

Reforming Teacher Education for Inclusion in Developing Countries in the Asia-Pacific Region

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A number of Asian Pacific countries have ratified the UN *Conventions on the Rights of People with Disabilities* and have identified an urgent need to include children with special educational needs in regular school programs. Successful implementation of such a policy reform requires significant changes in the way education is provided to all students, but most importantly depends upon how adequately the teachers and related professionals are prepared to implement the reform. This paper reviews research from 13 Asian Pacific countries, undertaken in the last five years, to address two questions. First it reports on the issues, challenges, and proposals related to inclusive education in these countries. Second the review reports on how each region has progressed towards implementing the Millennium Development Goals with particular emphasis on how teacher education has or has not responded to this. The review concludes that a lack of well thought out policy, few resources, and limited understanding of inclusion seems widespread in the Asia-Pacific region. As yet special education and related service expertise and teacher education for inclusion, is not in place to support teachers to work inclusively.

Keywords: Developing countries, inclusion, inclusive education, disability, teachers, teacher education, legislation

Introduction

The inclusion of children with diverse learning needs, particularly those with a disability, is a significant policy shift in the majority of developing countries. Most of these countries either have or are producing policies that require schools to enrol, whenever possible, children with disabilities. These policies, however, in many instances have not been translated into classroom practice (Sharma & Deppeler, 2005; McConkey & Bradley, 2010; Xu, 2012). In particular, a large number of children with disabilities in many developing countries are still denied access to education (Yu, Su, & Liu, 2011). While inclusion should be essential in a democratic society, the concept rarely becomes reality, despite its frequent acceptance in discourse (Garcia-Huidobro, 2009). Many developing countries like their western counterparts grapple with the practical complexities of including students with disabilities in general education classes (Ellsworth & Zhang, 2007).

This article is based on a review of research papers published between 2007 and 2012 that provide current perspectives on inclusive education and teacher education for inclusion in developing countries within the Asia-Pacific region as identified by the International Statistical Institute (ISI, 2012). Concept papers and those reporting research data are included through an

extensive search of education data bases. The purpose is to inform possible ways that teacher education may be developed in order to make inclusion a reality for learners who continue to be excluded from regular schooling. While we are using the term “developing” in relation to these countries, as this is the term used frequently in the literature and it is the way in which they are identified in the ISI, in no way are we assuming that in the context of inclusive education that they may be less developed than other countries.

Inclusive education in developing countries

The move towards an inclusive approach to education varies considerably between regions. According to Xu (2012), countries such as China have gone through three stages of process, namely spontaneity, experiment, and development. In almost all states, systems continue to offer a range of placement options for children with special learning needs from full inclusion to placement within segregated special schools (Forlin, 2010).

Inclusion, nevertheless, is still considered to be a largely Western concept (Eleweke & Rodda, 2002; Johnston & Chapman, 2009). History of special education and the inclusion movement clearly indicates that the idea of inclusion originated in western countries (Miles, 1997) and was exported to countries of the East following a similar trajectory. The need to educate children with disabilities was first recognised by missionaries and they founded many schools for children with disabilities. A number of scholars, albeit few (e.g., Miles, 1997), have argued that countries of the east started educating children with disabilities before such attempts were made in countries of the west.

The inclusion movement has been promulgated in a variety of conventions and declarations. Following the Millennium Summit held in New York in 2000, all participating 123 United Nations member states and 23 international organisations adopted the *United Nations Millennium Declaration* that highlighted eight international development goals for achievement by 2015. Achieving universal primary education was Goal 2. In 2012, it was reported that some countries have achieved many of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG, United Nations, 2012), while others are not on track to realize any. According to this Report, disparity was thwarting the progress due to “...the unevenness of progress within countries and regions and the severe inequalities that exist among populations, especially between rural and urban areas” (MDG, 2012, p.3). This unfulfilled target was deemed to be impacting on all other goals which were considered unlikely to be achieved within the next three years.

In 2007, the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* included commitments for governments for ensuring the education of people with a disability (Article 24). States parties were specifically tasked to enable an inclusive education system at all levels and to provide lifelong learning opportunities. As part of this realization governments were to train professionals and staffs who work at all levels of education by incorporating disability awareness and the use of appropriate augmentative and alternative modes, means, and formats of communication to enable this. In many developing countries, consequently, new policies and legislation have appeared that replicate the terminology of the global directives that promote education for all and an inclusive approach to education (Donnelly & Watkins, 2011). Nonetheless, these are frequently not reflected in the pragmatics of implementation (Florin, 2011; Forlin, 2012).

