a dynamic and ever-changing environment of inclusive education. The purpose of the current study was to explore ways students in various universities within the UAE conceptualized and imagined the future outlook of inclusive education. There is a dearth of research on the conceptualization of inclusive education and how different stakeholders envision the future of the concept. Existing literature related to the topic focused on different aspects such as the past, present, and future of inclusive education (An, Hu, & Horn, 2018), experiences of students with different disabilities in an inclusive environment (Efthymiou, 2023), and understanding of inclusive education (Tan, Liu, & Teng, 2022) among others. Researchers have been motivated to undertake the current study because of a dearth of research on not only the conceptualization and future of inclusive education but also the negative implications associated with different understandings of the concept in a particular context. If teachers conceptualize inclusion differently from policymakers and other stakeholders like parents and students, that is likely to make implementation of the concept happen in a fluid way which is not effective in terms of catering to the diverse learning needs of all students in a class. This necessitates this study which sought to focus on conceptualization of the concept in the UAE's context and how participants envisioned the future outlook.

## 2.4 Research Methods

The current study was conducted using qualitative research methods within an interpretive paradigm, which generally focuses on investigating individuals' experiences and beliefs. According to interpretivism, people experience certain phenomena differently, developing different understanding and conceptions about the same phenomena (Nickerson, 2022). The current study investigated pre-service teachers' conceptions and outlook on the future of inclusive education in the UAE. An interpretive paradigm provided an appropriate inquiry context to respond to the main research question that guided the study.

The study was conducted using a multiple case study of five different universities in the UAE. A case study was selected as it enabled researchers to undertake an in-depth investigation of the phenomenon. This is consistent with Yin (2018) who states that case studies are very specific and ideal for research studies that seek to make a deep exploration of a subject under investigation. Purposive sampling, characterized by deliberate targeting of participants and institutions (Creswell, 2012), was used to select universities with teacher training programs. Twenty-one (21) pre-service teachers were selected from the five universities

which agreed to be part of the project. From each university, pre-service teachers were invited to take part and 21 were actively involved in both the study and a professional development session which was offered.

Data were gathered during the 2022 academic year between February and May. Two research instruments were used to conduct the study: an open-ended questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The open-ended questionnaire was circulated to senior students studying in colleges of education within five different universities in the UAE and was offered online in two languages, Arabic and English. Twenty-one pre-service teachers from different universities across the UAE completed the questionnaire. The questionnaire included questions which focused on pre-service teachers' understanding of inclusive education and how they envision the future outlook of the concept. Participants were also asked to provide feedback on specific areas related to inclusion with which they needed additional support. Responses given for this part of the question were not analyzed in this study as it was a different focus area. However, information was used to develop a workshop to capacitate pre-service teachers with knowledge and skills about inclusion. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six pre-service teachers. The six pre-service teachers were among 21 participants who completed a questionnaire. Others were not comfortable participating in interviews which were recorded, which is why they only preferred to share their information in a questionnaire. This is consistent with Creswell (2012) who argues that participants may have different preferences when it comes to qualitative data collection. In this study, some preferred completing a questionnaire only while others preferred both questionnaires and interviews. The interviews were conducted online using the Zoom video conferencing platform and recorded. The interviewees preferred to be interviewed in English, although an option to be interviewed in Arabic was provided. Each interview took between 30 and 45 min. Interview questions focused on investigating the participants' general understanding of inclusion, perceptions about the challenges facing inclusion in mainstream schools in the UAE, expectations for the future of inclusion in the UAE, and the level of readiness to teach students with disabilities in inclusive settings. The research instruments allowed participants enough space and freedom to express personal views and opinions about inclusion and any fears related to teaching students with additional needs.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. First, the questionnaire responses were read through repeatedly by the researchers to gain a comprehensive understanding of the information. Second, data were organized into broad segments. Third, data were coded within the established segments. There were many codes which were later collapsed into two main themes, namely conceptualization of inclusive education and re-imagining inclusive education for the future. These two themes are consistent with the focus and critical questions of this study.

