Developing Teaching & Learning in Africa

Decolonising Perspectives

EDITOR
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Chapter Four

Inclusive Education without Resources: A Policy Approach for Sub-Saharan Africa

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Introduction

Inclusive education as an overarching philosophical framework offers a comprehensive approach for all students to have equal access to learning (Ashman, 2015). Simply put, inclusive education as a framework argues that learning opportunities should be made available to all students irrespective of their backgrounds, abilities, and locations (Armstrong, Armstrong & Spandagou, 2011; Ashman, 2015; Slee, 2001). Discrimination in any form is regarded as human rights violation and as such, it is essential for systems to embrace policies that would enable all children to learn together in regular schools located in their environments (UNICEF, 2007; WHO, 2011). Particularly, it has been argued that the special schooling system is counterproductive and does not prepare children with disabilities to partake in income generation activities (Armstrong, 2005; Miles & Singal, 2010). For example, special schools mainly train children with disabilities to acquire basic living skills, which is not tailored or directed towards the job market (Miles & Singal, 2010). If society is interested in alleviating poverty among persons with disabilities, then the best place to teach them is environments where they would acquire relevant skills to participate in economic activities.

In this, inclusive education explicitly provides opportunities to explore all-inclusive approaches to learning and to develop non-discriminating school and curriculum practices to support all students, and especially students with disabilities both within and outside of the classroom (Armstrong et al., 2011; Ashman, 2015;

Slee, 2001). This all-inclusive understanding is essential in sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries (i.e. Ghana, South Africa and Tanzania), as they lack funds, have shortages of specialist services, and more importantly, there are very few special schools and professional/clinical support facilities. However, the question – to what extent can inclusive education as an overarching framework come to support students without external resources – has not been addressed clearly and thus requires urgent exploring. More specifically, the challenge for inclusive education in SSA countries: To what extent can curriculum, personal experiences, and learning environments be adapted, changed and improved to cater for the needs of students with disabilities with little or no resources? The fundamental question that this chapter aims to tackle is, to what extent can students with disabilities be supported at all levels of schooling (i.e. systems, student, and curriculum) without external resources? Perhaps, a starting place to explore this concept is to understand how inclusive education is defined in terms of policies and operational practices within SSA countries, and then to examine how inclusive education is contextualised to assist students with disabilities within the SSA context.

Ghana's Inclusive Education policy is described in terms of "... ensuring access and learning for all children: especially those disadvantaged from linguistic, ethnic, gender, geographic or religious minority, from an economically impoverished background as well as children with special needs including those with disabilities..." (Republic of Ghana, 2015:7). The principle concept of 'ensuring' and 'access' appear to be intricately reliant on external resources (i.e. funds and facilities) – the how, when and where are not clear, and move the focus away from capitalising on the student's strengths, abilities, and competencies. Further, the notion of 'providing' something implicitly seems to be embedded in resources. Importantly, there are no operational standard built-in to know how or whether 'ensuring' is effective or ineffective, which again inadvertently is related to resources and measurement? Importantly, very little attention is given to building or developing student strengths and abilities (J-F et al., 2017).

In South Africa, the Education White Paper defines inclusive education as:

[...] acknowledging that all children and youth can learn and that all children and youth need support. Enabling education structures, systems and learning methodologies to meet the needs of all learners [...] Acknowledging and respecting differences in learners, whether due to age, gender, ethnicity, language, class, disability, HIV or other infectious diseases [...]

Department of Education, 2001:6

However, it is not clear to what extent inclusive education is possible without a system-based resource enabling structure/s? Further, the concept of ‘acknowledging’ and ‘enabling’, once again are implicitly linked to resources in terms of identifying and supporting students which to a great extent, are still dependent on funds and specialist services. It appears that even to kickstart support (i.e. acknowledging) a systems-level resource-driven top-down model is necessary in South Africa. Inclusive education or, for that matter, supporting students with disabilities appear to be a top-down resource embedded model, moving away from recognising children’s strengths, self-reliant capabilities, and agencies they bring to learning and their own development (J-F et al., 2017).

In Tanzania, inclusive education is the community’s willingness to meet the learning needs of all students. In recent National Inclusive Education Strategy, inclusive education was defined as “an approach which transforms education system, including its structure, policies, practices and human resources, to accommodate all learners in the mainstream education by addressing and responding to learners’ diverse needs” (United Republic of Tanzania, 2017). Tanzania places inclusive education within the context of ‘community’ wherein the expansion of access to equitable education to all learners is the responsibility of the community, including those with special needs as well as those who are marginalised (United Republic of Tanzania, 2017:20). It is unclear what ‘community’ and ‘willingness’ mean or imply, especially in terms of service provision, accountability, and the role of delivery in terms of supporting students with disability. The very notion of community is a far-reaching construct and convoluted with the pragmatics of who does what, when, and how, but does it recognise the needs of learners without external resources? However, though it is essential to locate and localise *community* so that it becomes responsible and held accountable in how they come to support students and foster their strengths (J-F et al., 2017).

