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Inclusive Education: From Targeting Groups and Schools to Achieving Quality Education as the Core of EFA

Renato Opertti, Zachary Walker and Yi Zhang

INTRODUCTION

Building an inclusive society, in which all people can participate effectively and learn together, entails a broadened understanding, conceptualization, and development of inclusive education as a key overall principle to attain and sustain quality education for all (UNESCO, 2009). The potential for inclusion to educate all learners is promising because it allows for reflection upon the current educational systems and for revolutionizing education at large. However, the debate about the terminology, definitions, and implications of inclusive education is often contested, confusing, and sometimes stagnant (Ainscow, Dyson & Weiner, 2012). This creates a mindset barrier for stakeholders as well as the general public to understanding inclusion's basic premise – that all children have the right to an inclusive learning environment where educational leaders and teachers are convinced of and actively promote inclusive practices in the school. Inclusive education does not only entail advocating for its development and/or allocating more resources to invest in basic infrastructure and equipment. Nor is it simply adjusting the curriculum repeatedly to narrow down inputs for 'learning', or introducing changes in teacher education, or supporting in-service training. Instead, inclusive education entails the openness, willingness and competencies to understand, embrace, and support the diversity of learners' profiles, circumstances, needs, styles, and expectations as a powerful source for democratizing and enhancing learning opportunities, processes, and outcomes.

The concept of inclusion has significantly evolved throughout the past 60–70 years. Reviewing its development from an international comparative perspective, there are four core ideas discussed and developed at the national and international levels regarding how inclusive education policies and practices are understood and implemented under different circumstances. While the term inclusion became more popular near the end of the 20th century, we posit that it began as a foundation for the rights-based approach of educational practice (core idea 1) as indicated in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Initially, inclusive practitioners focused on improving the learning conditions of specific learners, mostly children categorized with special needs (core idea 2), which was largely influenced by the 1994 Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education. Gradually, they expanded their focus to all marginalized children (core idea 3) as declared in the World Education Forum in Dakar, 2000. Today, inclusive education is increasingly driven towards bolstering the capabilities of the education system, across all its levels, provisions, and settings, to deliver on the promise of a quality education for all (core idea 4).

The foundations, rationale, content, and implications of these four core ideas have informed and largely shaped the current educational policies and practices on inclusion, although not necessarily under robust, coherent, and comprehensive frameworks. Sometimes they complement each other in building strong, inclusive education systems, such as in the case of Finland (Halinen & Järvinen, 2008; Savolainen, 2009; Thuneberg et al., 2012). Other times, they run into contradiction, resulting in piece-meal approaches or evidence gaps between and within the policy, programmatic, and practice levels.

For example, principally in the past decade, there have been significant normative and programmatic advances in Latin America to strengthen education as a human right and a public social good, as well as to promote the role of government and prioritize policies for traditionally excluded groups such as the indigenous and Afro-origin populations. Nonetheless, inclusive approaches and practices are predominantly embedded in divisions/departments of special education, and are strongly focused on mainstreaming students with disabilities in regular schools (Amadio, 2009; Amadio & Opertti, 2011; Cedillo, Fletcher, & Contreras, 2009; Garcia-Huidobro & Corvalán, 2009). Likewise, in Eastern and South-eastern Europe, as well as in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and most parts of Asia, the concept and practice of inclusive education have been limited mainly to students identified as having special needs, generally referring to those with physical and/or mental disabilities, as well as refugees (UNESCO-IBE, 2008b; Zagoumenov, 2011).

