INCLUSIVE EDUCATION INITIATIVE
Transforming Education for Children with Disabilities

African Scholarship Exchange
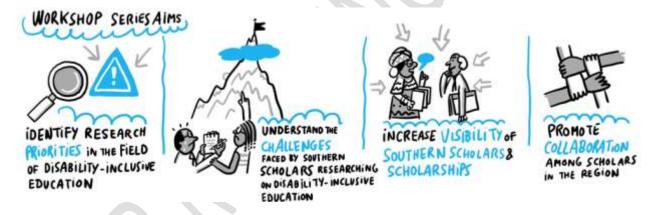
Researching Disability-Inclusive Education in Sub Saharan Africa and South Asia

Dates: June 23rd, 2021| Time: 7:00 - 9:00 am EST

On the 23rd of June, 2021, the Inclusive Education Initiative (IEI) conducted its first of four workshops within the Research Exchange Workshop Series. This workshop brought together early career and established researchers from universities across East and South Africa.

The workshop aimed to bring forth Southern researchers' voices and provide a platform for early career and established researchers to share their perspectives on the disability-inclusive education research priorities. It offered them the space to explore what they needed to advance their research agendas, both in the global context of the Sustainable Development Goal for Education and their national contexts.

The objectives of the scholarship exchange were outlined as:

The content and the discussion questions for this workshop were guided by the work of a recent report **"Primary Schooling for Children with Disabilities- A review of African scholarship"[1]**. The systematic review of research from 14 Sub-Saharan African countries examined the patterns (if any) in publications on disability and education by researchers based in Sub-Saharan Africa (geographical and thematic focus).

The workshop was attended via Zoom by 35 researchers from 10 countries across the region who represented 12 universities. The participants had, on average, 5-10 years of experience and 20% of them identified as people with disabilities.

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[1] Singal, N., Spencer, C., and Mitchell, R. (2021). Primary Schooling for Children with Disabilities: A Review of African Scholarship. Research Report. Cambridge Network for Disability and Education Research, University of Cambridge, United Kingdom.

In order to facilitate discussions among the participants, they were divided into breakout groups, ensuring representation from different countries and universities, along with a facilitator and cofacilitator to help guide the conversations. The breakout groups sought to tackle four key questions, and their responses are summarized below.

What challenges are faced by the African scholarship in conducting robust research on disability-inclusive education?

- North-South differences – The playing field for research between the Global North and the Global South has never been level. One key challenge that researchers mentioned was that their qualifications and research was not taken as seriously by scholars in the Global North, and that it is more difficult for a researcher in the Global South to publish due to this. Researchers in the South also find that their focus areas are different from those in the North, leading to their interests not being as catered to. The difficulty of capturing lived experiences of people with hearing impairments because of lack of researchers who are familiar with sign language was another key challenge that was brought up.

- Funding – The biggest challenge faces by researchers and scholars in the Global South is funding and there are several reasons for this. Funders in the North have different research priorities from those in the South, and this lands up dictating the focus areas and objectives. The costs associated with publishing work in journals leads to research not being published as often in the South as well, hindering their professional growth. Scholars are often left to finance publishing costs out of pocket. Often with Northern funders, Principal Investigators are assigned from the Northern (donor) countries, leaving the Southern researcher to do all the field-work and data collection, only for the Northern PI to do the writing and publishing, thus overshadowing the Southern researchers work.

- Capacity building and collaboration - Several researchers pointed to the lack of skill and capacity building in their contexts, leaving them unable to access more prestigious journals and other professional opportunities. There is currently a death of mentorship programs and peer-review opportunities for scholars to access. Additionally, a lack of South-South collaboration also keeps them isolated from peers and hinders the formation of a community of practice.

What should be the research priorities in the area of disability-inclusive education?

- Longitudinal studies – Researchers pointed out that studies conducted in the South are often done as 'one-offs' and little-to-no follow up exists. Longitudinal studies to follow a student or an intervention over time are key to addressing gaps in the system and creating lasting solutions.
- Role of the family- A critical overlooked aspect of disability-inclusive education is the role of the family and the child's home environment. Scholars expressed their frustration at the lack of

research done to study how the family's support of the child and their understanding of the importance of education can impact their trajectory.

- <u>Research on school transition –</u> There is not enough known currently about the transition rate for students with disabilities from primary to secondary school, nor is there tracking of where these students go after they drop out of school. This is vital to understanding the levers behind their decision making and addressing them. This ties into a lack of focus on higher education for students past secondary school and into tertiary education as well.

DON'T EXAGGERATE THE VULNERABILITY OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

- <u>Ethical challenges -</u>Research access to students with disabilities can be challenging. However, scholars believe that the vulnerabilities of such students are exaggerated, keeping their voices and experiences out of published work. Processes should be developed to ensure the safety and respectful inclusion of their voices to ensure holistic and well-rounded work.

- <u>Researching curriculum and teacher training -</u>More focus and research must go into what is being taught in schools and how it caters to students with a wide array of disabilities, both physical and mental. Professional development for teachers to upskill them on the use of technology and other pedagogical methods is key to ensuring inclusive classrooms that benefit all students and it is prudent to prioritize this within research to improve learning outcomes for all.

What kind of research design and methodologies should be considered while researching disability-inclusive education?

- <u>Auto ethnographic studies on inclusive education and disabilities –</u> A recommendation was made for autoethnographic research to be where groups of people with disabilities get to share their experiences and stories and be in charge of how they are told. Where participants don't have the academic writing skills, researchers can step in.

- <u>Mixed methods–</u> A strong case was made for mixed methods research in this field, with scholars arguing that no one way best captures the true experiences of people with disabilities. Numeric data alone was found to shut out minorities and their voices. However, the challenge with mixed methods is the additional funding and time required to do it justice. Qualitative research was thought to provide more robust and interesting findings in this context given its intricacies. There was an agreement that quantitative research is seen as the gold standard for research and is mostly accepted to inform policy recommendations and budget allocation.

