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Inclusive education in developing countries: a closer look at its implementation in the last 10 years

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The objective to provide education for all by the year 2015 includes students with disabilities. In the context of developing countries, this group of students is more excluded than included from educational services. This study presents an overview of literature in order to establish which projects have been undertaken and supported the inclusion of students with disabilities. The first aim is to examine the projects undertaken by governments and international organisations to include this group in regular education, the second aim is to examine the effects of these projects in terms of an increase in the number of students with disabilities in regular schools. An analysis of the literature was carried out by focusing on projects including the following four factors: external, school, teachers and parents. Fifteen empirical studies/reports were selected in which several undertaken projects were reported. The implemented projects focused mainly on school and teacher factors. Only two studies reported their effects. The findings are discussed by addressing the approaches of the projects undertaken and the serious gaps in implementing inclusive education in developing countries.

Keywords: effects; implementation; inclusive education; students with disabilities; developing countries

Introduction

In the twenty-first century inclusive education is considered as the right of every child to be a part of mainstream society (Ainscow and Miles 2008; UNESCO 2003). Inclusive education is seen as an international agenda, partly running parallel to the objective of Education for All (EFA) (Kalyanpur 2011; Miles and Singal 2010). In 2000, the World Education Forum (Dakar, Senegal) set the goal of achieving EFA by 2015. This aim included disadvantaged children, working children, remote rural dwellers and nomads, ethnic and linguistic minorities, children affected by conflict and those with disabilities (UNESCO, 2000). In that same year EFA was reiterated as a Millennium Development Goal (MDG) by the international community (Miles and Singal 2010). EFA and inclusive education share similar goals, be it that the latter also prefers EFA to be provided in regular schools.

Inclusive education mainly has focused on the position of students with special needs. In many countries these students do not even attend schools, let alone a special one. The right of children with special needs to attend a regular school has its genesis in many international statements, the most recent being the United Nations Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD 2006). In the

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context of students with disabilities, the Convention refers to them having “access to good, inclusive and free primary and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live” (UNCRC 2006, article 24). In line with international standards the term “students with disabilities” refers to those with sensory, communication, motor, learning disabilities and behaviour disorders (WHO 2010).

Partly resulting from this rights-based approach, there is an intense global debate on implementing inclusive education (Cooper and Jacob 2011; Ferguson 2008; Yeung 2012). This has generated an interest among policy-makers, researchers and practitioners on the question of “how” to make education inclusive. Particularly new legislation implemented by Western countries has changed school policies, improved teacher training and enhanced parental involvement (Pijl and Meijer 1997; Singal 2008). It resulted in making schools supportive and stimulating for diverse groups of students, in creating communities which encourage and celebrate student diversity and in supporting achievement (Ainscow, Booth, and Dyson 2006; Booth and Ainscow 2002; UNESCO 2005). On a political and social level, a shift was made from a one-dimensional view of disability to a new, three-dimensional one embracing community, social equality and respect (Thomas 2013). Booth (1999) offers a wider perspective of inclusion as a process of increasing *participation* of children and reducing their exclusion from the curricula, cultures and communities of a school.

However, these changes resonate more on social and political levels than in daily practice in schools. When it comes to implementing inclusive education, there are diverse implications for different parts of the world, particularly between Western or developed and developing countries (Armstrong, Armstrong, and Spandagou 2011). As stated by Peters (2003), inclusive education may be implemented with different goals, based on different motives, reflecting different classifications of disabilities and providing services within different contexts. In most Western countries, inclusive education started by including students with disabilities in regular schools, but it is no longer associated solely with such students (Miles and Singal 2010). However, for the developing world this is not always the case. For example: 57 million children of primary age do not attend school (UNESCO 2011) and the focus then is more on providing EFA than on making schools more inclusive. The real battle here is to get children to school, in places where there is no mass education, low literacy rates and widespread exclusionary pressures on educating particular groups like girls (Booth 1999). Furthermore, inclusive education embraces an array of issues including health, education, social welfare and youth development (Alur and Rioux 2003). This demonstrates that inclusive education has different implications depending on context and developmental phase of a country.