In light of the evolution of the concept and practices of inclusion, the education system should facilitate and ensure lifelong learning opportunities of all learners from childhood to adult education within a holistic vision of EFA (Opertti, Brady & Duncombe, 2009). Countries of different regions are facing a vast array of challenges cross-cutting to the educational system and broadly

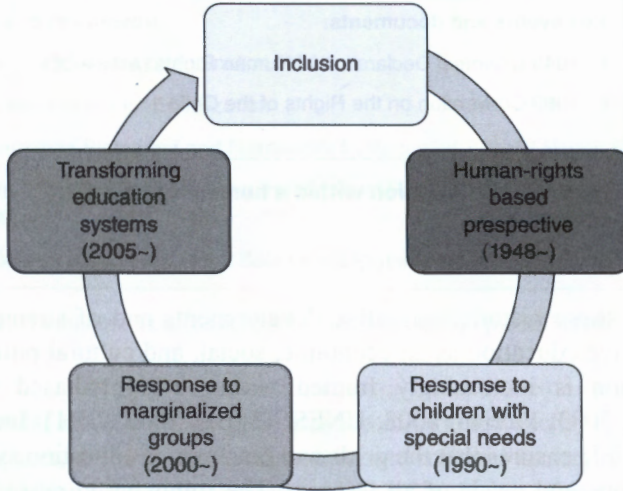


Figure 9.1 The continually-evolving journey to inclusion: Four core ideas in the international arena

referring to social inclusion policy initiatives and developments. Even bearing in mind the vast regional differences and disparities regarding inclusive education policies and practices (Operti & Belalcázar, 2008; UNESCO-IBE, 2011), countries at large are becoming increasingly aware of the need to revamp the educational system as they attempt to make inclusion truly effective. By positioning inclusive education at the core of transforming educational systems, it highlights the question of how it can be seen as a powerful way to contribute to attaining, developing and sustaining more inclusive societies and advancing progressive educational agendas (Acedo, Ferrer & Pàmies, 2009; Armstrong, Armstrong, & Spandagou, 2010).

The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights is the foundation for educating all learners and speaks directly to the issue of social justice (Rioux, 2007). Article 26 of the Declaration is the first international recognition that all human beings have a right to education (United Nations, 1948) and that education is imperative for the full development of individual potential.

The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child more concretely states the right for inclusion of all learners by proclaiming that all children have the right to receive an education that does not discriminate on the basis of disability, ethnicity, religion, language, gender, capabilities, or any other reason (UNICEF, 2011). The Convention produced the first legally-binding international instrument to incorporate the full range of human rights in terms of civil, cultural, economic, political, and social rights. People under 18 years old needed a special convention as they often require specific care and protection that adults do not. In addition, the Convention also sets out a clear recognition that children have human rights as well as adults (UNICEF, 2011).

Key events and documents:

- 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 26)
- 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child

Figure 9.1(a) Inclusion within a human rights-based perspective

In light of these historic normative developments and of strengthening the role of inclusive education as an economic, social, and cultural policy, the current discussion is increasingly framed within a rights-based perspective (Tomasevski, 2003; Florian, 2008; UNESCO-IBE, 2009, 2011). Inclusion as a guiding principle ensures that the goals and practices of education systems meet the expectations and needs of all learners. The rights-based perspective overcomes a categorical approach towards inclusion, as the right of each learner to access, profit from and enjoy a relevant education is explicit and visible, compared to being encapsulated within the needs of diverse categories and/or groups. Framing inclusion as the right of individual learners contributes to understanding and appreciating the uniqueness of each learner and thus highlights the need to personalize education in order to be attentive to the diversity of learning contexts, circumstances, and profiles.

In 1990, delegates from 155 countries, as well as representatives from some 150 governmental and non-governmental organizations, agreed at the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand (5–9 March 1990), to make primary education accessible to all children. The delegates adopted a World Declaration on Education for All, which sets out an overall vision of universal access to education for all children, youth, and adults as well as equity among all. Additionally, the conference explicitly stated that both women and people with disabilities were excluded from education worldwide and outcomes for these groups needed to be improved (UNESCO, 1990).

The Jomtien meeting paved the way for acknowledgement of the exclusion of large numbers of vulnerable and marginalized learners from education systems worldwide. It also presented a vision of education as a much broader concept than schooling, by beginning with early childhood, emphasizing women's literacy, and recognizing the importance of basic literacy skills as part of lifelong learning. This was a landmark conference in the understanding of inclusive education, even though this concept was not widely adopted at that time (Ainscow & Miles, 2008). Likewise, the 1993 Standard Rules for Equalization focused specifically on ensuring that people with disabilities had the same rights as others in society (United Nations, 1993).

