

## Inclusive Education: Are We There? Some Global Challenges, Contradictions and Anomalies

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**ABSTRACT** Since the signing of the Salamanca statement in 1994, various countries have vowed to implement inclusive education. Different version of inclusion have been adopted worldwide but critics are beginning to suspect that, while inclusion sounds good in theory, it has not yet translated into implementable and realisable ideals. The study on which this analytical paper is based therefore explored challenges, contradictions and anomalies in the implementation of inclusive education globally. Various articles by leading scholars in the field of inclusive education were reviewed. The findings indicate, inter alia, that inclusive education has not yet come into its own right due to the varied contexts, conceptualisations and interpretations of the notion. It follows that leading scholars and practitioners in the field of inclusion should review the status quo, as well as reconceptualise and redesign the strategies to enhance its pedagogical implementation.

### INTRODUCTION

Despite international declarations and statements by various organisations and countries about the internationally adopted notion of inclusion, it is debatable whether it has been implemented successfully. The reason is that it is conceptualised differently due to the varying contexts which influence its implementation and practice (Dyson 2001; Artiles and Dyson 2005; Florian and Kershner, 2009; Makoelle 2013). The concept is so widely regarded as being context-bound that there is confusion about its use and meaning (Clough and Corbett 2000; O'Brien 2001). For instance practitioner are exposed to various interpretations of inclusion that some believe that their understanding could be applicable in all contexts. While some scholars confine it to the reorganisation of schools to be accommodative of all learners, others believe it to be about social justice. For example, Ainscow (2010) refers to inclusion as a process of reorganising the school to be responsive to the needs of all its learners, while Artiles and Kozleski (2007) conceptualise the term more broadly as a goal to bring about an inclusive society. This explains why the notion of social inclusion is sometimes used interchangeably with inclusive education.

This has given rise to several theoretical stances. For instance, full inclusion has been contrasted with the notion of integration:

All forms of integration assume some type of assimilation of the disabled learners into the

mainstream school largely unchanged. Inclusion is not a static state like integration. It is a continuing process of school ethos and change (Makoelle and Van der Merwe 2014). It is about building a school community that accepts and values differences (Florian 2007: 37).

The above quotation argues that simply placing learners in a mainstream school in the absence of adequate measures to respond to their needs is contrary to the aspirations of full inclusion (Makoelle 2014). A distinction between integration and inclusion can be made on the basis of the placement of learners according to three broad approaches, according to integration:

- ♦ *Location:* Classes are located within the mainstream campus.
- ♦ *Social:* Learners interact during social activities at schools, for example at mealtimes.
- ♦ *Functional:* Learners with difficulties are placed in the mainstream classes along their peers

However according to inclusion involves learners are welcomed as full members of the class regardless of their differences.

It follows that the various theoretical and philosophical stances of inclusion have far-reaching implications as a result of how those who adopt them define inclusive education. For example, there is a perspective by Farrell (1997), Rief and Heimburge (2006) and others that inclusive education involves applying special education strategies within the mainstream

schools. However, the counter-argument holds that inclusion is an alternative approach to special education, goes beyond such strategies, and relies on the creativity and novelty of teachers' teaching and assessment strategies (Ballard 1999; Ainscow 2010). As a result, these positions have to be scrutinised more closely and a comparative analysis should be conducted to find common ground. The definition of inclusive education by UNESCO (2001: 8) comes closest to finding commonality. It states that inclusive education:

- ♦ acknowledges that all children can learn and that all need some form of support for learning;
- ♦ aims to uncover and minimise barriers to learning;
- ♦ is broader than formal schooling and includes the home community and other opportunities for education outside the school;
- ♦ is about changing attitudes, behaviour, teaching methods, curriculum and learning environments to meet the needs of all children;
- ♦ is a dynamic process which is constantly evolving according to local cultures and contexts and is part of the world strategy to promote an inclusive society.