The above-mentioned definitions are full of complexities and seem to be top-down concepts with little or no clarity around the pragmatics surrounding the implementation of an inclusive education framework in terms of service provision, support mechanisms and measurement. Further, to a great extent, the notion of an ongoing supply of resources seem to be the driving force for inclusive education agenda in SSA countries (Kalyanpur, 2014; Meekosha, 2011). It appears that the very implementation of inclusive education as a paradigm in SSA countries seems to be positioned on the availability of resources and facilities (i.e. well developed curricula, organisational arrangements, specialist staff, technical assistance, specialised material, and assistive learning devices) (Anthony, 2011;

Opoku et al., 2015; 2016; Stubbs, 2008). In SSA countries, schools and teachers seem to have the expectancy that inclusive education is only possible when resources are available (Stubbs, 2008). A number of studies confirm that teachers in SSA countries report that resources (i.e. funding, facilities and aids) are fundamental to support learning and that without such resources they would not be able to help students with disabilities (Arrah & Swain, 2014; Opoku et al., 2015; 2017a; 2017b).

The SSA countries seem to have inadvertently adopted a “supply stream endowment model”, this term is coined to mean that support is only possible when there is a continual flow of resources from an infinite source. In SSA countries, this supply stream endowment model expectancy appears to be evident at all levels: from a system based process level to teacher pedagogical training and to the pragmatics of providing everyday support in the classroom (Kalyanpur, 2014). It also appears that this “supply stream endowment model”, unfortunately, seems also to have created a real and unnecessary problem that top-down supply of resources is both necessary and imperative for teachers to be effective (Kalyanpur, 2014). But SSA countries have limited resources and have other social and economic challenges such as poverty, high levels of unemployment, corruption, and illiteracy, just to name a few. More importantly, they have failed to value the strengths, assets and self-reliant abilities that students bring with them (Eleweke & Rodda, 2002; J-F et al., 2017; Kalyanpur, 2014).

The SSA context requires a different approach to practising inclusive education and supporting students with disabilities away from supply stream endowment model to more cost-minimising, sustainable, strengths-based, and student self-reliant practices (Sharma, Forlin, Marella & Jitoko, 2017; J-F et al., 2017; Stubbs, 2008). Thus, it is essential to re-conceptualise inclusive education in terms of making it conducive to SSA countries through how it assists students with disabilities where resources are scarce. Equally, it is essential to locate the concept of disabilities in the inclusive education paradigm within the SSA context.

Disability as Part of Inclusive Education in SSA Countries

Largely, it appears that this supply stream endowment model has also come to define how students with disabilities are supported in SSA countries (Grech, 2015; Meekosha, 2011). Assisting students with disabilities is even more complicated as SSA countries have a very antagonistic view and language around disabilities (Engelbrecht, 2004; Kebaneilwe, 2016; Lamptey, De-Lawrence, Minnes &

McColl, 2015; Setume, 2016). For example, the very view of disability is defined as a deformity, and an impairment in functional physiological abilities and cognitive incapacities throughout one's life course (Ndlovu, 2016; Powell, 2006). Put another way, any classification or identification of a concern as a disability or spectrum therein is deemed a lifelong incapacity (Setume, 2016). This notion of disability is further reinforced by how SSA countries have come to interpret disability through: a socio-cultural perspective; a medicalised view to cure disability; and that disability is an economic liability.

Socio-cultural perspectives with regard to disabilities take the view that disability is a punishment for the sins of parents, and that disability is caused by a supernatural force as a penance for the atonement of errors of parents and ancestors (Agbenyega, 2003; Avoke, 2002; Opoku, Mprah, McKenzie, Sakah & Badu, 2017c). These views are still prevalent and active today, and SSA countries more commonly interpret disability as a curse from gods, to the extent that the families (i.e. extended and biological), relatives, and friends choose not to associate with children with disabilities or their immediate siblings and families, and sever long-held support and kinship ties (Avoke, 2002; Engelbrecht, 2006; Opoku et al., 2017b; Opoku et al., 2018). Such views have a negative impact on the child as they grow up learning that it is because of them that their families are ousted out of their immediate communities, and sometimes, even their own immediate families abandon them (Agbenyega, 2003; Avoke, 2002; Kebaneilwe, 2015; Opoku et al., 2017c). This further alienates, not only the children with disabilities, but also puts them away from receiving the much needed community support, help, and care.

