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Dual transformation of and through inclusion. Postcolonial perspectives from the African continent

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Dual transformation of and through inclusion: Postcolonial perspectives from the African continent

Abstract

This collaborative article examines inclusive education (IE) in Egypt, Kenya, and Uganda through the lens of dual transformation, illustrating how IE both shapes and is shaped by local socio-political contexts. Grounded in postcolonial theory, it critiques Global North-driven inclusion norms promoted through international development, which often impose standardized models that overlook local realities. Dual transformation is introduced as both an analytical framework and a practical tool, bridging top-down policy and bottom-up innovation while emphasizing the agency of local actors in shaping inclusive practices. The research advances the debate on Africanizing IE and calls for moving away from normative policy transfers toward context-sensitive, sustainable, and genuinely collaborative approaches.

Schlagworte: Dual transformation, Africanizing inclusive education, Global South, postcolonial theory

1 Introduction and study design

We argue that inclusive education (IE) in Egypt, Kenya, and Uganda evolves through a process of dual transformation: a transformation through inclusion – such as top-down policies and donor frameworks – and a transformation of inclusion – where local actors reinterpret, adapt, or resist global norms. This study utilized an adapted constructivist Grounded Theory approach (Charmaz, 2014; Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021) to examine IE in these three countries. Grounded Theory was selected for its flexibility in developing concepts from data and its capacity to capture the interplay between global standards and local practices. This methodology enabled us to interpret inclusion not as

a fixed model but as a dynamic process shaped by both top-down reforms and bottom-up innovations.

By situating our analysis within postcolonial theory, we foreground African contexts and epistemologies while providing a comparative perspective across Egypt, Kenya, and Uganda. Our data sources included existing research, interviews with teachers and school leaders, classroom observations, and secondary data (national statistics, policy reports) from each country. Data were thematically coded and discussed in iterative digital workshops involving both Global South and Global North partners.

This article begins with an overview of IE in the three countries, introduces the concept of dual transformation, and situates it within postcolonial theory. It then explores how dual transformation contributes to the Africanization of IE (Kinuthia, 2022) and concludes by discussing future pathways and implications.

2 Inclusive Education in Egypt, Kenya, and Uganda: A Brief Overview

All three countries have ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN-CRPD) and implemented IE through their respective national legal frameworks. While these frameworks share the influence of cultural traditions and postcolonial factors, their implementation differs.

2.1 Egypt

In 2017, Egypt legally entitled students with „mild“ disabilities to inclusive education through Ministerial Decree 252. Prime Ministerial Decree 2733 and Law 10 (2018) expanded access to inclusion and broadened the definition of „mild“ disability, allowing more students to enter mainstream education. In 2013, only about 1.2% of children with disabilities attended school (EMoE, 2014), illustrating the previous extent of exclusion. By 2024, mainstream schools enrolled 159,824 pupils with „mild“ disabilities (up from 34,054 in 2017), while special-school enrollment remained nearly constant at around 40,000, indicating limited system-wide impact. Challenges include insufficient teacher training and resources, especially in rural areas, where over 30% of in-service teachers lack pedagogical training. Implementation often relies on committed individuals, as awareness, monitoring, and enforcement remain limited (Abbas, 2023).

2.2 Kenya

Kenya's IE strategy is backed by robust laws and policies, e.g. the Persons with Disabilities Act (2003), Special Needs Education Policy (2009), Sector Policy (2018), and the 2010 Constitution reflecting the commitments under the UNCRPD. Foundational reports (Ominde, 1964; Gachathi, 1976; Kochung, 2011) and plans like Vision 2030 have promoted integrating learners with disabilities into mainstream schools (Ranji, 2021). Despite this, IE faces barriers like inadequate infrastructure, limited assistive devices, and a shortage of trained teachers. Many educators cannot develop IEPs and still favor segregation. Nationally, 11.4% of children (approx. 2.5 million) live with disabilities, with those needing self-care facing the lowest enrollment and highest dropout rates, particularly in rural areas due to poverty and stigma (KISE, MoE & KNBS, 2018). The Disability Inclusion Status Report 2025 urges a shift from symbolic efforts to systemic reforms, inclusive pedagogy, stronger data, and cultural change (NCPWD, 2024).

