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Editorial

Evidence-Informed Inclusive Education: Enablers, Barriers and Innovations

Since the second half of the twentieth century, education has been seen as a key institution for promoting equal opportunities. Consequently, democratic governments have sought to develop policies to mitigate the effects of social inequalities on access to education, schooling conditions and educational outcomes. Yet the persistence of inequality across education systems in developed countries raises fundamental questions about how best to design policies and practices that can offset social disadvantage and provide a legitimate foundation for a meritocratic system and fair access to social positions. In this global context, achieving sustainable improvement in schools that address inequalities in students' learning outcomes – particularly for those from disadvantaged backgrounds – remains a significant global challenge (e.g., OECD, 2012; UNESCO, 2015).

Attaining sustainable student success and contributing to social development requires reducing school failure and promoting a school system that combines quality with equity in the complex and challenging current socio-economic context. Equity can be understood as the implementation of strategies aimed at reducing the obstacles students face due to social or personal circumstances – such as gender, ethnicity or family background – that may limit their ability to realise their educational potential and attain desirable outcomes (Eurydice, 2019). Despite extensive efforts at the international, European and national levels (e.g., the Fundació Bofill report in Spain; Riera, 2019), educational reforms have often failed to improve education systems or effectively address disparities in student outcomes. Achieving school equity is still an unresolved issue. In this context, this special issue of the CEPS Journal addresses questions such as: How can the most recent evidence and research data be used to inform efforts to address equity and inclusion in schools? How can schools and individual teachers be empowered to take direct action on their decisions in systems where top-down reforms have not yielded the desired results?

Ensuring the systematic use of evidence in schools represents a critical step towards addressing persistent inequalities and designing pedagogical approaches capable of effectively supporting diverse learners.

Yet, despite widespread rhetorical commitment, evidence-informed practice often remains fragmented, uneven and difficult to sustain. Research consistently shows that educators' engagement with evidence is shaped not

only by its availability but also by research literacy, professional beliefs, organisational conditions and the contextual realities of schools. This special issue, entitled *Evidence-Informed Inclusive Education: Enablers, Barriers and Innovations*, brings together empirical studies exploring these dimensions across varied educational levels, systems and socio-cultural contexts.

The first paper, *Is There a Skills Gap? Information Literacy and Primary School Teachers' Attitudes Towards Research*, by María Rodríguez Alcolea and Despoina Georgiou, addresses a foundational issue in evidence use: teachers' information literacy. Drawing on survey data from 120 primary teachers, the study shows that attitudes towards research are shaped by teachers' information literacy skills, identifying a modifiable competency that can be strengthened through targeted professional development. The study highlights the need for targeted professional development to support the sustainable integration of research evidence into primary education.

In *Affirmative Re-Action: Attitudes Towards Roma Students in Serbia*, Simona Bekić and Dragica Pavlović Babić examine perceptions of affirmative action as a mechanism for addressing long-term discrimination and promoting equity among minority groups, based on data from 190 university students. Although most of the respondents support such measures, nuances emerge: male students report more negative views, while insufficient knowledge of affirmative programmes is associated with greater social distance towards Roma people. These findings highlight the need for awareness-raising and structured opportunities for intercultural learning within higher education.

Mirlinda Bunjaku-Isufi's contribution, *Evidence-Based Strategies for Promoting Student Inclusion in Urban and Rural Schools in Kosovo*, presents a mixed-methods exploration of teachers' and students' perceptions of evidence-based strategies that support inclusion across contrasting geographical contexts. The study reveals that professional development, leadership support and collaborative planning are central to perceived inclusion, while implementation varies substantially between urban and rural schools. The findings underscore the importance of context-sensitive policy responses that acknowledge structural disparities.

The paper by Cecilia-Inés Suárez-Rivarola, Saida López-Crespo and Anna Díaz-Vicario, *Teachers' Perceptions of Evidence-Informed Practice: An Analysis According to School Complexity Level in Catalonia*, sheds light on how organisational conditions influence the use of research in teaching in schools with different levels of complexity in Catalonia. Although teachers across settings recognise the value of research, its use is conditioned by time constraints, training opportunities and the cultures of professional reflection within schools. Although differences across

school complexity levels are subtle, they indicate more conducive environments for systematic evidence use in low-complexity schools. The study highlights the need for more targeted teacher training and systematic evaluation of practice as key factors in fostering evidence-informed teaching.