In terms of implications within an educational context, the socio-cultural perspective highlights the significant level of discrimination and marginalisation of students with disabilities at the family and community level (Gregorius, 2016; Singal, Mahama Salifu, Iddrisu, Casely-Hayford & Lundebye, 2015). The very notion that students with disabilities are seen as a 'curse' is likely to lead to rejection by peers, an unwelcomeness in learning environments, and ostracisation by the local community, wherein they are likely to experience significant restrictions in accessing schools (Avoke, 2001; Kassah, 2008; Opoku et al., 2018). Students with disabilities are expected to remain at the end of the societal spectrum and pay the penance for the sins of parents (Baffoe, 2013). At a student level, such views disempower them and they are likely to be marginalised both within and outside of school.

Unfortunately, many teachers endorse and share these negative views about disability (Mprah, Dwomoh, Opoku, Owusu & Ampratwum, 2016; Opoku et al., 2015; Setume, 2016). It is reported that teachers are reluctant to include students with disabilities in their classrooms, and do little to challenge these negative views, which is more likely to contribute to the marginalisation of students with disabilities which keeps them from having a real possibility of learning (Mprah et al., 2016; Opoku et al., 2015; 2017c). Furthermore, it has been reported that teachers resist the inclusion of students with disabilities in the classroom, and are hesitant to teach students with disabilities as this would slow teaching and learning activities for others (Arrah & Swain, 2015; Mprah et al., 2016; Ocloo & Subbey, 2008; Opoku et al., 2015; 2017a). It is well documented that teachers in SSA countries actively exclude students with disabilities from learning and even encourage them to drop out of school (Agbenyega, 2007; Ocloo & Subbey, 2008; Opoku et al., 2015). To have a comprehensive and equitable approach to learning, SSA countries must root out all ill-informed views at all levels of society.

The Medicalised premise around disability in SSA countries is intricately linked to the notion of impaired bodies (Avoke, 2002; Grech, 2015; Meekosha, 2011; Ndlovu, 2016). This model places the problem within the individual as an infection (i.e. virus) needing to be cured, so that the original condition of functioning without deficits and defects is restored (Kassah, Kassah & Phillips, 2018; Meekosha & Soldatic, 2011). Put another way, disability is seen as a sickness and illness that needs to be treated and fully cured (Geldoff, 2016). And, to some extent, this medicalised notion got traction due to international communities trying to assist SSA countries by providing pharmacological support to alleviate symptomologies, pain, and co-morbid concerns associated with disabilities, but they seems to have been mistakenly interpreted to be a cure for disability itself (Kassah, 1998; 2001). SSA countries have somehow misunderstood the role of pharmacological support and assistive technology, to the extent that they have been lobbying international aid communities to develop strategies on a cure principle in supporting students with disabilities (Kalyanpur, 2014; Ndlovu, 2016; Setume, 2016). Further, communities receiving assistive technology and pharmacological support argue that if the right equipment and/or the right medication is prescribed, that disability can be cured once and for all, and regrettably, to some extent that SSA countries have accepted the medicalised view of cure (Geoldoff, 2016).

In terms of implications within an educational context, the medicalised premise around disability has severe negative consequences. Primarily, it leads to the notion that pharmacological support, assistive technology, and specialist facilities

are the only way to support (i.e. cure) students with disabilities (Engelbrecht, 2004; Lamptey et al., 2015). To the extent that it has been reported that teachers argue regular schools are not avenue for students with disabilities, and they direct students with disabilities to special schools (Mprah et al., 2016; Opoku et al., 2015; 2017a). Such views can lead to a segregated system of education and encourage discrimination and exclusion of students with disabilities from learning places and communities (Armstrong, 2005; Avoke, 2001; Barton, 1997; Powell, 2006).

Even before accessing or exploring educational opportunities, most families and parents are pre-occupied for years searching for a cure, and go from one specialist to another in search of remedy for the right prescription and the correct medication, which is not only likely to delay the student's involvement in learning, but can lead to significant negative view of themselves that they cannot be cured and likely to interrupt their schooling and result in gaps in knowledge (Avoke, 2001; 2002). Unfortunately, when all diagnosis and pharmacological support fails to cure, it further reinforces the socio-cultural view that disability is a curse from gods (Kebaneilwe, 2016; Setume, 2016). Thus, there is an urgent need to educate families, parents, and teachers in understanding the role of pharmacological support, assistive technology, and specialist facilities, and to counter the view that disability needs to be cured.