Under the guise of establishing an inclusive educational system and as signatories to these national conventions and declarations, local understandings and action have in many instances been far from the original intention. In some developing countries there is no legislation and policy, and if in existence, it tends to be rhetoric. Although developing countries may have adopted the

philosophy of inclusion there is frequently insufficient funding, support, or knowledge, to be able to assume an effective system-wide inclusive approach for all learners. In most instances the current inclusive agenda in developing countries is driven by policy makers rather than educators and schools (Singhal, 2005), thus making implementation very challenging as schools attempt to engage with the process of inclusive education (Gronlund, Lim, & Larsson, 2010).

In Asian countries while supporting the philosophy of inclusion, many teachers challenge the feasibility of implementation (Forlin, 2008). Various issues are raised that act against an inclusive approach in these regions such as an exam oriented curriculum, didactic teaching practices, extensive homework expectations, and a school eliteness due to an hierarchical banding system (a system whereby secondary schools are ranked into three levels that cater for students with high, medium, and lower academic abilities). Even in developing countries where access to regular schooling has improved for many learners, a range of barriers continue to hinder full inclusion (Watson, 2009).

Frequently teachers in developing countries are judged on the results of their students, so there is little motivation for them to devote additional time with those who are unlikely to achieve good results (Forlin, 2010). A disposition to offer places to students who require higher levels of support may, thus, be compromised, resulting in limited options for students with special educational needs to attend a school of their choice (Jordan, Glenn, & McGhie-Richmond, 2010). Within the highly competitive systems that schools in many developing countries have, balancing the inclusion of students with high support needs with the need for students to be competitive and attain expected standards in literacy, numeracy, and science, is very problematic. This is further compounded by the banding system that exists in many regions which puts great pressure on teachers to help their students obtain access to the higher banded schools (Forlin & Sin, 2010). A system of target setting has led to a culpable culture that has raised tensions for schools. In many occasions as schools strive to become more inclusive they are still required to achieve inflexible curricular and pedagogy, making the process untenable (Forlin, in press).

Another challenge that continues to create significant barriers to the inclusion of people with disabilities are the attitudes of society (Sharma, Forlin, & Loreman, 2008; 2011). For example many Hindus believe in the theory of Karma. Disability is viewed as a result of the past deeds performed by the individual in previous life (Sharma & Deppeler, 2005). The society defends their action of not doing anything for the individual as the God has punished the individual and any interference with the God's will is not acceptable. On the other hand, some individuals who believe in this theory can be more positive, albeit sympathetic, in their actions towards people with disabilities. They believe that if they treat people with disabilities well in this life, they are less likely to be disabled in their future lives. Such attitudes can either result in complete segregation of people with disabilities or a highly sympathetic attitude towards such people. Unfortunately, little is done to challenge such views by these societies.

Teacher education

One of the biggest challenges faced by developing countries is the lack of preparedness of teachers to implement an inclusive approach in schools. If teachers are to become effective inclusive practitioners and understand and meet the needs of all learners, then they must be educated appropriately to undertake this new role (Forlin, Earle, Loreman, & Sharma, 2011; Graziano, 2008).

Some education systems are actively involved in reviewing pre-service teacher education models and in developing and trialing new methodologies, for example, through greater collaboration between training institutions and schools (Florian & Rouse, 2009). Others have

legislated at the state level, minimum requirements for initial teacher education, and teacher education institutions are required to register to ensure they meet these minimums (Forlin, 2012). Even in countries where inclusion has been practiced since the early 1980s teacher education has invariably been slow to change to meet the new demands of an inclusive approach (Malakolunthu & Rengasamy, 2012; Sharma, Forlin, & Loreman, 2011). In most jurisdictions teachers continue to rate their lack of training as a key reason for finding inclusion too difficult to implement. According to Forlin (2012, p.4) "...teacher education for inclusion in most regions has been tokenistic at best and non-existent at worse".

A further key issue, especially in countries that are embracing inclusion for the first time, is that teacher educators themselves are professionally unprepared to take on the role of educating pre- and in-service teachers about inclusion (Forlin & Dinh, 2010). According to Deppeler (2012, p. 132) "Quality teaching within inclusive schools requires focused attention on improving the *collective* professional knowledge and practices of teachers". The need, therefore, to upskill teacher educators to offer an appropriate curriculum and to employ suitable pedagogies to prepare teachers for inclusion can be very challenging in countries where there are few academics that are themselves trained in inclusive education, with the majority lacking the necessary skills, knowledge and sentiments to undertake such a role.