Data collected through interviews were transcribed first and then organized. The coding process was performed, and information was filtered through the two themes mentioned earlier. Since the main objective of the study was to shed light on the conceptions of pre-service teachers for inclusion, the results of the study were presented descriptively to reflect the perceptions and beliefs of the research participants. Researchers ensured validity and trustworthiness of data by transcribing it collaboratively with a research assistant and applying the member check technique. The main challenge for this research was to get authority from the universities to conduct the study with their students. It was a lengthy process of getting permission to administer surveys as some responsible authorities were not replying to emails and were reluctant to let their institutions be involved. This challenge was mitigated by assigning specific universities to research team members either to write emails through contact persons they knew or to go in person to ask for permission. Since research team members were from three different institutions in the UAE, they had to use their influence and professional contacts to let responsible people respond to emails to get permission.

Ethical clearance to conduct the study was obtained from the university in 2022. Participation in the study was completely voluntary. The aim, benefits, and research methods of the study were clearly explained to the participants through the consent form included in the online questionnaire and this was also sent to the participants before conducting the interviews. The right to withdraw from the study at any time was communicated to each research participant. The identities of the participants were confidential. To protect the identity of all participants, any information which may reveal the identity of any participant was removed from the study, and data and videos of interviews were stored with the principal researcher under a password-protected digital folder. Moreover, the online questionnaire did not contain any questions which might lead to the identification of the participants.

# 3 Results

Results of the current study are categorized into two main themes: (1) conceptualizing inclusive education and (2) re-imagining inclusive education for the future. Each of the

two themes is presented below along with direct quotes from the participants.

## 3.1 Conceptualizing Inclusive Education

Although participants defined inclusive education using different terms, the general conceptualization of the term was based on a holistic point of view. Participants looked at inclusive education as allowing all students to have equitable educational opportunities. One participant stated:

> From my perspective, inclusive education is giving the opportunity to all children from all races and backgrounds and with physical and mental disabilities. Children will be studying in one classroom that provides all means necessary that every one of them learns equally in a respective and safe environment.

Similarly, another participant conceptualized inclusive education from a holistic point of view saying:

> I think it is the new strategy in the UAE of including all students of different abilities in one place in the classroom. It is no longer a situation where students with special needs are placed in separate classes, no. Everybody will be in the same place, and teachers will have to adjust their lesson plans and activities to include every student. That means students without disabilities and those with disabilities will be in the same class.

Some participants looked at inclusive education as referring to putting both students with and without disabilities in a mixed classroom. Three participants stated:

> I think it is a mixed class between the special needs and regular students. It is a class where there is a mixture of students with and without disabilities and gifted and not gifted (Statement 1).

> In general, all students study in a mixed classroom. For students with special needs, a teacher will have to provide additional support. He/she may use an individual education plan (IEP) to meet the needs of special need[s] students within a mainstream classroom (Statement 2).

> My understanding of inclusive education is when the education system asks children with disabilities to be included inside the general classroom with children without disabilities. Children with disabilities are not separated to another institute, neither are they placed to another building or another room. They will be in the same general classroom with other typically developing children (Statement 3).

Tolerance and a sense of belonging are encouraged by having all students learn in a regular mainstream classroom. One participant argued the conceptualization that inclusive education happens when students with special needs are placed in a mainstream classroom stating:

> Special need students should be encouraged to learn in a mainstream classroom. They do not need their own institutions. They should be learning and experiencing what it feels like to be normal in a normal classroom. It will give them a sense of belonging first, and it will teach their fellow peers in the mainstream class how to be more humane and how to communicate and collaborate with different races and different students. So, it will help them grow. Like growth is not just academically, it is also mentally.