The 1994 Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994) has also been pivotal to the inclusion movement because of the focus it brought to mainstreaming students with special needs into

Key events and documents:

- 1990 World Conference on Education for All
- 1993 Standard Rules for Equalization
- 1994 Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education
- 2006 United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (mainly Article 24)
- 2009 Follow-up conference of the Salamanca Statement

Figure 9.1(b) Inclusion as a response to students with special needs

regular schools, along with the prioritization of targeted excluded groups linked to ethnic, gender, cultural, socio-economic, and migrant factors.

Two main ideas framed the understanding of inclusive education: (i) regular schools must have an inclusive orientation, which constituted significant progress in recognizing that all schools should be inclusive, and no differentiation should be made among them regarding their scope of inclusiveness; and (ii) regular schools with an inclusive orientation are 'the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all' (Ainscow & Miles, 2008).

The Salamanca Statement placed educational reform within a broader social agenda that included health, social welfare and vocational training and employment. It emphasized that planning, monitoring and evaluating provisions for inclusive education should be 'decentralized and participatory' and should encourage the 'participation of parents, communities and organizations of people with disabilities in the planning and decision making' (UNESCO, 1994, p.ix). The Statement acknowledged that in many countries there were 'well established systems of special schools for those with specific impairments' (UNESCO, 1994). These systems could 'represent a valuable resource for the development of inclusive schools' (UNESCO, 1994, p.12). However, it urged countries without such a system to 'concentrate their efforts on the development of inclusive schools' alongside specialist support services to enable them to reach the majority of children and young people (UNESCO, 1994, p.13). All policies, both local and national, should ensure that children with disabilities attend their neighborhood schools (UNESCO, 1994, p.17). Finally, the Salamanca Framework specifically states: 'A change in social perspective is imperative. For far too long, the problems of people with disabilities have been compounded by a disabling society that has focused upon their impairments rather than their potential' (UNESCO, 1994, p.7).

In overall terms, the Salamanca Framework was a strong call to understand inclusion as an effective way to include special needs groups within the framework of EFA. This entails, among other key elements, strengthening the inclusive response of regular schools, rethinking the role of special schools as

resource centers, facilitating and promoting the participation of disabled people and their families in developing policies, and linking inclusive education to social inclusion.

Following the 1994 Salamanca Statement, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006), specifically Article 24, refers to an inclusive education system that ensures the right to education of persons with disabilities at all levels and within a lifelong learning perspective. It specifically tailors the general human rights to education to the particular context of disability, with reference to inclusive education. It aims especially to dismantle the barriers that exclude or otherwise marginalize learners with disabilities.

Article 24 is predicated on an assumption that each learner has unique needs – something that is particularly pronounced in the context of disability but equally applicable to all learners. The simple integration of children and other learners with disabilities into the general educational system is not the objective of the Convention. Instead, its aim is to provide the necessary obligations to support truly inclusive education systems and change existing practices to remove barriers to inclusion. As the most recent enunciation of the general human right to education in the specific context of disability, Article 24 is now the central point of departure in international law in the field (Operti, Brady, & Quinn, 2010).

Article 24 effectively codifies a core set of obligations which signatory States must follow to develop an inclusive education system that focuses on children with disabilities: ensuring access to free, compulsory, inclusive, and quality primary and secondary education; accommodating reasonably to individual requirements; and providing individualized support. Inclusion in this sense entails the full incorporation of students with disabilities into the regular educational system, but the article does not go beyond this idea. It views inclusion mainly from the perspective of learners' problems and impairments, which in fact could only be addressed by adjusting the educational system as a whole.