In Western countries many issues have been addressed in implementing inclusive education, such as partnerships between special schools and regular schools (Frederickson et al. 2004; Rose and Coles 2002), the role of special needs coordinators (Cole 2005), inclusive pedagogies (Florian and Linklater 2010), teacher attitudes (Avramidis, Bayliss, and Burden 2000), or teacher training (Norwich and Nash 2011). Pijl and Meijer (1997) have suggested three broad groups of factors in implementing inclusive education: (1) *external*: i.e. public opinion and attendant legislation/policy, regulations and funding, (2) *school*: i.e. structure for providing special services in schools, the role of special education, the support system, decentralisation and cooperation between schools, and (3) *teacher*: i.e. teacher attitude, available instruction time, knowledge and skills of the teacher and teaching methods

including available teaching materials. Besides the external, school, and teacher factors, the importance of parental involvement has been emphasised (Alur 2010; DFID 2010; Wehbi 2006). It has been found that parents play a role in scaling up inclusive practices in many countries. Because of this important role, parents should be considered as a fourth factor.

Due to the different contexts and backgrounds of the Western world compared to developing countries the same set of factors may not be applicable. Thus, it is possible that in developing countries other factors and actors play important roles. This is likely to result in differences in the pace of implementing inclusive education. A different pace of implementation is obvious in regions such as Africa, Asia, and Southeast Asia. Certain countries on those continents are revising educational policies based on international statements (Kalyanpur 2011; Serpell and Jere-Folotiya 2011; Villa et al. 2003), while others are at the stage of formulating policies (UNESCO 2007; World Bank 2005) and still others expect non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to take the lead (Alur 2002; UNESCO 2009). While looking at inclusive education in terms of pace, aspects and key players, it is important to remember that the history of inclusive education in developing countries is no more than a decade old.

Developments at policy level are important but, ultimately, inclusive education comes down to changing education in the school and classroom (Ainscow and Miles 2008; Croft 2010). Increasingly, efforts have been made by international organisations¹ to bridge the gap between policy and practice in developing regions. Under the flagship of United Nations agencies several projects have been undertaken to make education inclusive (UNICEF 2003; World Bank 2005). Whether these projects have been successful is largely unknown. Research addressing the issue of disabilities and inclusion in developing countries is limited and tends to focus on its prevalence (Singal 2010). Examples of studies investigating various aspects of inclusive education are the Rydstrom study in 2010 into resources required in Vietnam, that of Yu, Su, and Liu in 2011 addressing teacher training and teacher attitudes in China, that of Kristensen et al. in 2006 on the need for reformation and transformation in special schools in Uganda and the one of Alur in 2010 looking at the challenges of inclusion in socio-cultural ideologies of India and Cambodia (Kalyanpur 2011). Although there are some projects undertaken by international organisations and local NGOs to implement inclusive education in developing countries, not much is known about their effects. This leads to a serious gap in our knowledge regarding the effects of these projects on inclusive education. The argument here is that if the projects undertaken were known to be effective in terms of an increase in the numbers of students with disabilities in regular schools, then these projects could be replicated in other developing countries.

This study aims to increase our knowledge about the projects undertaken to implement inclusive education in developing countries and the effects of these projects. In this study the following questions will be addressed:

- (1) Which projects at policy, school, teacher and parent/public level have been undertaken to make education inclusive for students with disabilities in developing countries?
- (2) What are the effects of these projects in including students with disabilities in regular schools in developing countries?

Definition of the term “developing countries”

In this study we focus on inclusive education in developing countries. Developed and developing countries refer to the broad global differences in economic and political powers (Stubbs 2008). Neutral terms like countries of the “North” and “South” to refer to this difference are also used (Croft 2010; Singal 2010; Stubbs 2008). According to United Nations statistics there is no established designation for dividing countries into “developed” and “developing” nations. In order to answer the research questions of this current study, we use the recent classification of countries according to the Human Development Index (HDI) given by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP 2011). The HDI ranked 187 countries into four categories: very high human development, high human development, medium human development and low human development based on education, health and living standards for each country (UNDP 2011). This study focuses on the countries that fall into the medium and low human development categories, which may also be referred to as developing countries. A total number of 47 countries are ranked as medium human development, including Jordan, Algeria and Sri Lanka, while 93 countries are ranked as low human development, like Kenya, Pakistan and Bangladesh (UNDP 2011).