The economic liability is grounded in the notion that students with disabilities are a liability to the society (Opoku et al., 2017b). Consequently, society views students with disabilities as lifelong economic dependents who will never contribute meaningfully to the growth and development of the community (Kassah et al., 2018; Kassah, 2008). In addition, given the agriculture and resource-driven SSA cultures, the view is that all investment must yield their due profits and rewards in due course, and the communal family-knit economical model demand that children are expected to support parents as they grow older, as well as actively contribute towards the economic welfare of the whole family (Devereux & Getu, 2013). Thus, when children with disabilities are unable to contribute or support families, they are seen as a liability and incapable of making valuable contribution to family and the wider community (Kassah, 2008).

In terms of implications within an educational context, the economic liability positions students with disabilities as a burden on the schooling system (Stubbs, 2008). Within this notion, a student with disabilities is deemed as an ongoing expenditure and a drain on school resources and facilities, as limited as they are

(Downing, Eichinger & Williams, 1997; Eleweke & Rodda, 2002). In the SSA context, teachers and school systems seem to take the view that students with disabilities are a real economic burden on the rest of the students, and perhaps this is partly due to the socio-cultural opinions discussed earlier (Agbenyega, 2007; Eleweke & Rodda, 2002; Ocloo & Subbey, 2008). This also brings into question as to the kinds of students who would be referred to and supported by audiologists, psychologists, speech pathologists, communication support workers, and interpreters to support students with disabilities (Eleweke & Rodda, 2002; Engelbrecht, 2006; Srivastava, De Boer & Pijl, 2015). This notion of liability primarily positions students with disabilities as an inactive member of the society and actuarial liabilities, and as an impractical investment with little guarantee of any returns (Opoku et al., 2017b, 2017c). Such views perpetuate the cycle of pushing students with disabilities further out into the margins (Engelbrecht, Oswald, Kitching & Eloff, 2005).

Human Right Approach and Decolonising Education

A re-thinking of inclusive education and how to support students with disabilities in the SSA countries without resources needs to be urgently addressed with practical and realistic solutions. Further, the socio-cultural perspective, the medicalised view to cure disability, and disability as an economic liability must be challenged alongside the supply stream endowment model. Of the many, the Human Rights Framework is useful as it provides the central premise that education is a fundamental right for every child and that each child must be given a chance to participate and explore opportunities available in societies (UNICEF, 2007; WHO, 2011). The Human Rights Framework provides critical ingredients in challenging economic liability view, the socio-cultural perspectives, and the medicalised notion of cure to disability (Lindsay, 2003; Mittler, 2000; Peters, 2004; UNICEF, 2007). The Human Rights Framework first proposes that localised resources must be mobilised to capitalise on what is available and to maximise their use and potentials (Kalyanpur, 2014; Stubbs, 2008). Second, it argues that individual strengths must be developed and built upon, wherein positions students in a positive light with capabilities and possibilities that need to be discovered and established, so that they are self-reliant and resourceful (WHO, 2011). Third, it takes the view that supporting students with 'disability' is everyone's business and responsibility, and that it should begin by changing the attitudes prevalent in the society (UNICEF, 2007; WHO, 2011).

Utilising Localised Resources

Utilising localised resources must start with equipping classroom teachers with skills in how to support students with disabilities (Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001; Sharma et al., 2017). In almost every SSA country, teacher-training institutions have courses in special education to equip pre-service teachers with skills needed to adopt inclusive education approach and principles (Dalton, McKenzie & Kahinde, 2012; Engelbrecht, 2006). However, it appears that many teachers are unable to transform the knowledge they have acquired to provide practical support for students with disabilities without the 'supply stream endowment' model (Agbenyega, 2007; Eleweke & Rodda, 2002; Ocloo & Subbey, 2008). This is because teacher-training primarily rotates around using supportive materials and technological resources to support students with disabilities rather than using localised materials and tools that are within the immediate reach (Stubbs, 2008).

More focused and specialised training is required to inform and educate teachers to use and capitalise resources within their own means, such as: time, space, natural surroundings (e.g. vegetation, animals, soil, minerals and water), natural resources (e.g. rivers, mountains and landscape) and the community (e.g. peers, other teachers and elders in the community). This kind of training will enable teachers to make the best of what is available within their own means and scope. This is what we refer to as 'immersive teaching' where teaching and learning activities are intertwined with materials available in the local communities.