The UNESCO understanding of inclusion seems to converge with the elements of the definitions summarised above in that prominence is given to aspects such as the notion of equality, access to and provision of education to all regardless of background, and a curriculum responsive to the needs of all learners. These aspects transcend the definitions of inclusive education worldwide, despite the varied contexts referred to earlier. Even so, there remains a multiplicity of views about what inclusion really means (Makoelle 2014).

The varied interpretations have made it impossible to formulate a universal, context-free definition of inclusion. In fact, the multiple definitions of inclusion have resulted in different practices of inclusion at pedagogical level, thus prompting questions about the nature of inclusive pedagogic practice. Authors such as Florian (2009) have attempted to define notion inclusive pedagogy, but as yet no common understanding of the concept has emerged. Amid these developments there has been growing scepticism about inclusion (Makoelle 2014). For instance, Thomas and Loxley (2001: 41) provide the following critique of inclusion:

- ♦ There is an inconsistency between the principle of inclusion and evidence of its implementation.
- ♦ Inclusion is often driven by political rhetoric and ideology to claim that it is a reality.
- ♦ It is presented as the solution to most educational problems.

These sentiments have lately been echoed by researchers such as Hornby (2012: 54), O'Brien (2001) and Farrel (2010), who critique the notion and question the merits of inclusion as opposed to those of special needs education.

These and many others arguments cast doubts on whether a state of full inclusion will ever be achieved, thus prompting a systematic enquiry into the state of inclusion globally and the scope of inclusion as a philosophy.

### Aims of the Study

The study on which this article is based attempted to answer the following two research questions: What is the state of inclusion globally? Which factors hamper the implementation of inclusion globally?

### METHODOLOGY

The study was analytical, derived most of its arguments from a critical review of the research literature, and relied on the personal experiences of the author. There is an extensive body of literature on inclusion internationally. This analytical review represents an attempt at synthesising the various stances to provide a critical account of the state of inclusion globally. The criteria for selecting the literature were guided by their relevance to the research questions in order to elucidate the current debate on inclusion. Various databases such as Eric, Scopus, and Google Scholar were consulted. Further sources of relevant information included internationally accredited journals such as the International Journal of Inclusive Education, books (also called online journals), and newspaper articles which were reviewed to obtain more relevant up-to-date knowledge. The sources were selected on the basis of being evidence based and speculative sources were avoided. Key concepts were run through the search engines e.g. inclusive education challenges.

### Theoretical orientations in Inclusive Education

The large number of theoretical orientations towards inclusion have had an effect on its genesis and progression. Of the many theoretical orientations underpinning the notion of inclusion, five have been found to be dominant in the literature (Makoelle 2014). According to Clough and Corbett (2000), these perspectives on inclusion have been influenced by the way any given society construes the meaning of the term and have resulted in the following models:

**Curriculum Approaches Model:** This model involves viewing the curriculum itself as having the potential to act as a barrier to learning if it is not inclusive or targeted at a diverse learner population.

**School improvement strategies model:** The way the school is organised could act as a barrier to learning as well. For example, there is growing tendency to focus on pass rates in the interests of raising standards and to exclude those whose performance is perceived to be weak.

**Disability Model:** The physical or psychological attributes of the learner (for example, a hearing-impaired learner) render him/her a victim of deliberate exclusion.

**Pedagogic approach:** This model stems from the medical deficit model in terms of which teaching and learning are designed to address the learners' medically diagnosed challenges. According to this model, the learner is perceived to have a handicap hampering effective learning.

**Socio-ecological Model:** This model developed as a critique to the medical deficit model whereby the learner's social context forms the core of accepting diversity and allowing the participation of individuals regardless of differences (Cesar and Ainscow 2006; Reindal 2008; Landsberg, Kruger and Swart 2011).