Two questions underpin the research reported in this article. The first is to identify the issues, challenges, and proposals highlighted in the research literature about inclusive education in developing countries within the Asia-Pacific region. The second is to review these in light of Article 24 of the international Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2007) and each region's progress towards implementing the MDGs, with particular emphasis on how teacher education has or has not responded to the policy reform.

Method

A review of research published between 2007 and 2012 on the implementation of inclusive education in developing countries within the Asia-Pacific region, with a particular focus on teacher education, was undertaken. Three key levels of enactment deemed critical to effective inclusion were considered. At a government level consideration was given to commitment to international conventions and declarations and the development of local policy and/or legislation that embedded a philosophy of inclusion for the region. A second level examined how policy was reinforced and implemented in practice within local districts and schooling systems. A third level focussed on the way in which teacher education has responded to the policy reform of inclusive education. The analysis also focussed on how teachers were supported and schools adapted when applying inclusive approaches. To identify how these levels of implementation were occurring, a sub set of all developing countries within the Asia-Pacific was selected for investigation. Thirty-five developing countries within this area were identified from the ISI (2012).

A systematic review of literature published about inclusive education in these countries was undertaken. Selection criteria included articles published within the past five years in a peer-reviewed journal, written in English, and providing data in relation to the three levels of implementation, namely, government policy, district and school practice, teacher support and teacher education for inclusion.

A key focus of the analysis was teacher education and practices to help teachers become effective inclusive practitioners. This was used to provide a means to inform ways that teacher education may be reformed to make inclusion a reality for learners who continue to be excluded from regular schooling in the Asia-Pacific region. To locate relevant peer-reviewed articles for

these regions, 17 data bases were searched including Academic Search Premier, EdLink, EBSCOhost, ProQuest, Education Full Text, ERIC, and 11 others.

From the 35 identified developing countries within the Asia-Pacific, relevant articles were found for 13 countries. For 22 countries no published research within the last five years that met the criteria was found. Thus, the developing countries of Comoros, Fiji, Kirbati, North Korea, Madagascar, Maldives, Marshall Islands, Mauritius, Micronesia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Palau, Peru, Philippines, Russian Federation, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu Republic, and Vanuatu, were not included in the analysis. In total 37 articles were reviewed for the 13 countries, ranging from a minimum of one in Bhutan and Papua New Guinea, to a maximum of six in Bangladesh and India.

Results

Government policy

All 13 countries were signatories to and had ratified the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1990) (Table 1). Similarly, all countries were signatories to the Millennium Development Goals (2000). While 10 of the countries had signed the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (2007), only three, Bangladesh, Chile, and Nepal, had ratified the protocol.

Table 1
Thirteen Developing Countries in the Asia-Pacific Region in 2012

| Countries | Signatories / ratify the United Nations <i>Convention on Rights of the Child</i> (1990)* | Signatories to The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (2000)** | Ratify Convention / Protocol of <i>Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities</i> (CRPD) (2007)*** |
|----------------------|--|---|---|
| 1. Bangladesh | 26 Jan 1990 / 3 Aug 1990 | Yes. | 30.11.2007 / 12.5.2008 |
| 2. Bhutan | 4 Jun 1990 / 1 Aug 1990 | Yes. | - / - |
| 3. Cambodia | Not available / 15 Oct 1992 (a) | Yes. | 1.10.2007 / - |
| 4. Chile | 26 Jan 1990 / 13 Aug 1990 | Yes. | 30.3.2007 / 29.7.2008 |
| 5. China | 29 Aug 1990 / 2 Mar 1992 | Yes. | 1.8.2008 / - |
| 6. India | Not available / 11 Dec 1992 (a) | Yes. | 1.10.2007 / - |
| 7. Indonesia | 26 Jan 1990 / 5 Sep 1990 | Yes. | 30.11.2011 / - |
| 8. Malaysia | Not available / 17 Feb 1995 (a) | Yes. | 19.7.2010 / - |
| 9. Nepal | 26 Jan 1990 / 14 Sep 1990 | Yes. | 7.5.2010 / 7.5.2010 |
| 10. Pakistan | 20 Sep 1990 / 12 Nov 1990 | Yes. | 5.7.2011 / - |
| 11. Papua New Guinea | 30 Sep 1990 / 2 Mar 1993 | Yes. | - / - |
| 12. Thailand | Not available / 27 Mar 1992 (a) | Yes. | 29.7.2008 / - |
| 13. Vietnam | 26 Jan 1990 / 28 Feb 1990 | Yes. | - / - |