Measuring the effects of (educational) projects

The possible effects of implementing inclusive education for students with disabilities can be defined and measured in various ways. Several studies have reported inclusive educational practices involving various stakeholders such as local/school authorities, teachers, parents and students. According to Horner et al. (2005), an educational practice refers to an educational approach, system change, curricular or behavioural intervention implemented with an expectation of measurable educational, behavioural or physical benefit. Further, Carter, Sisco, and Chung (2010) have grouped the educational practices into three broad areas aiming at student, peer and support focused interventions. However, in the context of developing countries, it is argued that the primary concern is to make students with disabilities visible and present in regular neighbourhood schools. In the light of the development of inclusive education in developing countries over the last decade, the primary goal is that students with disabilities start attending regular schools and the quality of the education they receive or their academic and social outcomes come second. Therefore, it is logical to first establish the presence of such students in regular schools. The current study focuses on effects in terms of an increase in the number of students with disabilities as a first effect of the projects undertaken.

Method

A literature study was set up to present an overview of recent projects undertaken in the last 10 years. The procedure used to search for the studies/reports, the selection criteria and the analysis is described below.

Search procedure

The search for the relevant literature was made via the EBSCOhost complete electronic database, which includes 30 databases including ERIC, Medline PsycINFO

and SocINDEX. Moreover, Google was used to search for reports by international organisations and United Nations agencies. Research papers were also manually searched in National Association for Special Needs (NASSEN) publications. We used the following keywords to search for relevant reports and studies: “inclusive education”, “inclusion”, “students with special needs”, “students with disabilities”, “policy”, “teachers” and “parents”. These keywords were combined with the names of individual countries taken from the medium and low ranking categories of the HDI. The combinations of these words were searched in both the article’s title and abstract.

A search was then made for reports from United Nations agencies like the Children’s Fund, the Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, the World Health Organization and as well as international agencies such as Save the Children, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and the Department for International Development (DFID). Names of the organisations were combined with the key words: “inclusive education”, “children with special needs”, “students with disabilities”, “inclusion”, “education for all”, and “regional reports”.

The search was conducted in March 2012. In order to present a recent overview, the time period was limited to between 2000 and 2011.

Selection of studies and reports

In order to answer the first research question, studies and reports were selected which met the following criteria:

- (a) peer reviewed studies or (non) peer reviewed reports from international organisations;
- (b) studies or reports focusing on regular primary schools;
- (c) inclusion of students with disabilities in developing countries (HDI, UNDP 2011);
- (d) projects pertaining to implementing inclusive education in medium and low ranking countries on the HDI.

In order to answer the second research question we added one criterion:

- (a) studies or reports reporting the implementation effect in the country concerned in terms of an increase in the number of students with disabilities attending regular schools before and after the project was undertaken.

The search resulted in 157 references of which 106 studies and 51 reports. A total number of 38 studies were excluded on the basis of the first criterion (see Table 1). The remaining 68 studies were then evaluated using the other criteria. Seven were untraceable (e.g. not available via the Internet or library). This resulted in 61 studies for further assessment. After reading these studies carefully, 50 were deleted from the database because they did not meet the other criteria, i.e. did not focus on regular primary school (seven), focused on general rather than inclusive education (15) did not focus on projects about implementing inclusive education but on measurement of attitudes or status of students with special educational needs (28). After deleting these studies the final database comprised 11 studies.

Table 1. Reasons for rejecting studies in the first filtering round.

Selection criteria	Number of studies rejected	Number of reports rejected
Not peer reviewed	38	
Not focusing on regular primary school	7	
Not focusing on students with disabilities in developing countries	15	20
Not focusing on projects pertaining to implementation of inclusive education	28	27
Total deleted	88	47
Total selected	11	4

When applying the selection criteria for the reports, 47 were excluded. Twenty reports did not focus on students with disabilities and 27 were guidelines, manuals or proceedings of conferences rather than projects undertaken to implement inclusive education (see Table 1). The filtering resulted in four reports which were selected for further analysis. The studies in which projects were described covered 16 developing countries based on the medium and low ranking HDI (UNDP 2011) (see Figure 1).

The analysis of the studies and reports was carried out in two stages. First, all reports and studies were screened and analysed by the first author. Second, unclear and ambiguous reports and studies were discussed, along with the summaries of the analysed reports, within the group of authors, resulting in a shared decision about including the study/report.

A total number of 11 studies and four reports remained for the first research question. When the criterion on implementation effect for the second research question was added, only two studies remained.