The indication in the literature is that there has been a steady shift from the medical to the socio-ecological model. However, despite these developments and paradigm shifts, there remains the highly contested issue of how full participation and inclusion can be achieved, which results in further debates about the existence of an inclusive pedagogy. The different philosophical positions mentioned above have resulted in different kinds of definitions of inclusive education; for example Klibthong (2012: 46), citing Booth et al. and Kalambouka et al., presents a helpful synthesis (quoted verbatim) of the defini-

tions of inclusion from various leading authors in the field:

**Full Inclusion:** This form of inclusion typically permits developing children and children with additional needs to participate fully in a programme or service that caters for all children. This means inclusion focuses on the transformation of school cultures and pedagogy to increase access for all children, enhance the acceptance of all students, maximise children's participation in various activities, and increase the achievement and development of all children.

**Cluster Model Inclusion:** A group of children with additional needs participate together in a programme that operates alongside a mainstream programme.

**Reverse Inclusion:** A few typically developing children participate in a programme that caters largely for children with additional needs.

**Social Inclusion:** Children with additional needs are catered for in special settings and come together with typically developing children at times for social experiences.

The different kinds of definitions mentioned above are derived from the thought orientations quoted from Clough and Corbett (2000) earlier (Makoelle 2013). This poses challenges as different kinds of inclusions are being spoken about. Besides the theoretical orientations, there seems to be a danger of decontextualizing inclusion.

The notion of inclusion from a global perspective seems to be located within one or more contexts or discourses, which influences how it is conceptualised, understood, practised and implemented in the community of nations throughout the world (Dyson 2001; Artiles and Dyson 2005; Florian and Kershner 2009). This has resulted in confusion about its use and meaning (Clough and Corbett, 2000; O'Brien, 2001). For instance, Ainscow (2009) refers to inclusion as a process of reorganising the school to be responsive to the needs of all its learners, while other researchers conceptualise inclusion as a goal to bring about an inclusive society (Artiles and Kozleski 2007). These different interpretations result from the different contexts in which the concept is embedded.

While governments have issued international declarations vowing to implement inclusion, the different contexts have made it impossible to formulate a universal, context-free definition of inclusion. The multiple contexts of inclusion have resulted in different practices of inclusion

at pedagogical level, raising questions about the nature of inclusive pedagogic practice (Makoelle 2014). This has prompted efforts to define the notion of an inclusive pedagogy, which at this stage is a subject of debate among inclusive researchers (Florian 2007). Not only are the varied contextualisations of inclusion a problem, but so are the development and implementation of inclusive policies.

More often than not, the process of inclusion is associated with the goal of governments to bring about equality in societies characterised by inequalities and social injustices (Artiles and Dyson 2005). The concept of inclusion was coined in the United States of America (USA) in the late 1980s as a result of the process the USA had embarked on to bring about social justice (Dyson and Millward 2000). At the same time, the British education system adopted the so-called “liberal principle”, which is based on the notion of equal rights – that is, all learners are equally important and should have the right of access to education. Furthermore, the liberal discourse as articulated in Britain advocates non-segregation, non-stigmatisation and unfettered access to education by learners with special educational needs. Inclusion as practised within the parameters of a liberal dictum is conceptualised as a socio-political and transformational tool to ensure freedom and equality in society. As such, inclusion contrasts with and diverges from the periphery of the hegemonic discourses which seek to exclude and marginalise the vulnerable. Therefore, authors such as Landsberg et al. (2011) believe it to be a process of increasing the participation of all learners equally in education regardless of their differences. The process of implementing inclusion in South Africa was derived from similar principles advocating a just and an equitable society (Makoelle 2012). However, it is not clear whether this ideal has been achieved as there are still very serious questions about what inclusive education really is (Hornby 2012). Often there is a dichotomy between the state of affairs envisaged in policy documents on inclusion and the reality of the classrooms.

While numerous studies have been conducted on inclusion, only a few have been carried out by the victims of exclusion, which has resulted in a growing movement of victims of exclusion in societies challenging the status quo and finding their position in the discourse by

searching for a means of inclusion in society. For instance, the research literature shows that ‘disabled’ people have established a movement that seeks to take control of the available research opportunities on inclusion and conduct research themselves rather than relying on those claiming to be representing their aspirations (Maher 2007). This has resulted in the emergence of ‘emancipatory discourse’, which focusses on power relations in research by, for example, using narrative research as an important tool to let the ‘disabled’ tell their experiences rather than be observed by the ‘non-disabled’ (Walmsley 2001; Barnes 2002). Emancipatory research is different from participatory research in that it is conducted by the victims themselves.