**United Nations Development Programme. (2012). *MDG progress reports*. Retrieved from <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/mdg/mdg-reports/>

*** UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: resolution / adopted by the General Assembly*, 24 January 2007, A/RES/61/106, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/45f973632.html> [accessed 24 August 2012]

*United Nations Treaty Collection. (1990). Human right. Retrieved from http://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-11&chapter=4&lang=en

At a national level most countries indicated that an inclusive educational approach was being promoted, either through policy or curriculum change. Most had education Acts or Laws with some having specific policies, regulations, or ordinances related to the education of children with disabilities. A few countries had also developed guidelines or policy explicitly for inclusive education. The international conventions and declarations were seen as providing the incentive for change with several countries relying on international aid and support to establish more inclusive systems. Western ideology was shaping changes in countries such as Papua New Guinea, with a great reliance on external specialists to guide systemic adjustments. Even so, the research mostly acknowledged that while a more equitable approach was the aim of each country, they were at an early stage of development and implementation. Some countries like Pakistan were just trialing inclusion; whereas, others had implemented specific national programs such as China with their Sui Ban Jiu Du (Learning in Regular Classrooms, LRC) approach (Meng & Harris 2008), and India with their Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), (Education for All) model (Rao, 2008).

The enormous inequality between provinces, urban, and rural communities was highlighted, with extreme poverty being cited by some as a major challenge to rectifying this inequity. Greater poverty was noted for people with disabilities than for their non-disabled peers in places like Pakistan; and in Nepal it was reported that people with disabilities were still being socially excluded. Superstitious beliefs reigned strongly within some countries with Cambodia reporting that cultural traditions were paradoxical to inclusive education, thus making it very hard to implement.

For many countries the national policies that focused on establishing inclusive schooling cultures were considered to be challenging to endorse, as it was difficult for educational systems to change. In contrast, Vietnam reported a fairly well established nationwide inclusive educational approach with inclusion being documented in law and with a well-developed inclusive education action plan being led by the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training. Conversely, a lack of in-depth discussions about the major tendencies prevailing in contemporary educational systems for places like Chile was a noted concern.

Strategies to enhance government policy

A number of strategies were proposed in the research for enhancing the role of governments in developing and / or implementing inclusive policy in developing countries. It was acknowledged that there continues to be a need for international donors and implementers to help support the efforts in developing countries to provide educational opportunities to all children, particularly those with disabilities. Yet it was posited that if international development agencies wish to effectively support and promote inclusive education in these countries then they should become more 'inclusive' organisations. In particular, they should adopt more responsive and participatory approaches, especially in low-income countries such as Papua New Guinea. It was recommended that all professional developers must become more aware of cultural differences both overt and subtle before leading any professional education efforts in a developing country.

To ensure a more comprehensive introduction of inclusion across the prevailing disparities between rural and urban settings, a centrally developed synchronized theory and practice approach was proposed. Such an approach would need to be supported by national policy with a clear definition of inclusion and the introduction of appropriate strategies. Increasing resources to local governments underpinned by good governance and collaborative approaches were considered essential. The development of care and rehabilitation programs and a system to provide livelihood,

employment, and social security for adults for example as undertaken in Nepal (Crishna & Prajapati, 2008), were also considered important.

District and school practice

The complexity of implementing an inclusive approach was evident from the research. Of concern for several countries such as India and Nepal, was the difficulty in collecting reliable data on which to report progress. Practice varied between schools, especially those in rural and urban settings and also across districts. Some countries such as Bangladesh had established links between education and social welfare groups to support inclusion. Other countries such as India, that reported minimal infrastructure and poor standards in schools, were establishing alternative providers to government schools.

The most dominant theme that was evident from the research was the emphasis placed on the importance of considering local culture and context when establishing an inclusive schooling system. In particular, cultural values and the education system were considered in countries like Nepal to be highly influential in exclusion vs. inclusion. Many countries included reference to the diversity of ethnic groups across their region and the difficulties faced with integrating different cultures into the community. Definitions of inclusive practices also varied between countries depending upon the diversity of student needs that were being addressed.

