INCLUSIVE EDUCATION INITIATIVE
Transforming Education for Children with Disabilities

African Scholarship Exchange

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

Dates: July 29th, 2021| Time: 7:00 - 9:30 am EST

On the 29th of July, 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 West and Central 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:

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

The workshop was attended via Zoom by 10 researchers from 3 countries across the region who represented 12 universities. The participants had, on average, 10-15 years of experience and 33% of them identified as people with disabilities.

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).

---

[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?

- <u>Ethical clearances and dilemmas</u>- All participants referred to the difficulties associated with gaining ethical clearance regarding research with people with disabilities. One participant highlighted his struggles of conducting a case study in Ghana and not being able to get ethical clearance. Complicated bureaucratic processes often hold-up the progress of the research project. This can often result in researchers excluding the voices of including children with disabilities in an attempt to avoid the ethical struggles.

- <u>Funding-</u> Scholar highlighted funding to be one of the biggest challenges faced. One researcher mentioned that interviewing people with hearing and visual impairments is expensive as you need to budget for sign interpreter and use of Braille. Lack of adequate resources to provide these services leads to these populations being left out of research. The scope of most research is also narrower due to lack of financial support to explore sources outside of the local context.

- <u>Western influences-</u> IE work published is more based on a western lens of disability and inclusion, making it difficult to understand disability through an African lens. The Western/Global North research priorities also decide how funding is allocated, making African voices underrepresented. The terminology used in research is also more North-centric, causing the African stories and experiences to not translate well.

- <u>Lack of data-</u> Participants mentioned that a lack of good data sources makes their research more difficult, especially when Western journals and funders put more of an emphasis on quantitative methods of research.

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

- <u>Longitudinal studies –</u> 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.

- Children's voices- Researchers pointed out that while students are the ones most impacted by disparities in classrooms, they are also the most underrepresented voice in most research studies. More effort needs to be made to ethically interview students both in and outside the classroom environment.

- Online teaching- Online learning became a necessity during covid-19 and not all students had access to the resources required to be able to participate.

- Professional development for general education teachers- Scholars brought up that in regular schools, general education teachers may not have enough knowledge or skill related to inclusive education. They proposed action research to help in push forward the concept of inclusive education in schools.

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

- Mixed-methods approach – Participants made a strong push for a mixed methods approach to research to ensure a holistic picture is created. They emphasized that while quantitative research gets prioritized in the Global North, there is immense value to qualitative research particularly when working with persons with disabilities as it allows them to tell their stories. One participant spoke about their experience in Ghana as it reflects the cultural setting. "Asking someone to complete a survey will never convey the true experience of an individual."

- Participatory research- The agenda should be coming from the target population. Having people with disabilities as researchers in the project instead of just participants. Disability research cannot solely rely on people with disabilities. It must also include other stakeholders (parents, teachers, educational institutions, NGOs).

- Online research methods– Researchers mentioned that especially in areas that are conflict-ridden, online research methodologies can prove to be very beneficial.

- Case studies- Researchers found case studies and story-telling to be a very effective tool to help look at

differences between all the voices that are engaged. The lived experiences of their participants helped create a more holistic picture and enriched their research.

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

No concrete avenues named but the recurring themes were:

- <u>Awareness as a result of Covid-19</u> – Covid-19 brought out the disparities and helped parents become more aware about how their children could get left out. Global awareness about the struggles of persons with disabilities increased during the pandemic, creating a more conducive environment to have conversations and do research.

- <u>Networking-</u> Researchers pointed out that opportunities like the IEI Research Exchange Workshop were a good place to meet other researchers and build networks with peers. They highlighted the importance of democratizing the space and of finding ways to operationalize through the discourses taking place between then.

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.

The next workshop in the series is planned for the 8th of September, 2021 where we will bring together colleagues from South Asian universities.

_____

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"

THURSDAY, MAY 25TH 2024
REGIONAL HUBS: WEST & CENTRAL AFRICA

WORLD BANK GROUP

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION INITIATIVE

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 IN 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

CONDUCTING RESEARCH IN FCV SETTINGS IS DIFFICULT

FINDING PARTICIPANTS IS HARD, THERE'S A LOT OF STIGMA & DISCRIMINATION

INCLUSION IN STEM RESEARCH

SIGNIFICANT GAPS IN LITERATURE

THE NEED FOR RESEARCH NEEDS TO BE UNDERSTOOD

FUNDING FOR RESEARCH IS A PROBLEM

CAN WE LOOK AT DISABILITY FROM AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE?

ETHICS CAN BE AN ISSUE

LET'S LISTEN TO THE VOICES OF DISABLED CHILDREN...

HOW DO YOU WANT TO BE INCLUDED?

I HAD TO FUND MY OWN RESEARCH

RESEARCH EXCHANGE WORKSHOP RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

TEACHER TRAINING IS IMPORTANT

MAKE SURE ALL STAKEHOLDERS ARE INCLUDED

COMMUNITY ATTITUDES & STEREOTYPES

CONSENT CAN BE A CHALLENGE

PROBLEM: LACK OF DATA

THERE'S A LOT OF BUREAUCRACY

PROGRAM AND RESEARCH FOCUS IS LIMITED TO PRIMARY EDUCATION. SECONDARY & VOCATIONAL SKILLS NEGLECTED

NEED TO TURN RESEARCH INTO PRACTICE

DESIRED RESEARCH PRINCIPLES & APPROACHES

QUALITATIVE AND HARD DATA... MIX THEM UP!

MIXED METHODS ARE MORE COLLABORATIVE

THE WORLD BANK IS AN EVIDENCE BASED INSTITUTION

RESEARCH HAS TO BE PARTICIPATORY

WE NEED TO CREATE AWARENESS!

LET'S BE ADVOCATES!

NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US!

WHO HAS ACCESS TO ONLINE LEARNING?

LONGITUDINAL STUDIES

WE NEED MORE AFRICAN RESEARCHERS

CO-CREATE KNOWLEDGE WITH PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES

THERE'S A LACK OF POLITICAL WILL

LET'S BE AWARE OF GENDER DYNAMICS

HOW DO WE MAKE SURE THAT AFRICAN RESEARCH IS DISSEMINATED?

CAN WE BE INSPIRED BY AFRICAN PHILOSOPHIES SUCH AS UBUNTU?

GIRLS WITH DISABILITIES ARE FURTHER DISADVANTAGED (SEXUAL VIOLENCE)

WE NEED TO DECOLONIZE & AFRICANIZE RESEARCH

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY IS INFLUENCED BY AVAILABILITY OF RESOURCES

RESEARCH NEEDS TO BE CONTEXTUALIZED AT A NATIONAL AND LOCAL LEVEL AS WELL AS AT AN AFRICAN LEVEL