2.3 Uganda

Uganda has taken important steps toward IE since the early 1990s, supported by policies such as the 1992 Government White Paper, the Persons with Disabilities Act (2006), and the National IE Policy Framework (2011). Despite this progress, implementation remains weak, especially in rural and post-conflict areas, due to limited infrastructure, resources, and trained personnel. Despite national progress in education, enrollment and completion rates for children with disabilities in Uganda remain very low, only 9% attend school and just 0.81% reach advanced secondary exams (UNEB, 2017). A key barrier is inadequate teacher preparation, with training often theoretical and disconnected from practice. Stigma, poverty, and gender inequality further limit inclusion. Yet, community-led innovations such as parent networks, adapted teaching strategies, and mentorship programs show the potential of local, low-cost solutions to advance IE from the ground up.

3 Introducing the dual transformation

Having outlined the contexts, this section introduces dual transformation as the lens through which we interpret these divergent experiences. The concept of dual transformation offers a novel perspective for attributing agency to local actors and for illustrating how IE materializes as a highly contextualized and hybrid construct. It examines both top-down processes shaped by international and national policy frameworks that carry postcolonial legacies (transformation through inclusion) and bottom-up dynamics at the school and

student level (transformation of inclusion). Within these localized contexts, creative and collaborative approaches emerge, grounded in local knowledge and developed despite limited resources, to support the inclusion of students with special educational needs. These adaptive strategies reflect the interplay of historical continuities shaped by colonial structures and contemporary innovations responding to present-day challenges.

While there are similarities to Kamenopoulou's (2018) holistic framework, the concept of dual transformation is more readily applicable as a practical tool in IE reforms and international cooperation. By linking global norms, power relations, processes, and local contexts, it enables actors to identify adaptive strategies that promote inclusion and make effective use of existing resources.

3.1 Uganda

Uganda has developed a strong IE policy framework, notably through the 2011 National Policy and the 2006 Persons with Disabilities Act, reflecting a top-down commitment supported by international partners. Yet, implementation remains uneven, especially in rural and post-conflict areas with limited resources and trained staff (UNESCO, 2021). In response, grassroots and faith-based groups have launched local initiatives such as parent support networks, low-cost teaching tools, and teacher mentorships tailored to community needs. Parent networks in Central Uganda host weekend peer-to-peer support circles, offering joint activities regardless of abilities a clear case of transformation of inclusion at village level (Nalugya et al., 2023).

Classroom observations showed teachers using storytelling circles, where learners with disabilities participated through peer narration and role play. Such locally rooted adaptations exemplify the dual transformation between policy aspirations and creative classroom practice. During observations in one rural primary classroom, a teacher supported a boy with hearing loss by rearranging seating and pairing him with a peer who repeated instructions using gestures. This adaptation reflects both the Ministry's top-down commitment (transformation through inclusion) and the teacher's bottom-up improvisation (transformation of inclusion).

3.2 Kenya

In Kenya, dual transformation is demonstrated through the incorporation of IE ideas into national legislative and policy frameworks, such as Vision 2030, which represents transformation through inclusion, and the Sector Policy for Learners and Trainees with Disabilities (2018). Systemic issues, such as a lack of infrastructure, poor teacher preparation, and social stigma, still exist, evidencing the policy practice gap. Programs like the eKitabu Digital Literacy

Project exemplify the transformation of inclusion: providing an accessible, open-source e-reading platform for global and local pedagogical content, adapting external resources to local needs. By these adaptive interventions to local circumstances, community-driven projects and mobile support units are tackling exclusion in certain rural areas, thereby providing the bottom-up part of the dual transformation.