There seemed to be a general emphasis on local community-based practices that were able to address local needs in more effective ways. Enormous disparity was reported between schools in general with the differences between rural communities and others being specifically noted by five countries. In some countries the rather rigid curriculum and the desired autonomy of schools were seen as hindering progress.

A managerial approach to accountability frequently required school leaders to rigidly adhere to bureaucratic rules. This resulted in a top down management control system within which leaders felt powerless.

Strategies to enhance district and school practice

Where policy already existed, suggestions were related to making local authorities and districts more active in promoting inclusion by raising local awareness and valuing diversity. There was a general call to reduce class sizes and to increase the teacher to student ratio.

Teacher support

Teacher support for becoming an inclusive practitioner took into account uncertainty about their role and their perceived inability to provide effective inclusive teaching. Negative attitudes and concern about inclusion were identified in countries such as India and Pakistan. Teachers' resistance to inclusion, student's lack of acceptance, and non-supportive views of parents and the community, were also raised by Bangladesh. In such countries the resulting lack of support from administrators and the community made inclusion extremely difficult to manage.

A range of specific challenges was reported in regards to the difficulties in supporting teachers in these developing countries. A shortage of appropriately trained teachers was evident, along with a lack of suitable and effective professional development opportunities for teachers endeavouring to implement inclusive practices in countries such as Bangladesh, Bhutan, China,

India, Pakistan, and Vietnam. Within schools a lack of specialised equipment for students with specific disabilities and limited resources in general was problematic especially in countries such as Indonesia and Bangladesh. Large class sizes were reported by China, Pakistan, and India, and charges for educational services within Chile combined with a school's process for selecting students, all contributed to the difficulties in promoting inclusion. In some countries the existing structures and pressures on teachers were considered to be already resulting in teachers being stressed.

Strategies for supporting inclusion

A number of strategies were suggested as a way of overcoming these challenges while addressing local context and cultural differences and teacher needs. It was considered key that infrastructures needed to be in place for supporting teachers in schools. A pilot project undertaken in Pakistan, for example, using a three-pronged approach to provide training and support for teachers involving workshops, onsite support with mentor teachers, and cluster meetings, led to a range of positive changes in teachers (Awan, Caceres, Majeed, Mindes, & Nabeel, 2010). As teachers became more aware of how to create inclusive classrooms and more sensitive to the needs of all students, they became more confident about their abilities to educate children with disabilities. It was proposed that such structures should include ways of developing more friendly environments in general education schools to build friendships among children with and without disabilities. The establishment of good coordination among teachers, between teachers and administrators, and between teachers and parents; and collegial support including support from special education teachers, were all considered pertinent aspects for supporting teachers. The development of a bank of teaching and learning materials to support teachers with inclusive curriculum was necessary as resources generally seemed very limited, if available at all.

Pedagogical approaches identified as effective included cooperative group teaching and group assignments, reviewing, group work, questioning, peer tutoring, and brainstorming. Enhancing teaching time for inclusive classes and using mixed ability co-operative group teaching approaches were proffered, especially when classes were large. To overcome social exclusion, the telling of local stories illustrating moral lesson was considered a way of freeing children with disabilities from stigma in classes, schools, or in society at large.

Teacher education for inclusion

Throughout almost all of the research that included reference to teacher education for inclusion, it was clear that teacher preparation for inclusion was being undertaken in an ad hoc, minimal, and isolated way. Many countries reported limited one-off teacher education programs that had been piloted with small numbers of teachers. With the exception of Vietnam, there was no indication of any national teacher education program being in place which embraced the principles of inclusion. A lack of any systematic national teacher education programs was explicitly voiced as problematic in countries such as Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, and Pakistan.

Where pockets of teacher education did exist, countries such as Bhutan and Papua New Guinea were relying on external "experts" to undertake this and were concerned about a lack of participatory involvement by local stakeholders in the process and implementation. Vietnam was the only country that reported compulsory pre-service teacher education for preschool and primary teachers in inclusive education. Not surprisingly, this general lack of preparation for teachers was matched with a noted shortage of suitably qualified or trained teachers to implement new policies on inclusive education.