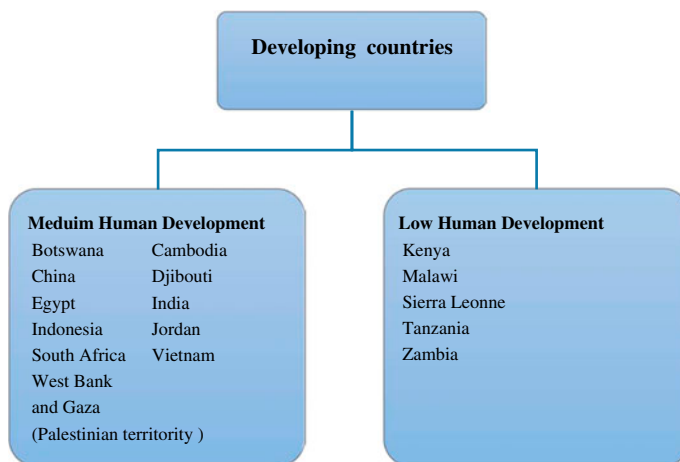


Figure 1. Overview of developing countries involved in the selected studies.

Results

The selected studies are described in two parts. In the first part, projects are described and categorised according to the four factors mentioned by Pijl and Meijer (1997). In the second part, the effects of these projects are described in terms of an increase in the number of students with disabilities in regular schools after the project was undertaken. The findings are grouped as external factors, school factors, teacher factors and parent factors.

Results 1: Projects undertaken in developing countries

External factor (legislation/policy)

Eight studies and two reports described projects which focused on policy revision, such as clearly mentioning students with disabilities in legislation and educational policies as well as clear roles and responsibilities of the various departments involved in formulating and implementing policies and raising public awareness.

Alur (2002) and Singal (2006) describe an important aspect of policy development as being a designation of clear roles and responsibilities of the various governmental departments in implementing the policy. While their studies describe two government departments as being responsible in India for the education of students with disabilities, their roles were not clearly defined. This *shared responsibility* led to ambiguity and confusion in educating these students. In such a situation the NGOs took a lead and in the last decade have established themselves as a pressure group. Alur (2010) describes the key role played by an NGO as a pressure group in formulating a national policy for inclusive education. It also describes a *revision in NGO policy* from institution based services to community ones.

Revisions in policy, based on internationally developing trends to include students with disabilities categorically, have been made in several countries. Dart (2007) in Botswana, Kalyanpur (2011) in Cambodia, Serpell and Jere-Folotiya (2011) in Zambia, and UNESCO (2007) in Indonesia all give details of children with disabilities being included in “inclusive education” as being part of a national policy revision.

The UNESCO report (2007) describes a policy of *abolished school fees* for students with or without disabilities. This was in response to EFA (basic education) in Africa for countries like Kenya, Malawi, Sierra Leone and Tanzania.

Several reports and studies see the importance of *public awareness* as a tool to implement inclusive education. Villa et al. (2003) in Vietnam and World Bank (2005) in Egypt, the West Bank and Gaza described projects with a focus on enhancing community support by training local leaders and generally disseminating information regarding disability. These projects are taken jointly by local and international organisations.

School factor

Five studies and one report described specific projects at school level, like providing educational services to students with disabilities in neighbourhood schools, collaboration between various organisations, partial inclusion and certain medical approaches for students with disabilities.

Studies by Deng and Holdsworth (2007) in west China and Villa et al. (2003) in Vietnam described projects based on *collaboration* between local governments and international organisations. Deng and Holdsworth (2007) describe a three-year project of systematic planning and implementation carried out in three phases. This focused on: (i) gathering information about students with disabilities, (ii) formulating school policy and a school development plan with head teachers and teachers, (iii) training and instructional skills to address disabilities of students. Villa et al. (2003) describe a similar project focusing on collaboration in three provinces of Vietnam, aimed at training teachers, promoting cooperative learning, involving community leaders and age appropriate placing of students with disabilities in regular classrooms. Both the projects had a wider scope by involving the entire local community.

Narayan et al. (2005) in India and Ngcobo and Muthukrishna (2011) in a South African province have described the initiatives of *local schools* to include students with disabilities. These schools have placed such students in classrooms through goodwill and a positive attitude.

Singh (2009) has described the *teamwork between teachers and specialists* to include students with disabilities in regular classroom in one Indian city. The study describes the teamwork of specialists, including special educators and speech therapists in planning educational programmes and developing teaching materials for students with disabilities in a regular school.