In the paper *Creation of Didactic Materials at an Art Academy for Children with Developmental Disabilities Involved in Equine-Assisted Learning Interventions*, Renata Burai, Sonja Vuk and Antonio Kutleša investigate a practice-based project involving codesign and evaluation of didactic materials for children with developmental disabilities participating in equine-assisted learning interventions. Their findings reveal that engagement and motivation increase when students work on real-world, socially meaningful tasks. Moreover, the usability of materials depends strongly on the individual characteristics of children, emphasising the importance of adaptability and personalisation in inclusive practice.

Beyond the special issue focus, the varia section contributes a series of studies that, while diverse, enrich broader conversations on teaching, learning and educational wellbeing.

Evelyn Mei Ling Wong and Ann Rosnida Md Deni's article, *Promoting Interaction to Enhance Student Perceived Learning and Satisfaction in a Large e-Flipped Accounting Classroom*, demonstrates that interventions such as learner-content, learner-instructor and learner-learner interactions are critical for student learning and satisfaction in both pre-class and in-class online activities. Their work underscores the continued importance of pedagogical design in increasingly digital learning environments.

In *Videoconferencing and Sleep Quality in Slovenian University Students: Is There a Mediating Role of Zoom Fatigue?*, Vita Vuk, Marina Horvat, Vesna Vrečko Pizzulin and Vita Štukovnik examine the link between videoconferencing, fatigue and sleep quality during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their findings reveal that videoconference fatigue mediates the negative relationship between screen use and sleep quality, pointing to the need for more sustainable remote learning practices.

In the paper *The Study of Light as an Experimental Factor in Observing the Development of Children's Artistic Abilities in Kindergarten*, Urianni Merlin and Matjaž Duh investigate how different programmes centred on light and shadow can influence young children's divergent thinking and artistic expression. The results show significant improvements, particularly in creative development, when structured and intentionally designed programmes are implemented.

In *Perceived Change in Job Demands and Resources and Teacher Well-Being During the Pandemic*, Iris Marušić, Josip Šabić and Jelena Matić Bojić

analyse data from over 3,000 Croatian teachers. Despite increased job demands during the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers reported relatively high job satisfaction and manageable stress levels, demonstrating notable professional resilience.

The study by Erika Löfström, Katrin Poom-Valickis and Kirsti Rumma, *Teachers' Metaphors and Beliefs About Teaching and Their Relationship With Job Satisfaction*, highlights how teachers' metaphorical understandings of their work relate to job satisfaction. Those holding student-centred beliefs were more satisfied with their professional environment, pointing to the value of reflective approaches that illuminate teachers' conceptualisations of teaching. The study suggests the importance of considering beliefs, knowledge base and emotions in understanding job satisfaction.

Finally, Melita Lemut Bajec's paper *Teachers' Attitudes Towards Classroom Observations* reveals that teachers generally view classroom observation positively, valuing constructive feedback and opportunities for self-reflection. Although observations may evoke stress or concerns related to supervision, peer observations in particular are considered beneficial, despite perceived risks of bias.

This special issue concludes with a review of *How to Use Research Evidence Well in Education*, by Mark Rickinson, Lucas Walsh, Joanne Gleeson, Blake Cutler, Bernice Plant, Mark Boulet, Genevieve Hall, Connie Cirkony and Mandy Salisbury, which offers a robust framework (QURE) for understanding high-quality research use as reflective, contextualised and supported by organisational structures. The book provides practical guidance for embedding evidence use within everyday professional practice, aligning with the broader themes of this issue.

The contributions included in this special issue collectively provide a nuanced and multifaceted examination of the factors that shape evidence-informed inclusive education. They elucidate the complex interplay between individual professional competencies, contextual conditions, pedagogical design and organisational cultures, highlighting how these dimensions interact to influence educational practices and outcomes. Importantly, the contributions underscore the transformative potential inherent in the deliberate and collaborative use of research to inform policy and practice, fostering more equitable, responsive and inclusive education systems.

By synthesising empirical insights and theoretical perspectives, this special issue advances understanding of how evidence can be mobilised to support inclusive education. We hope it serves not only as a catalyst for reflection among researchers and practitioners but also as an impetus for the refinement

of education policy and practice. More broadly, it aims to stimulate ongoing empirical inquiry and critical dialogue, contributing to a sustained research agenda focused on the development of inclusive, evidence-informed educational environments.

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