Of particular note in India, Malaysia, Pakistan, and Vietnam, was the lack of aptly qualified teacher educators to undertake the preparation of teachers for inclusion. To overcome this in India, for example, pre-service teacher education programs had been started by Non-Government Organisations (NGO). In Vietnam, a comprehensive national program involving university faculty from all provinces preparing to teach inclusive education had been established. Even so, teacher education was still limited in Vietnam by the capacity and size of institutions that could deliver appropriate courses.

Strategies for enhancing teacher education for inclusion

Suggestions for improving teacher education for inclusion were rather limited as there were few examples of practice in the research. It was noted that before local academics could undertake teacher education for inclusion, their self-efficacy for working with teachers from diverse backgrounds needed to be improved.

It was suggested that pre-service courses should include a focus on integrating curriculum about disability and inclusive education. Recommendations included curriculum reform, emphasizing practicum more than theory, and preparing regular and special educators to work together. New teaching methods and more appropriate pedagogies were also recommended for learners with Autism Spectrum Disorder or intellectual disabilities.

In addition, teacher education courses were needed for all teachers and managers in schools, particularly as a means to empower leaders to implement inclusion. Additional teachers with appropriate education in special education to support school staff were considered essential along with greater opportunities for attending refresher and skill development courses for existing experienced special teachers. In India it was suggested that to reduce the high dropout rates in the special education system, more teachers needed to be trained in special education and that appropriate professional development and skill development courses were essential for trained special educators. In Pakistan it was noted that:

... even small amounts of training made noticeably improvements in teachers' abilities to work inclusively: When training was provided to Pakistani primary teachers, they were able to make changes in their pedagogy and become more accepting of differences in their students, which are necessary initial steps to making classrooms and schools more inclusive (Awan, Caceres, Nabeel, Mageed, & Mindes, 2010, p.vi).

Discussion

Although expressed in different forms, the following summary from Pakistan provides an indication of the general feeling towards inclusion by the developing countries presented in the research:

Inclusion seems to be utopia where general education teachers do not have awareness, they are not oriented to children with special education needs, and they don't have inclusive curriculum which helps them to organize activities for inclusive classes. Inclusion in overcrowded general education classes and without at least minimum required resources only increases stress for the teachers (Hassan, Parveen, & Riffat-un-Nisa, 2010, p. 62).

As enormous diversity existed between districts, local communities seemed best placed to address the needs of schools for becoming more inclusive. Yet in a number of countries the top down approach to bureaucracy was divergent to allowing local decision-making. Leaders, therefore, reported being disempowered to making changes that improved support for local needs as these might be construed as contradicting national goals. Likewise, teachers indicated a lack of control over the curriculum and limited input into decision-making. With an emphasis in the research on the need for greater cultural and contextual sensitivity, this seems to be an area of urgent importance for redressing the directive approach that ignores local community needs. In many areas the culture of schooling in general and the organizational structure in particular needed reform with a strong recommendation that this needs to be undertaken locally.

Some of these countries have overcome this by introducing non-government schools or community based approaches to promote inclusion. While these may be able to respond to local expectations, unless they are better funded, their reliance on donations is unlikely to provide a suitable foundation to maintain them for any extended period of time. A lack of well thought out policy, few resources, and limited understanding of inclusion seems widespread. Special education and related service expertise is not in place to support teachers to work inclusively.

Implications for teacher education

The results of this review suggest that attempts to reform teacher education programs across the countries reviewed are haphazard. While in some countries, there is a push at a national level, in other countries, there is no emphasis on inclusive education in teacher education programs. Considering that all the countries have ratified Article 24 of the international Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2007) and each country is keen to make progress towards implementing the Millenium Development Goals, it is important to discuss how the countries should prepare the personnel directly responsible for implementing inclusion policies.

In this regard, it might be useful for educators to systematically examine their current teacher education programs and what needs to be done to further improve them. It is essential that inclusive education is not just seen as an additional “subject” that all teachers must do. It should be seen as the foundation of a good teacher education program. In universities inclusive education, and even the teacher educators involved in teaching inclusive and special education, are typically regarded at the peripheries of education programs. Subjects on inclusive and special education are either offered in elective mode or not offered at all. Often it is argued that teachers have to learn a lot and learning to teach in inclusive classrooms is the last priority. As countries move towards ratifying the UN conventions, this has to change.