Inclusive education is about affording to SEND students the right to learn along with other students without disabilities, including groups of students previously excluded in the education system because of barriers to learning, and placing all students into one class regardless of learning differences and striving to cater for the diverse learning needs. Two participants stated that inclusive education is: "Providing real learning opportunities for groups who have traditionally been excluded – not only children with disabilities, but speakers of minority languages too" (Statement 1).

> There is no need to separate children with disabilities from a normal classroom. We can blend both of the students (disabled and non-disabled) together and meet their individual needs at the same time. In that way, the education system will be giving all children their right to education. Special need children will not feel excluded and that is what inclusive education is about (Statement 2).

One participant supported the claim that inclusive education requires teachers to provide individualized support to students by stating that inclusive education "occurs when all students have the right to a proper well rounded and personalized educational journey regardless of their abilities." In order to achieve inclusive education, teachers must be creative in terms of teaching.

To summarize the first theme of conceptualization of inclusive education, participants generally demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of the term as they viewed it from a holistic point of view where all students will have support regardless of their barriers to learning. That conceptualization is not limited to students with disabilities only, but also those with different learning needs. Teachers are expected to ensure that children with diverse learning needs are accommodated and supported in order to enhance their learning experiences.

## 3.2 Re-Imagining Inclusive Education for the Future

Participants forecasted how inclusive education would look in the near future. Generally, all participants

reiterated that future classes would become more diversified, partly due to online learning, which has accelerated mass education. Students from different contexts, backgrounds, and with diverse learning needs now have access to the same classroom with the same teacher. A participant stated:

> We should look at the long run. In ten years, we are going to have Emiratis, Chinese, French and all kinds of students from different backgrounds and nationalities. They are going to be all learning in the same environment and same classroom. So, we should be ready for that. It is not going to be like ten years ago where we had a blackboard and all the students were the same, all the students were wearing the same thing and they were all speaking the same language. That was old school and things do not work like that anymore. You can have all kinds of students in the same classroom learning the same thing at the same time. This is the future and we should be prepared for it.

Another participant echoed the same sentiments about the near future of inclusive education having diverse populations in one classroom by stating:

> This world is so big. It has people with different backgrounds, people with special needs and people with learning difficulties. There are all sorts of people out there. Nobody is perfect. So, including people with special education needs in a normal classroom will make them feel like it is okay for them to be included in the society. They are not different from us. They do not need their own institutions to learn. They do not need to be left out even when there is a school trip. In normal schools, if there is a school trip or if there is anything special going on, usually the student with special education needs do not get included. That is changing in the near future.

Students are likely to learn from each other when students requiring additional learning needs are placed in the same class as students without special needs. The need for empathy and sympathy was supported by a participant who stated:

> Having students of different abilities in one class, improves something like empathy and sympathy in children, which is needed in the new time. They are very important skills for the future to have empathy and sympathy and to accept and include everyone.

One participant gave an example of students with disabilities in the class saying:

> I had many students with disabilities and sometimes there were many shadow teachers with them. There was one on a wheelchair who needed support, some other students were with him in the group and it was not bad at all. With the teachers' proper planning and preparation, it was not a bad experience.

In a context where future classes will be diversified, teachers will have to adjust teaching to ensure that all students have quality learning experiences regardless of barriers to learning. One participant wrote:

> All students have to be in the same class regardless of their different needs. Teacher have to adapt their lesson plans to have activities that would suit all students with different cognitive abilities and learning styles... in the UAE, there is not going to be an issue of putting special need students into special schools or classes. This is because all teachers will be expected to find ways to accommodate students with diverse needs in their classes.

Another participant concurs that due to online learning, which gained momentum because of the global pandemic of COVID-19, future classes are likely to be more inclusive, rather than exclusive. The participant said "It is okay to have children with disabilities in the same class with children without disabilities. Most classes are going to be like that especially online."

Teachers should be required to develop professionally in order to match the future of pedagogical instruction and provide differentiated support as the cornerstone of inclusive education.