The World Bank (2005) mentions two projects. The first in Jordan describes *partial inclusion* at school level. Under this programme resource rooms were created in regular schools to address disability, whereby individual students were supported by a specialist educator or speech therapist. The second project in Djibouti, the West Bank and Gaza was based on a *medical approach* at school level. This approach supported the well-being of the children rather than their inclusion. It suggests rehabilitating students with disabilities by providing aids, appliances and a component of special education.

Teacher factor

Two reports focused at teacher level, reporting on two projects involving *teacher training*. The first, a UNICEF report (2003), describes a teacher training project undertaken in five cities of India. The training was conducted by local organisations with the support of international organisations in terms of expertise, knowledge and consultation. Training was based on “index for inclusion” developed by Booth and Ainscow (2002), which has three dimensions to it, namely inclusive policies, inclusive culture and inclusive practices. The latter dimension was the responsibility of local NGOs, with support from international organisations. The World Bank (2005) report describes a similar project in Cairo (Egypt) (see Table 2).

Parent factor

One study and two reports focused on the role of parents in educating their children with disabilities in terms of having negative attitudes and a lack of information about available services. NGOs have undertaken projects based on these parents recognising the importance of knowledge and information about disability, its management and available services.

Alur (2010) describes NGO initiatives in Mumbai (India) to empower parents by involving them as *equal partners* in the education of their child. These initiatives

Table 2. Summary of the studies and the outcomes per factor ($N = 15$ studies/reports).

References	Countries	Report /study	Key focus	Effect
<i>External factors</i>				
Alur (2002)	India	Study	Shared responsibility of two government departments	N/A
Alur (2010)	India	Study	Revision of NGO policy	N/A
Dart (2007)	Botswana	Study	Policy revision	N/A
Kalyanpur (2011)	Cambodia	Study	Policy revision	N/A
Serpell and Jere-Folotiya (2011)	Zambia	Study	Policy revision	N/A
Singal (2006)	India	Study	Shared responsibility of two government departments	N/A
UNESCO (2007)	Africa: Kenya, Malawi, Sierra Leone, Tanzania	Report	Policy of fee abolition	N/A
UNESCO (2009)	Indonesia	Report	Policy revision	N/A
Villa et al. (2003)	Vietnam	Study	Public awareness	N/A
World Bank (2005)	MENA: Egypt, West Bank and Gaza, Jordan	Report	Public awareness	N/A
<i>School factors</i>				
Deng and Holdsworth (2007)	West China	Study	Collaboration	Yes
Narayan et al. (2005)	India	Study	Local school placement	N/A
Ngcobo and Muthukrishna (2011)	South Africa	Study	Local school placement	N/A
Singh (2009)	India	Study	Teamwork of teachers and specialists	N/A
Villa et al. (2003)	Vietnam	Study	Collaboration	Yes
World Bank (2005)	Jordan	Report	Partial inclusion	N/A
World Bank (2005)	Djibouti, West Bank and Gaza		Medical approach	N/A
<i>Teachers factors</i>				
UNICEF (2003)	India	Report	Teacher training	N/A
World Bank (2005)	Egypt	Report	Teacher training	N/A
<i>Parents factors</i>				
Alur (2010)	India	Study	Involvement as equal partners	N/A
UNICEF (2003)	India	Report	Sensitising and informing parents	N/A
World Bank (2005)	Egypt	Report	Sensitising and informing parents	N/A

Note: MENA, Middle East and North African countries; NGO, non-government organisation, N/A, not applicable.

were not limited to only training to manage their child at home but also to encourage parents to participate in decision making, auditing, evaluating services and acting as resources in sensitising communities. The reports of UNICEF (2003)

in five cities of India and the World Bank (2005) in a slum area of Cairo (Egypt) also describe joint initiatives between local and international organisations that focus on *sensitising and informing parents* and communities about disability. These initiatives are mainly through community workers working with a rights-based approach and the “index for inclusion” developed by Booth and Ainscow (2002).

Summary of projects undertaken in developing countries

To summarise, we found several studies describing various projects with a specific focus on external factors, like revising policies according to international guidelines on inclusive education. Limited projects were undertaken in informing the general public about such policies. Regarding the school factor, projects were based on different approaches, such as inclusive, partially inclusive or on a medical approach. In addition, such projects were at individual school level or in collaboration with organisations. With respect to teachers, NGO training about disabilities was also mentioned. Regarding parent factors, the dissemination of information on special needs and the involvement of parents as equal partners was mentioned only in a few studies/reports.