The follow-up conference of the Salamanca Statement reaffirmed the commitment to develop an inclusive education system by highlighting Article 24 as a vehicle to achieve the goal of inclusion for all. The main challenge in developing inclusive systems lies in reforming the mainstream school system and the early years' settings by emphasizing the need to overcome barriers in environment, communication, curriculum, teaching, socialization, and assessment at all levels. The reference document of the post-Salamanca meeting (Inclusion International, 2009b) points out that Article 24 indicates a delicate consensus among international disability organizations reflecting the right to inclusive education as well as the right of blind, deaf and deaf-blind students to be educated in groups (Inclusion International, 2009a). The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities constructs the framework and outlines the obligations as a roadmap to advance the Salamanca agenda. It entails building consensus and adopting a series of performance benchmarks and success indicators to assess the implementation of inclusive education across different policy domains and actions.

Key events and documents:

- 1990 World Conference on Education For All
- 2000 Dakar Framework for Action
- 2010 UNESCO EFA Monitoring Report

Figure 9.1(c) Inclusion as a response to marginalized groups

Within this framework, the agenda of inclusion has been intensively promoted in the past 15 years or so, mainly by civil society organizations related to people with disabilities, and in a lesser way by governments. Despite the reference to EFA or to the needs of all learners, inclusive education is strongly related to the refinement of mainstreaming with a holistic and systemic perspective on how to accommodate the needs of learners categorized as having difficulties and impairments. Inclusion might not be the response or solution in all cases, and it seems not to be a principle applied to all learners, but mainly for those who are defined as in need to be included and specifically related to the framework of special needs education (Booth, 2011).

While the purpose of the World Education Forum (2000, Dakar, Senegal) was referred to by some critics as ‘essentially updating or reorienting the plans of Jomtien, and giving them an extra 15 years’ (Torres, 2001), the Dakar Framework for Action re-affirmed the commitment to achieving EFA by 2015 (UNESCO, 2000) and, in fact, placed a more specific emphasis on expanding the notion of inclusive education. This was mainly done in two ways: (i) by increasing the scope of groups considered as marginalized learners; and (ii) by asserting that the issues of quality are central to the attainment of a truly inclusive education system.

While tackling marginalization, the Dakar Framework called upon nations to address groups that had not previously been a primary focus of international frameworks, such as the poor and most disadvantaged, including working children, remote rural dwellers and nomads, ethnic and linguistic minorities, children, young people and adults affected by conflict, HIV/AIDS, hunger and poor health, and those with special learning needs (UNESCO, 2000). This targeted group approach widened the scope and content of the concept of inclusive education, recognizing that inclusive education also raises issues of cultural and social exclusion. In response to these concerns, governments usually give priority to certain excluded groups in policy planning and the allocation of resources. The discussion has revolved significantly around whether these policy initiatives are developed in a more universally-oriented or focalized public policy framework, having a compensatory perspective on inequities (essentially separated interventions and provisions) or one more related to forging sustainable opportunities for social and individual development under a holistic vision of education (Operti et al., 2009).

The debate about inclusion responding to the needs of marginalized groups implies a discussion about restructuring the welfare state and, more specifically, how targeted policies and programs are embedded in universal public policy frameworks. Focalizing policies within weak universal references may lead to second-class education perceptions and realities, assuming that learning expectations and proposals ought to be narrowed to the constraints of diverse learners' profiles, contexts and circumstances (Operti, 2011).

The Dakar Framework for Action introduced the idea of a quality education for all linked to the achievement of learning outcomes, especially in literacy, numeracy, and essential life skills (UNESCO, 2001a). It was reaffirmed and further developed afterwards, that equity and quality go hand in hand, and that inclusion may be seen as an evolving process as well as a complex and delicate synthesis of these two concepts. Within this perspective, inclusive policies must widen their scope, as exclusion is related not solely to access to education but to lack of equity in learning processes and outcomes. Exclusion was visualized as coming from the 'black box' of the educational system (Rambla, Ferrer, Tarabini & Verger, 2008) and not purely as the result of socio-economic factors. The Dakar conference constituted a step forward in visualizing equity and quality as complementary foundations of inclusive approaches targeted at marginalized learners. It was able to 'turn on many spotlights', revealing groups that had been left behind. Although more groups received schooling, many of the settings where they received schooling lacked equity and quality.