This has resulted in the conceptualisation of inclusion as a need to empower the ‘disabled’ to take charge of their emancipation. The ‘disabled movement’ departs from the premise that research on the ‘disabled’ should to a large extent be controlled by ‘disabled’ people themselves rather than the reverse as is currently the case. Therefore, the current practice of different groupings conducting research purely in terms of their own aims is perceived to be divisive and problematic. To aggravate matters, the notion of economic participation is more often than not based on profit-driven motives rather than on an equitable distribution of wealth and resources.

While governments have invested considerable resources in ensuring that all their citizens are economically active and viable, the production of a labour force that is responsive to both the service and capital needs of the specific country remains high on the political agenda of many developing countries (Coffey 2001). Inclusion comes amid debates about how maximum participation of all in the economy could be enhanced. The notion of economic participation (the participation of individuals in the economy) is regarded as pivotal in the economic growth of the country. Consequently, inclusion is perceived as access to social goods (a means through which individuals can achieve economic emancipation); that is, the commodification of education (Khothule 2004). However, the notion of the marketisation of education is driven by capitalist consumerism which usually advocates competitiveness for production (meaning education is only available to those who can afford it) (Nind, Rix, Sheeny and Simmons 2003). This raises the question whether the intention not to

exclude others on the basis of competition is genuine. In these circumstances, it is still reliant on the survival of those with trusted production skills and will not necessarily include everyone on an equal basis.

Furthermore, the notion of resourced and under-resourced countries seems to have a bearing on the way inclusion is implemented. For instance, in 1994, the Salamanca Statement was signed mainly by countries from the developing world (Dyson and Millward 2000). This might be an indication that inclusion offers an alternative solution to the provision of education to all children where there is a severe shortage of resources (Eleweke and Rodda 2000). Inclusive education means that educational resources can be used optimally. It follows that with inclusion more learners can be accommodated in mainstream education rather than having separate schooling structures (purported to be expensive) for those perceived to be different. However, the bone of contention is whether inclusion can be operationalised at pedagogical level given that some contexts lack the resources to implement it fully.

As a result of the different kinds of inclusion, its application in the classroom will vary from context to context. There is a debate around the question whether there is a purely inclusive pedagogy. Several UK authors (for example, Farrell 1997; Nind et al. 2003; Rief and Heimbürge 2006; Florian 2007) have written about the inclusive strategies of teaching learners with special educational needs while borrowing strategies from special education discourse. By contrast, other UK authors (e.g. Ainscow 2010; Dyson 2001; Ainscow and Booth 2002; Ainscow and Howes 2003) and the South African author Engelbrecht (1999) have proposed developing inclusive practices by encouraging participation and collaboration. For example, the Index for Inclusion (2002) has served as a point of reference in this regard. Owing to these varied positions, it is crucial to interrogate the meaning of inclusive teaching (pedagogy) closely in order to shed light on these debates. The different ways in which inclusive pedagogy has been defined have resulted in divergent practices (Makoelle 2013), for example:

**Special Needs Pedagogy:** Inclusive pedagogy focuses on those who are perceived to be different (learners have to fit into the structure rather than the reverse). This usually involves

the application of subjugating and disempowering procedures, techniques, and strategies presumed to remedy or fix the need (Farrell 1997; Nind et al. 2003; Rief and Heimbürge 2006; Florian 2007).

**Inclusive Pedagogy:** This pedagogy is based on constructivist notions of teaching which hold that learners have to be at the centre and in control of their own learning. It critically challenges convictions about which pedagogy is applicable by whom and for whom (the voice of the voiceless) and challenges conventional teacher-learner power relations. As such it is emancipatory and empowering (Engelbrecht 1999; Dyson 2001; Ainscow and Booth 2002; Ainscow and Howes 2003; Ainscow 2010). While the debate about what constitutes an inclusive pedagogy continues, this pedagogy further challenges beliefs and attitudes that have not changed.