Results 2: Effects of projects under taken in developing countries

In order to answer the second research question, we examined whether studies/reports mentioned the effects of projects in terms of an increase in students with disabilities attending regular schools before and after the project undertaken (see Table 2). Two out of 15 studies/reports reported data indicating that the project had a positive effect.

These studies showing positive effects are described by Deng and Holdsworth (2007) in West China and Villa et al. (2003) in Vietnam. Both projects consisted of collaboration between local government as well as local and international NGOs. Deng and Holdsworth (2007) describe the involvement of community leaders and the training of head teachers and class teachers as initiatives which resulted in an increase of students with disabilities in regular primary schools. Before the project began 30% of students with disabilities were already in regular schools, a situation described as “unconscious inclusion”. After the three-year joint project 60% of students with disabilities attended regular education, described as “conscious inclusion.” In a similar project mentioned by Villa et al. (2003) in Vietnam, the initiatives are described as community involvement, training teachers about teaching methods such as promoting cooperative learning and age appropriate placement of students with disabilities. During the four-year project the number of students with disabilities in regular school increased from 30% to 86%.

To summarise research on the attendance of students with disabilities in regular education is very limited. In two small-scale projects it was reported as an effect.

Overall summary

Inclusive education for students with disabilities is receiving growing global attention by international/national organisations (Armstrong, Armstrong, and Spandagou 2010; Engelbrecht 2006; Singal 2006). This study presents an overview of available literature regarding projects and their effects on inclusive education in developing countries. The projects are broadly categorized into four factors: external, school, teacher and parent.

The study began with a systematic search for empirical studies in developing countries defined by the UNDP as medium and low ranking on a HDI. In total 140 countries fell into these two categories (UNDP 2011). Surprisingly, we found that only 16 countries (out of 140) had projects on inclusion of students with disabilities (see Figure 1). These projects, however, were often small scale and confined to a small area like a school or a city (see Alur 2010; UNICEF 2003; World Bank 2005). This striking fact has led to grave concerns regarding the status of research on inclusive education in developing countries.

Inclusive education requires new legislation and clarity concerning its definition and objectives. We found that few countries have clearly defined students with disabilities. Although a number of developing countries signed the recent UNCRPD (2006), students with disabilities are not always taken care of in education policies. It appears that including students with disabilities in education is certainly not a priority. In the last decade, international organisations have been key players in supporting the development of education in general in developing countries. However, it seems they have largely remained silent on the matter of including children with disabilities in their programmes. An example Alur (2008) points out is that in the Indian context students with disabilities were exempt from education policy because discussions did not lead to decisions. So far, according to Rambla et al. (2008) UNESCO/IBE workshops have contributed to the discussion on inclusive education in Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, but did not result in any projects to increase the number of students with special educational needs in regular education. The only outcome is the description of the current status of students with disabilities in UNESCO reports. A constructive aspect of it is that the position of the children with disabilities is highlighted in terms of educational programmes.

In most developing countries, regular schools have large classes with few teachers. Consequently, many teachers hesitate to work with students with disabilities, finding it an additional workload (UNICEF 2003). This review showed that teachers receive very little attention in developing countries. A few studies have reported on teachers' attitude towards inclusive education in developing countries and indicated their inadequate knowledge and skills in meeting the needs of students with disabilities (Johnstone and Chapman 2009; Kuyini and Desai 2007; Mdikana, Ntshangase, and Mayekiso 2007; Ocloo and Subbey 2008; Parasuram 2006). While these studies provide insight into knowledge, skills and attitudes and possible variables influencing this situation, they do not focus on teachers' actual behaviour in the classroom. The effects of teacher training on, for instance, classroom climate or academic and social outcomes, are often forgotten. It seems a worthwhile goal to focus on this in future research in developing countries.

This study further revealed that projects in terms of parent involvement have been extremely limited and emphasises the lack of information available regarding children with a disability and the options parents have. However, parents of children with disabilities in Western countries have been involved in the education of their child. Importantly, parents are aware of their rights and options (Engelbrecht et al. 2005; Wehbi 2006; Yssel et al. 2007). In developing countries, empowering parents can be seen as a bottom up approach in implementing policies, like for example the initiatives of NGOs in the Indian context (Alur 2010).