One participant wrote:

> Teachers have to design lesson plans that have different outcomes for different students to cater for the diverse learning needs of all students in the class. It is all about designing a lesson plan with different outcomes. So, if we take into consideration the needs of different students, it is really easy to design a program that fits all. It is about interacting and understanding the student first. Teacher has to notice students' weaknesses and strengths. That will help to further design better classroom and better lesson plans that have different learning outcomes for all the students.

Another participant explained catering to the diverse needs of all students by differentiating teaching, stating:

> Whenever I think of differentiation of instruction, what comes into my mind is giving different content and activities to students in the same class. I will be giving the same worksheet to all the students with three questions. Question one will be a bit easy, question two a bit harder and question three the hardest. Students with low cognitive abilities will answer only question one while the rest of the class answers all the questions.

Another participant gave an example of differentiating teaching to meet the diverse needs of all children in the classroom by writing:

> You may have a child with mild autism to be in the classroom with you, to study with a student who has a hearing impairment and wears hearing aids, or to have someone in your class who has a visual impairment. To have them in the classroom means you should provide the support and accommodations which

allow them to receive the same instruction and to access the curriculum that is being taught in the general classroom. So, for example, a child with ADHD may have a different type of worksheet to work on while in the same idea of the lesson but the organization of the work may be different to help them focus.

Due to high levels of diversity in the classroom, all participants felt that differentiation of instruction would be inevitable in the near future. Teachers must be proficient in a variety of ways to differentiate instruction, keeping in mind that high-performing students need to be given challenging tasks and struggling students need additional support. A participant who felt prepared to implement differentiation of instruction wrote:

> I feel competent to differentiate tasks and differentiate a lesson plan based on the readiness and interests of my students. If some students still do not have the basic skills that I need to have in my lesson, I will have to differentiate the lesson to reach their level of understanding in order to bridge that knowledge gap first. I should not ignore the advanced students and I should not make them feel bored in the classroom. I should also target them and differentiate the lesson tasks for them.

To summarize the second theme of reimagining inclusive education for the future, results show that participants foresee classes diversifying more than they are today. That challenges teachers to design lesson plans which cater to the diverse needs of all children in classrooms. Emphasis is on pedagogical strategies which must be inclusive in nature and should be done in a way that is consistent with differentiation of instruction.

# 4 Discussion

## 4.1 Diversity in Future Classes

According to the surveyed teachers, inclusion is a broader concept, enabling students with SEND to participate in school activities and benefit from inclusion, mainly educationally, without stressing the students' personal and social benefits. Freire (2005) describes learning as an experiential process where learners and teachers become cognitive subjects, interact critically, and learn together in a diverse class. Results of the current study conclude similarities with Freire where participants reiterated the need for teachers to acquire more knowledge and skills to be able to teach competently in futuristic classes, which are likely to be more diverse than they are today. Future classes are likely to be more diverse and inclusive policies will be tightened so that no child will be left behind. Chin (2023)

suggests there will be a zero-rejection policy for students with learning disabilities in Malaysia, which concurs with the UAE's current inclusive education slogan, "School for All," requiring teachers to support diverse learners today and in the future. From the UAE context, Mohebi and Meda (2021) argue that inclusion is currently inevitable, and in the future, teachers will be expected to embrace diversity and inclusive pedagogical practices to meet the needs of students. Massouti et al. (2023, p. 4283) echo the same sentiment, saying "promoting a culture of diversity and inclusion among students and staff is a priority for the schools" in the UAE. The demand for inclusion challenges teachers to step-up efforts in preparation for future classes by attending professional development sessions related to teaching inclusively. From the workshops, teachers will learn different strategies about how to meet the diverse learning needs of students in the future. Meda and Albukhari (2023) argue there is a need for teachers to implement a nested approach to supporting students with diverse learning needs in the near future, as schools are widening enrollments beyond borders and boundaries while including students from different cultures, backgrounds, nationalities, and beliefs (Massouti et al., 2023).