3.3 Egypt

The pattern in Egypt is similar. Inclusive Education (IE) is still in its early stages and, as one deputy school director noted, is “trying to get into the fabric of education” (Personal communication, 2019). In the absence of effective structures and adequate resources, schools are using whatever local assets are available to implement inclusion. These grassroots efforts by committed individuals highlight the agency of local actors in shaping inclusive practices. There is no clear national definition of inclusion (UNESCO, 2025), and school visits reveal that inclusion is often negotiated between school directors and parents, as well as between international conventions, national laws, and the hyper-local contexts. All stakeholders contribute to shaping IE, illustrating a dual transformation.

4 Postcolonial theory and dual transformation

Postcolonial theory provides a framework and foundation for dual transformation. Edward Said’s concept of “travelling theory” (1994) suggests local adaptations are responses to shifting socio-cultural contexts, but this alone is not sufficient. Homi Bhabha’s concept of hybridization (1994) offers a deeper lens: local actors reshape external constructs by infusing local elements in an act of decolonization. Hyper-local processes of inclusion and exclusion thus produce various hybrid forms of inclusion. Rose’s idea of a “paradoxical space” (1993), applied in Global South contexts (Lux 2023), transcends binary notions (inclusion/exclusion, North/South) and illuminates how subjective experiences and social structures interact (Link 2025). Focusing on these paradoxical spaces underscores the need to examine the diverse dual transformations of inclusion. Building on Spivak (1999), Brunner (2020) shows how knowledge can perpetuate postcolonial structures, noting that supposedly “global” knowledge (mostly from the North) often overwrites local knowledge in the South. Dual transformation, by valuing both global and local knowledge, counteracts this by treating them both as relevant in advancing and shaping IE in the Global South.

5 Africanizing Inclusive Education

Combining the insights provided by postcolonial theory leads to discussions on Africanizing IE (Kinuthia, 2022). Our findings echo Kinuthia's call by empirically and theoretically demonstrating the centrality of local context in shaping IE. They highlight the limitations and the potential harm of homogenizing approaches using a „global norming“ (Artiles, 2020) of inclusion, as often embedded in international development, which can marginalize or even overwrite local practices and knowledge systems (Bifuh-Ambe, 2020). Africanizing IE means moving beyond merely adapting external models; it requires centering African epistemologies, e.g. community values, traditions and relational worldviews like Ubuntu, as foundations for inclusive pedagogy (Letseka, 2012; Waghid, 2014). For example, some schools in western Kenya integrate storytelling, proverbs, and involve community elders in teaching, reflecting culturally grounded inclusive strategies (Swadener et al., 2000; Muringi, 2013). Reflecting on his own work, one educator in Egypt states: “we take international norms for inclusion and tailor it” (Personal communication, 2024) to our needs. Africanizing IE does not mean to isolate inclusion from the international discourse, but to open a dialogue between Northern and Southern/local knowledge and to adjust the implementation of inclusion to local needs and practices. This underscores the importance of culturally anchored innovation and affirms the agency of African educators and communities to shape IE in context-sensitive, sustainable, and epistemically just ways (Kupe, 2019).

6 Conclusion

IE in Egypt, Kenya, and Uganda is both a vehicle for and a product of broader socio-political transformations. The dual transformation framework reveals that inclusion is not just an imported policy directive but a lived, evolving process shaped by local histories, knowledge systems, and community action. Using a postcolonial lens, we uncover tensions between global inclusion norms and indigenous educational & socio-economic realities. By emphasizing the hyper-local nature of inclusion, we caution that many national and international initiatives impose homogenized structures that overlook local context, restrictions and creativity. The dual framework allows for the synchronization of Northern and Southern perspectives for local inclusion research. The findings underscore the need to look beyond technocratic reforms and recognize the epistemic agency of African educators, learners, and communities in shaping their educational futures. This approach may lead to a plurality of Africanized, sustainable, context-sensitive forms of inclusion.

7 Limitations and Future Directions

This study's focus on three countries, while diverse, does not capture the full spectrum of African IE experiences. Additionally, reliance on interviews and policy analysis may have omitted student perspectives and informal education settings. Future research should include longitudinal studies, greater engagement with learners with disabilities, and deeper ethnographic exploration of rural and marginalized contexts. Further inquiry is needed into how African epistemologies can shape inclusive pedagogies beyond current frameworks.

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