Despite efforts to make education inclusive, the research literature indicates that there are still attitudes and beliefs that militate against inclusion (Makoelle 2014). Indeed, recent developments have witnessed the emergence of a movement against inclusion. The concept and practice have been critiqued by prominent scholars such as Farrel (2010) in the UK, Hornby (2012) in New Zealand, and Kauffman and Hallahan (1995) in the USA. Other studies follow the same line of reasoning by suggesting that special needs education is more beneficial to learners than full inclusion, for example in South Africa. Pillay and Terlizzi (2009) aver that learners with learning barriers thrive in the so-called special schools. In a study conducted by them, a pupil with learning barriers was moved from the mainstream to a special needs education environment and the various findings were recorded (Makoelle 2012). These included the improved socialisation and academic performance of the learner. The reason, as Makoelle (2012) points out, is that the situation in mainstream schools was not yet ideal for inclusion due to the lack of resources and high level of teacher expertise needed to support learners with learning barriers. Pillay and Terlizzi (2009) believe that, while inclusion is good in theory, the current classrooms will have to be prepared in such a way that the needs of the learners will be met. Their study, which was conducted as recently as 2009, after the advent of inclusive education in South Africa, seems to account for the dichotomy be-

tween old-versus-new thinking in terms of the inclusive education debate in South Africa (Makoelle 2012).

Similarly, the research on inclusion clearly shows that outmoded attitudes and beliefs continue to prevail. For instance, special needs education researchers have suddenly started writing about inclusion, adding to the plethora of interpretations of what inclusion is. In the same vein, some faculties of education still deal with inclusive education under the rubric of the psychology of education or special needs, in contradistinction to what inclusion articulates. This raises the valid and provocative question whether or not inclusion belongs to the field of psychology. Ontologically and epistemologically, this question challenges some of the fundamental ideals and theories in the field of psychology.

### Lessons from the Literature

The analysis indicates that the move towards inclusion is not progressing smoothly. There appears to be a problem in defining inclusion and specifying how it should be operationalised. The term is so context-dependent that it is problematic to universalise its meaning. The dichotomy between policies and their implementation shows that what is normally envisaged politically often does not translate into tangible and achievable actions. It is ironic that, while inclusion is advocated as an all-inclusive process benefitting all those who were previously excluded (for example, those with perceived disabilities), it is driven not by them but by 'outsiders'. This raises difficult questions about the distribution of power in the emancipation of the previously excluded or marginalised. Although inclusion was conceived as a moral quest to liberate the excluded, there is a lingering suspicion that their inclusion could stifle productivity. The problem is further compounded by the great disparity of resources between the countries of the north and those of the south. This hinders the adoption of a common approach towards realising full inclusion. Thus the different conceptualisations of inclusion often result in a confusing array of different pedagogical practices. Finally, the tenacious adherence to beliefs and attitudes rooted in archaic practices militates against the adoption of enlightened modern forms of thinking.

### CONCLUSION

The notion that inclusion can solve all educational problems at once is at best misguided. Thus continuous reflection on the progress being made towards the implementation of inclusion will assist in determining whether or not the ideal state envisaged has been achieved. It is hoped that this paper will lay a foundation for such an on-going reflection on the state of inclusion globally and that it will pave the way for further research on the applicability of and success towards achieving inclusion in the field.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Firstly, what is needed is a redefinition of the concept of inclusion to accommodate the diverse contexts and unequal resources of the countries of the north and south. In addition, clear pedagogical guidelines on how to develop inclusive policies and implementation frameworks should be provided. Categories such as "disabled" should be redefined as they create the perception that those outside the category do not face barriers that are worth taking note of. More research is needed on how to transform and move archaic thinking and educational practices forward. Inclusive education needs to gain independence as an autonomous discipline as opposed to subsuming it under other disciplines.

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