## 4.2 Liberation Pedagogy in an Inclusive Class

The idea of diversity in future classes aligns with the philosophical underpinning of a liberating pedagogical approach that originates from both teachers' and students' shared experiences (Freire, 1997, 1985). The current study results align with the liberating pedagogical approach, where pre-service teachers conceptualized inclusive education in a holistic manner and demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of the term. According to Freire, liberation pedagogy is a democratic education that provokes questioning by approaching knowledge and reflecting on reality in a critical way. Therefore, liberating educators ensure the development of dialogue and collaboration in educational practice, and observe and pursue social interactions with the ultimate goal of achieving educational transformation, a change that will then extend beyond education to society and people.

Emancipatory education emphasizes the inclusion interests of students with SEND (Morena & Nkoane, 2021). To form knowledge in a classroom, the students must become subjects of the learning process, along with the teachers. Knowledge should be based on a worldview rather than forcing a higher reality. Observing the answers of the pre-service teachers, results of the current study suggest that when learners' needs are discussed, learning

deficiencies are highlighted more than social needs. As Freire (1997, 1985) believed, learners of all ages must use all the resources available, including intelligence and critical thinking, to deeply decode inner worlds, but also external ones, to transform social reality into an existential self-realization through processes of social participation and synergy that facilitate efficiency and qualitative perceptual interaction. Teachers argued that education relates to the social integration of students with SEND and that learning is the process of acquiring knowledge, not only conventionally through the intake of information, but also through learning how to live and act within society (Moriña, Sandoval, & Carnerero, 2020).

## 4.3 Implementing Inclusion

Several pre-service teachers mentioned differentiated teaching in the educational process without mentioning the need to design engaging digital learning environments and collaborative learning environments for students that allow an active part in learning. Lack of relevant training for teachers and insufficient electronic equipment in inclusive schools hinder the practice of successful implementation, according to the research (Papadakis, Vaiopoulou, Sifaki, Stamovlasis, & Kalogiannakis, 2021). Teachers need to remain positive about using modern technological media and digital educational tools to teach as a means of removing functional barriers and consolidating inclusive education in general schools. Social transformation is inextricably linked to the professional development of teachers (Freire, 1998). The school failure of students with SEND is largely a product of the educational system, which takes on greater dimensions and frequency if teachers have insufficient psycho-pedagogical and didactic training (Moretti, 2021). The teacher must not only fully control the process of their own professional development, but also the change in society (Freire, 1985).

## 5 Conclusion

The purpose of the current study was to explore ways students in various universities within the UAE conceptualized inclusive education and imagined the future outlook of the concept. Results concluded that conceptualization of inclusive education is context specific and forecasted to be more challenging to implement in the future. There are different ways in which people understand the term of inclusion. Future classes are likely to be larger than today and may be conducted using novel online platforms, which

increases the difficulty for teachers to cater to the diverse needs of all students. Continuous professional development of teachers aimed at inclusive pedagogical approaches in both face-to-face and online classes is paramount. Teachers must be equipped with a wide range of strategies for teaching in diverse classes. Massification of education through online learning is a crucial factor to consider in the rapid expansion of future classes. There is a need to re-imagine and forecast the future of inclusion in the current era to support planning a curriculum for the future and implementation of liberation pedagogy.

## 5.1 Recommendations for Future Research

In light of the varying conceptualization of inclusive education presented in this study, it is recommended that policymakers and practitioners work collaboratively to ensure that there is coherence in terms of policy and practice. If teachers have multiple interpretations of what the term in a policy (such as inclusive education) entails, they are likely to implement it differently. Some implementations may not be inclusive in nature. There is a need for continuous professional development opportunities for in-service teachers so that they are assisted in various ways of implementing inclusive pedagogical approaches in the digital era. If pre-service teachers do not understand inclusion or have some doubts about making some accommodations, professional development opportunities will assist them in closing that gap. Future research can explore the implications of teachers' diverse conceptualization of inclusion and also investigate how challenges envisioned in the future can be mitigated.

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