NARRATIVES & STORIES PROVIDE THE FIELD WITH RICH DATA & IS POWERFUL

- <u>Participatory research–</u> This form of research is especially beneficial with children who are voiceless or have trouble articulating their thoughts, as well as those whose languages do not have sign language.

- <u>Strong narratives -</u> Life stories and narratives provide the disability field with rich data, letting individuals write their own stories. Often participants give more information than you anticipated. The scholars highlighted that Africans are considered to be story tellers and that this should be used in research, allowing the exploration of stories to dictate research questions.

COMMUNITY MEMBERS AS GENERATORS OF KNOWLEDGE

What are the current opportunities which can be leveraged on strengthened?

- Existing established groups: Participants named existing groups like African Network on Evidence to Africa (AfriNEAD) and CODESERIA (Senegal) that scholars should take advantage of in the region. These groups support funding and provide assistance for conferences, in addition to creating opportunities for collaboration.

- Identify the local journals: Different universities have local journals that are available to scholars outside of those universities as well. Identifying these will provide a more extensive list of opportunities for publishing without reliance on the Northern journals One example is the African Journal on Disability.

- Promote access to the findings and recommendations: Several scholars have provided recommendations to various bodies through their research. Follow up on what is happening with the recommendations. Who is implementing these recommendations? There needs to be more focus on implementation, evaluation, and monitoring.

The workshop was full of insightful and rigorous conversations that allowed participants to thoughtfully engage with each other and create long-lasting collaborations. Participants will have the opportunity to continue these engagements through the IEI CoP as well as through future blog posts.

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Visual Summary

On the following page, the above report is summarized through visual notes.

workshop series

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION INITIATIVE RESEARCH EXCHANGE

RESEARCHING DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN SUBSAHARAN AFRICA & SOUTH ASIA

"UNPACKING BARRIERS, REALIZING ENABLERS & EXPLORING SOLUTIONS"

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 22ND 2024
REGIONAL FOCUS: EAST & SOUTH AFRICA

WORLD BANK GROUP

WORKSHOP SERIES AIMS

- IDENTIFY RESEARCH PRIORITIES IN THE FIELD OF DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE EDUCATION
- UNDERSTAND THE CHALLENGES FACED BY SOUTHERN SCHOLARS RESEARCHING ON DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE EDUCATION
- INCREASE VISIBILITY OF SOUTHERN SCHOLARS & SCHOLARSHIPS
- PROMOTE COLLABORATION AMONG SCHOLARS IN THE REGION

REPORT:

PRIMARY SCHOOLING FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES: A REVIEW OF AFRICAN SCHOLARSHIP

KEY FINDINGS:

1. WITHIN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA, RESEARCH ON DISABILITY AND EDUCATION FOCUSES ON JUST A FEW COUNTRIES
2. FEW PAPERS WERE WRITTEN SOLELY BY AUTHORS BASED IN THE SSA. SOME WRITTEN IN COLLABORATION BETWEEN SSA RESEARCHER & RESEARCHER OUTSIDE OF THE REGION
3. MAJORITY OF RESEARCH STUDIES CONDUCTED VIA AFFILIATIONS WITH UK, AUSTRALIA, US AND CANADA
4. MOST STUDIES WERE FOCUSED ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION, FOLLOWED BY EFFICACY OF SPECIFIC INTERVENTIONS AND POLICY REVIEWS

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. ADOPT SYSTEMS LEVEL CHANGE
2. CONTEXTUALIZED UNDERSTANDING OF DISABILITY INCLUSIVE EDUCATION
3. INCLUDE VOICES OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES
4. IDENTIFY & ADOPT LOCAL STRATEGIES

CHALLENGES & PRIORITIES

NORTH/SOUTH PARTNERSHIPS ARE UNEQUAL

GLOBAL SOUTH RESEARCHERS

"WE DO ALL THE GROUND WORK BUT ARE NOT RECOGNIZED"

PAY ATTENTION TO ACCESS ISSUES

ETHICAL CLEARANCE CAN BE A PROBLEM

UNIVERSITIES TAKE A BIG CHUNK OF THE BUDGET

AN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION ECOSYSTEM IS NEEDED

NEED TO INCLUDE OTHER, INVISIBLE, DISABILITIES (SUCH AS AUTISM...)

DON'T EXAGGERATE THE VULNERABILITY OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERNATIONAL & REGIONAL NETWORKING

ACCESS TO FUNDING IS COMPETITIVE

ABSENCE OF CHILDREN'S VOICES, SPECIALLY RURAL CHILDREN'S

COMMUNITY FATIGUE: PEOPLE ARE TIRED OF RESEARCHERS... HEY!

WHERE ARE THE RESEARCHERS WITH DISABILITIES?

LOCALIZE RESEARCH

DESIRED RESEARCH PRINCIPLES & APPROACHES

CREATE MENTORING OPPORTUNITIES

CONFERENCES TO FOLLOW UP

DO RESEARCH THAT IMPACTS PRACTICE

EMPOWER LOCAL COMMUNITIES

PROMOTE ACCESS TO FINDINGS

LET'S PUT OUR HEADS TOGETHER & COLLABORATE

WE CANNOT RUN AWAY FROM MIXED RESEARCH DESIGN

NARRATIVES & STORIES FROM THE FIELD IS RICH DATA & POWERFUL

COMMUNITY MEMBERS AS GENERATORS OF KNOWLEDGE

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH NEEDS TO BE SUBSTANTIATED WITH NUMBERS & DATA

AND REMEMBER! PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES ARE NOT OBJECTS OR NUMBERS