

## Book Review

### **Inclusive Education in Low-Income Countries: A Resource for Teachers Educators, Parent Trainers and Community Development Workers**

**Authors:** Mariga, L., McConkey, R., & Myezwa, H. (2014). Megadigital, Cape Town; ISBN 978-09870203-4-5

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This book discusses the implementation of inclusive education in an African context. It draws data from three broad studies on inclusive education conducted in three African countries; namely, Lesotho, Tanzania and Zanzibar. The book is divided into eleven chapters. In Chapter 1, the authors take a critical gaze at the philosophical foundations of inclusive education. The concept of inclusive education is located within the Human Rights discourse as captured in the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). The authors are quick to point out that while many state parties have ratified the CRPD, very little has been done to domesticate it at national levels. Therefore, the authors recommend intensive advocacy to align national laws and policies to the CRPD. In addition to this, the authors posit that there are socio-cultural, political, and economic contextual barriers to the implementation of inclusive education. In order to address these barriers, the authors emphasize the importance of community participation, which has the potential to remove the stigma associated with disability and enhance the engagement of people with disabilities.

Chapter 2 offers the definition of inclusive education and its trajectory at global and national levels. It documents the journey of inclusive education from history of denial of access, to segregated spaces, and finally to inclusive spaces. The chapter further examines prerequisites for the implementation of inclusive education such as political will, voices of persons with disabilities and empowerment.

Chapter 3 addresses the significance of family involvement in the implementation of inclusive education. The chapter addresses the absence of family involvement in the implementation of inclusive education in the context of sub-Saharan Africa, an issue that is not addressed in most of the books in the area of inclusive education. It offers practical strategies that

could be employed in low-income sub-Saharan region where emphasis is placed on professionals with little regard for parents of students with disabilities. The chapter ends with key strategies for enhancing parental involvement and these include parents support groups and homeschooling partnerships.

Chapter 4 addresses the importance of advocacy and empowerment of students with disabilities and parents of individuals with disabilities. In addition, it highlights the significance of the involvement of Disabled Persons Organizations (DPOs) and recommends the inclusion of the voices of persons with disabilities in order to achieve a successful implementation of inclusive education. The authors make a unique contribution to the discourse on the implementation of inclusive education by offering strategies of empowering students with disabilities and their parents by suggesting the building of strategic partnership with DPOs, a point that is often overlooked by academics.

Prefaced with an African adage 'It takes a village to educate a child,' Chapter 5 explores the involvement of local communities in implementing inclusive education. Mariga, McConkey and Myezwa opine that community involvement provides the social capital that could drive inclusive education beyond the limits of financial capital. This is a context sensitive model for the implementation of inclusive education in low-income sub-Saharan Africa. However, the model should be used cautiously given the attitudes towards disability in Africa where the representation of disability is imbued with notions of witchcraft curses and deficiency. According to the authors, community mobilization, particularly on disability issues, receives selective attention, if not disinterest. The authors suggest that key stakeholders be identified at a community level to help change myths about disability and the achievement of successful implementation of inclusive education. These stakeholders include religious leaders, community leaders, politicians and government officials. The authors emphasize community gatherings as important sites in building social capital for successful implementation of inclusive education.

The subject of Chapter 6 is the strengthening of partnership with local community health services for purposes of prevention of disabilities, early identification and intervention. This partnership can be enhanced through aligning community based rehabilitation services with the school, and creating easy access to wider health, social and community services to parents of

children with disabilities. This is an important point that sub-Saharan countries could learn from given the fact that most of sub-Saharan countries have working community health systems.

Chapter 7 highlights the importance of conducting feasibility studies to inform the process of implementing inclusive education. The authors bring to the fore an important issue of the need to examine contextual factors, a construct that is often glossed over and considered unproblematic when implementing inclusive education. Moreover representativeness of all stakeholders particularly inviting the missing voices persons with disabilities and DPOs is given prominence in such studies capture perspectives of multiple stakeholders.

Mariga et al in Chapter 8 bring to light the importance of professional development of teachers to sustain the implementation of inclusive education. The chapter adequately addresses the knowledge gap by identifying critical areas of knowledge for an effective inclusive teacher such as teachers' knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and value systems, skills and competencies on which effective implementation of inclusive education hinges. Lastly, the authors draw on experiences of teachers in Lesotho and Zanzibar to illustrate how in-service training can be structured in a cost effective way to cascade training. For illustrative purposes a teacher who has undergone training becomes a teacher consultant for the school and schools in their localities. In my opinion this model of in-service training could work well in sub-Saharan Africa where funding to support social services education is limited or absent.

In Chapter 9, the focus is on supporting the pupil to learn in an inclusive classroom. The chapter outlines inclusive pedagogical practices that enable African teachers to address classroom diversity such as effective communication, developing individual educational plans and employing individualized instruction.

Chapter 10 outlines techniques teachers should employ to manage inclusive classrooms. It emphasizes the concept of social capital that makes it easy for students to bond as a group. The authors are of the view that inclusive education can be realised through the removal of barriers that hinder access and participation in the classroom and beyond. These strategies for removing barriers to inclusive education comprise the following: including a learner with a disability, using space to construct inclusivity in all activities that take place in the classroom, employing lesson plans that

inform differentiated teaching and learning and using peer tutors. This approach has been missed out historically in the education of students with disabilities where emphasis was on who is wrong, as opposed to what is wrong with the society. The creation of a barrier free learning environment can lead to equality in education for students with disabilities.

Finally, Chapter 11 examines challenges in implementing inclusive education in the context of Africa and two main issues are highlighted namely: the inflexible curriculum that has not been adapted for inclusive education and the importance of evaluating inclusive education. On the issue of evaluation of inclusive education, Mariga et al place premium on the process rather than outcomes of inclusive education utilizing formative evaluation approach. The authors argue that employing this approach helps to assess the effectiveness of inclusive education as well as barriers to the implementation of inclusive education. While this form of assessment is commendable, the interaction of the team involved in the implementation of inclusive education glosses over the issue of power and power relations when working with teachers. This top down approach overlooks the importance of information that could be generated by teachers as they take a critical gaze at their processes when implementing inclusive education. Lastly the authors recommend the use of summative evaluation conducted by external reviewers in collaboration with local key stakeholders.

The book addresses fundamental issues that are pertinent to the implementation of inclusive education in an African context. It coincides with the ratification of CRPD by most African states. Unlike other descriptive books on the subject of inclusive education, this book takes a practical analytical route on how to implement inclusive education in low-income countries. Thus, it offers unique ideas on the implementation of Article 24 of the *Convention on Inclusive Education*. The book is a must read not only for teacher educators, community development workers and parent trainers, but also for rehabilitation officers, disability researchers, support services staff and student teachers in the area of inclusive education.