For instance, in countries such as Ghana, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, and Uganda, most people are engaged in farming, and as such, it would be worthwhile to link learning to activities to the most common practices in the community. Additionally, Central Uganda, where the hospitality industry is booming, teachers could be urged to collaborate with industry partners to offer students practical experience, training, and apprenticeship beyond the classroom. Further, when a student with a disability identifies an area of interest, efforts should be directed towards supporting them to specialise and advance their interest. The priority here is to develop the capacity of teachers to utilising localised resources and to empower students with disabilities (Ashman, 2015). It is important to add here that not everyone will be in classroom for academic purposes. Therefore, there is the need for entrepreneurship and skills training geared towards equipping students with disabilities the skills to participate in economic activities.

Develop Individual Strengths and Assets

Fostering students' strengths within their learning is likely to improve both their engagement and will capitalise on their strengths and assets (Sternberg, 2000; Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2000). The primary focus of teaching and learning should be to develop students' strengths and assets especially when it comes to supporting students with disabilities (Ashman, 2015). The decisive priority is to support students to capitalise on acquiring skills, using their own strengths and assets. In an inclusive classroom, students with disabilities need teachers' support to explore their talents and work toward specialising in what they are able and capable of doing (Setume, 2016; Stone-MacDonald, 2012). Students learn best when it is based on interests, strengths and assets, which teachers need to capitalise in an effort towards practising inclusive education (Ashman, 2015). Knowing student's background, their experiences and allowing each student to uniquely participate in learning is likely to enrich their interest in learning. What's more, teachers using and building on students' interests and curiosity are likely to build their confidence and give a voice to students to share what they are good at and how they see their strengths being used in their learning (Sternberg, 2000; Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2000).

Changing Attitudes and Building an Inclusive Society

Pre-service teacher preparation must position teachers as agents of change (Setume, 2016; Swanepoel, 2009; Watson, 2012). This is more important and necessary in the SSA context as teachers have high social status in their local communities, and teachers play an integral part as knowledge experts, interpreters, translators, and generally dominate in almost every society (Setume, 2016; Stone-MacDonald, 2012). Further, teachers are likely to become policymakers and decision makers so they should be empowered to address and tackle issues of discrimination, inequality, and challenge the various myths and negative stereotypes in the society (Opoku et al., 2017b; 2017c; Swanepoel, 2009). Teachers should be the drivers of inclusive education and must be given a real voice in policy development and around the pragmatics of its delivery (Sharma et al., 2017).

In developing a comprehensive SSA system of education, the first step is to work towards changing attitudes of teachers towards individuals with disabilities. No declaration or pronouncements can change the minds of people if concerted efforts are not put in place to address the negative and misinformed views about disability. Thus, pre-service teacher education must be educated to challenge and

address all negative aspects and understandings about disabilities (Johansson, 2014; Singal, 2006). Pre-service teacher education in SSA must focus on equipping and developing strong links between theory, practice and culture so that teachers can understand and explore the inter-connectedness of educational methods, classroom practices and cultural values (Singal, 2006).

One of the missing links in teacher education programmes within SSA is the role of cultural views around disabilities, in other words, it is not dealt with in practice. SSA communities have practised a different form of inclusive practices, and it is essential to building inclusive education on empowering teachers to be agents of change (Berghs, 2017). Teacher education must move away from traditional methods that disadvantaged students with disabilities and embrace innovative ways of teaching practices (Agbenyega & Deku, 2011). It is high time SSA countries take action in making teachers resourceful social agents of positive change and give them a platform and a voice to positively engage in the implementation of inclusive education (Stone-MacDonald, 2012; Swanepoel, 2009; Watson, 2012). The governments should develop a system where teachers advocate for the rights of their students with disabilities and educate themselves to care and share useful strategies.

Conclusion

It appears that SSA countries have inadvertently exercised a different form of inclusive education and practices that are not culturally driven, and it is essential to build inclusive education on empowering teachers to be agents of change alongside empowering student with disabilities. This chapter has explored barriers to inclusive education in SSA countries and has shown how schools, systems and teachers are unable to adequately serve and support students with disabilities because of the supply endowment model alongside the socio-cultural views, medicalised cure principle and the economic liability notion around disabilities.

The chapter has made the case that supporting students with disabilities should be re-conceptualised away from the supply endowment model to capitalising and using local resources, means, and materials. This is not to say that resources in terms of external funds are not necessary or that funding is not needed, but this chapter makes the case that systems, personnel, curriculum, and pedagogy must not be solely dependent on funding. Perhaps the issue in SSA countries is not be over dependent on the supply endowment model. To address this notion of dependency, this chapter has highlighted the need for change in teacher

attitudes, build a system of capitalizing on resources and to empower students with disabilities. Consequently, teacher-training programmes in SSA countries must revised their training programmes and must prepare teachers to be real agents of change at all levels of schooling and in the community.

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