Inclusive education is good education for *all*, first, and the best way to educate students with special needs, *second* (Ainscow, 2013; Deppeler, 2012). Including a child with special needs in a traditional classroom, where there are already many structural and pedagogical barriers, is extremely difficult. Subjects on inclusive education should focus on how improving pedagogy and reducing barriers to learning for students in general is likely to make the inclusion of students with special needs feasible. Once this task is done well, the focus can then move towards how in such a classroom, meeting the needs of an individual child should be focused and also how this is easier in pedagogically sound classrooms.

It is important that pre-service teachers learn that good teaching is good teaching for all, not just for students who have special needs. Teacher educators also need to ensure that pre-service teachers have opportunities to practice what is taught in university classrooms. This is perhaps one

of the biggest challenges that all of these countries are facing and are likely to face for many years to come. Universities should consider working in partnerships with schools and in greater proximity to them in supporting schools to become more inclusive of all learners. This would provide opportunities for universities to place their graduates where they can witness inclusive pedagogy. It would also provide opportunities for universities to initiate research projects that can have direct relevance to improving the teacher education programs by informing the program of what works and what doesn't work in the local context.

There are many complex challenges to be faced in these developing countries and it may appear that it is almost impossible to move the agenda of inclusion forward. Perhaps including children with disabilities into regular schools is a new concept in developing countries. There is, however, hope. A means to transforming societal attitude toward people with disabilities may be promulgated if according to Gabel and Chander (2008, p. 78) "... the initiatives are implemented and disabled people are seen learning and succeeding in elementary and secondary schools, colleges, and universities". Reforming teacher education is one possible way that some of the major challenges that are faced in developing countries may be addressed. The development of a competence or standards model to facilitate an inclusive approach to teacher education as suggested by Moran (2009) may provide a more consistent approach to teacher education across regions which are diverse and where teacher education varies considerably. Two important questions for researchers, policy-makers, teacher educators and education systems to examine include "What should we do differently that we are not doing now?"; and, "How will we know if the changes made in teacher education will result in better inclusion programs?".

Limitations

The results of this examination of peer-reviewed, published articles must be interpreted with caution. It is clear that individual regions are responding to indigenous contexts that may not be replicated in other countries. Thus teacher education must by necessity respond to local contexts and not to this generalized summary. Further, we have only reviewed articles that were peer-reviewed and published in English, which is ignoring any locally published research. As published research in the past five years was very limited, the reliance on individual publications provides only a brief overview of the situation in some countries. Further, much of the research reports findings from only small cohorts; thus these may not represent perspectives from the wider population in a given country. This is likely to be particularly relevant when the disparity between rural and urban education is raised in most research and where responses are discussed only from one or other country region. While not specifically reported, countries may well be experiencing many of the issues raised in other regions and responding positively to inclusion, where limited research was available.

Conclusion

The lack of suitably qualified and prepared teachers, poor and/or limited teacher education, somewhat negative attitudes, and an ad hoc approach to preparing or up-skilling teachers was evident in almost every country in the region. Teacher education for inclusion was sparse and generally ineffectual with an over reliance on external "experts" who have limited local knowledge and with little evidence of the teacher education being used to help establish localised programs that could be more sustainable. As many countries raised the lack of suitably trained teachers as a major challenge it is apparent that this must become a priority item on the agenda of all developing countries. Without staff qualified to implement an inclusive approach, teachers and stakeholders are unlikely to embrace such a move and inclusion will flounder.

Policies, where evident in these developing countries, appear to support Article 24 of the international *Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (2007) and aim towards implementing the MDGs by mirroring the international inclusive movement and incorporating the western language of inclusion. Nonetheless, unless national approaches are based on a much stronger foundation that includes a well-established process for implementing policy by accommodating the needs of all learners and ensuring that teacher education, resources, and processes, are made available at all levels and stages of execution, inclusion is unlikely to move beyond policy.

As developing countries struggle to counter extant and diverse existing inequalities, inclusion offers a possible solution to enabling this. Inclusion is a process of change, though, that requires commitment beyond the production of policy. Racing forward without effective support structures in place will not suffice. Following policy the development of a well-structured and strategic implementation plan that considers how inclusion may be adopted depending upon local contexts and needs is imperative. Involving a broad range of stakeholders in dialogue about how to enable the establishment of strong and well-funded support structures, the development of nation-wide teacher education programs, and a means of overcoming the noted inequity between rural and urban communities are vital. If inclusion is to be successful in developing countries then external assistance should provide guidance for local developments, rather than taking a short-term approach of quick fix professional developments that do little to support local change that is sustainable.

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