



# Pre-service Teacher Education for Inclusion in The United Arab Emirates: Looking beyond COVID-19

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## ABSTRACT

This qualitative study aims to investigate the perspectives of pre-service teachers in the UAE's teacher education programs towards their preparation for inclusive teaching during COVID-19. The study seeks to report on the challenges and opportunities experienced by the latter with the aim to envision a new model of teaching and learning about inclusion in ways that advance the learning experience of disadvantaged groups, particularly students with special education needs in the UAE's K-12 system. A narrative inquiry methodological approach has been deployed. Data is being collected through semi-structured interviews, and document analysis of teacher education and inclusive education policies. The study offers insights on how rethinking teacher education program designs, modes of delivery, and courses offered contributes to the development of future teachers' skills and capacities for inclusive teaching, simultaneously responding to the complex challenges that students with special education needs continue to face pre and post COVID-19. Preliminary findings indicate that pre-service teachers are less ready to take on promising inclusive teaching practices if heavy-on-theory contemporary program designs persist. Further, supporting students with special education needs in the UAE's K-12 classrooms requires an enhanced practicum experience and adopting more tailored, practice-based instructional, yet inclusive strategies in university classrooms that resonate with the current K-12 teaching context. Recommendations for future teacher education policy and program development are offered.

**Keywords:** inclusive education, K-12, policy, practice, teacher preparation