A disappointing finding is that, based on our selection criteria, we only found two studies reporting on the effects of projects. Although we do not undermine the significance of studies and projects without data on effects, we do argue that report-

ing evaluations and effects is important. Effects of projects were formulated in terms of an increase in the number of students with disabilities in regular schools and one could argue that the criterion was too conservative. Other effect measures could have presented a more positive outcome. The most important lesson here is that projects are evaluated and how this is done is then a second issue.

Discussion

The current study draws attention to a number of concerns. First, the time scale to achieve EFA as a second MDG by 2015 is extremely tight. This fact calls for a response from every level of the international community. Although the results of this study seem disappointing in terms of effects, nevertheless a positive outcome is that the position of children with disabilities in educational policies and legislation of the developing countries has become more visible. While saying this, we are conscious of the incomparable political, economic, social and cultural identities of each country included, as the only commonality is that they are grouped by the UNDP on the HDI. Second, the mere physical presence of students with disabilities in schools or classrooms does not automatically lead to positive academic or social outcomes. The worry regarding the academic and social outcome of a student with disability has already been expressed in recent studies from Western countries (Armstrong, Armstrong, and Spandagou 2010; Ferguson 2008; Frederickson et al. 2007; Koster et al. 2010; Norwicki 2003; Pijl, Frostad, and Flem 2008; Ruijs, Peetsma, and Van der Veen 2010). Developing countries might benefit from this knowledge by measuring such outcomes when projects have been undertaken, or are planned to be implemented. A careful planning is cautioned here while learning from the Western countries. Thomas (2013) signals the dangerous consequences of *copycat educational ideology* from the West for developing countries in terms of curricular desertification and school violence, which might act as a warning for international organisations (see Harber 2004; Sayed 2002; Thomas 2013).

The study clearly indicates that there is insufficient empirical evidence on the effects of projects under the aegis of international organisations. It is alarming that governments and other organisations proceed in developing or implementing inclusive education without actual knowledge on possible outcomes. In setting up the evaluation of projects, an important aspect to bear in mind is that the evaluations of such projects are generally carried out by the same organisations. To make these projects more evidence based, an alternative would be to have them evaluated by an independent body.

Another point of interest in the two studies reporting positive effects of including students with disabilities was the impressive increase of the number of students with disabilities in regular education settings. The number of students with disabilities attending regular schools doubled. This raises questions about the calculation of the effects. Effect studies are far from easy to perform and require skilled, independent researchers.

This review shows that in developing countries the implementation of inclusive education is basically undertaken by the NGOs instead of a country's government. The studies of Alur (2002, 2008) mention similar findings. Disappointingly, the role of governments seems to be limited to the formulation or changing of education policies. The initiatives in implementing these policies at grass-roots level is left to local or international NGOs. It is reasonable that NGOs are engrossed singlehand-

edly in playing a number of roles, such as acting as pressure groups to governments for policy change, service delivery, raising community awareness, mapping resources and mobilising communities that there is scarcely time for empirical based, pre and post designed reporting.

This review highlights the worrying situation of inclusive education in developing countries. It is not based solely on Western perspectives as the first author is a resident of a developing country. It is all too easy to say that what works in Western countries, will work in developing countries as well.

Ways forward

The debate on inclusive education in developing countries is not much more than a decade old. International agreements push developing countries to speed up and make up for lost time. It is tempting to copy the experiences from the Western world quickly: start changing laws and regulations, adapt teacher education, empower parents and do all the other sensible things the West has done. In doing so, we assume that what works for Western countries will work in other settings as well. But it is not just a matter of technically making schools more inclusive.

This paper looks at the implementation of inclusive education for students with disabilities in developing countries. Some of the studies described in this paper suggest that the involvement of the whole local community and local authorities is extremely important (see Deng and Holdsworth 2007, Villa et al. 2003). This so-called community based rehabilitation (CBR) approach has been successfully used in other fields such as HIV/AIDS and in addressing other health issues of the World Bank projects (as quoted in Groce and Bakhshi 2011). It seems wise to utilise the tremendous potential of CBR in including children with disabilities in developing countries. A well planned and systematic CBR programme can expand the development towards more inclusive schooling involving the local community and is a means to battle the prevailing social assumptions regarding students with disabilities.

Note

1. International organisations refers to United Nations agencies like UNICEF, UNESCO and the local NGOs.

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