The scope of equity was widened to encompass access, processes and outcomes while quality was mainly referred to as achieving effective learning outcomes. The discussion remains quite open, as the understanding of quality is seen as the key to developing sustainable long-term policies (Operti, 2011; Roegiers, 2010). Some tend to see quality more as the aggregation of improved learning inputs and conditions, while others view it more as diversity of learning processes within a comprehensive vision of the curriculum (considering the prescribed, the implemented, the attained, the experienced, the hidden, and the forgotten curriculum) and leading the way towards relevant learning outcomes. It appears that after Dakar, inclusion has moved strongly along the line of enlarging the scope of equity while the quality discussion has been stuck in an input-oriented perspective (for example, the curricula and textbooks visualized as inputs) disregarding the vast array of learning processes and their complex links to outcomes. Likewise in the last decade or so, quality education has been increasingly narrowed to the conceptualization and measurement of learning outcomes mainly related to 'cognitive knowledge and skills in language, mathematics, and, to a lesser extent, science' (Benavot, 2012).

Ten years after Dakar, the UNESCO EFA Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2010) emphasized the important role of inclusive education as a condition for the development of more inclusive societies. It also highlighted the consequence of failing to place inclusive education at the center of the EFA agenda as hindering progress towards the goals adopted at Dakar. Without defining inclusive education, this report identifies three broad sets of policies in an

Key events and documents:

- 2005 UNESCO Guidelines for Inclusion
- 2008 48th session of the International Conference on Education
- 2009 UNESCO Policy Guidelines on Inclusion

Figure 9.1(d) Inclusion as transforming the education system at large

Inclusive-Education Triangle – accessibility and affordability, learning environment, and entitlements and opportunities – which could be seen as a way of integrating equity and quality policies (UNESCO, 2010).

Within this conceptualization, inclusive education is mainly the result of a series of concrete policies and interventions that have proved to be feasible in different contexts. One core question is how these initiatives are integrated and synergized within diverse educational systems, which are more like the sum of parts and components rather than facilitators of learning opportunities. Policies have great potential to transform reality yet effective development can be severely hampered by piece-meal approaches which seek to implement a series of measures that are not necessarily interconnected and devoid of a global vision of education and learning as well as a holistic perspective of the educational system.

In 2005, UNESCO released guidelines for inclusion with the view to systematize planning for excluded children in the educational process (UNESCO, 2005). The guidelines explained what inclusion entails, that inclusive practice must include all learners, and the need for a holistic view of education as a system comprised of both the public and private sectors. UNESCO understands inclusion as ‘a dynamic approach of responding positively to pupil diversity and of seeing individual differences not as problems, but as opportunities for enriching learning’ (UNESCO, 2005, p.12). Inclusion becomes more of a continually-evolving process (a journey) to respect, understand, address and respond to learners’ diversities, entailing changes in the educational system at large (i.e., regarding content, approaches, structures, and strategies) and strengthening the need to personalize education. Along with visualizing diversity as an entrance point to value all children equally (Booth, 2011) and the core of the attainment of inclusion, UNESCO (2005, p.16) also highlighted the need to prioritize ‘those groups of learners who may be at risk of marginalization, exclusion or underachievement’ indicating moral responsibility.

Building upon this vision of inclusion, and taking stock of diverse policy developments and agreements at the inter-regional and regional levels (UNESCO-IBE, 2008b), the 48th session of the International Conference on Education (ICE) (held in 2008) placed inclusive education at the core of the transformation and development of the educational system at large. Endorsed by 153 countries, including over 100 Ministers of Education, inclusive education was understood

‘as a general guiding principle to strengthen education for sustainable development, lifelong learning for all and equal access of all levels of society to learning opportunities’ (UNESCO-IBE, 2008a).

The 2008 ICE was followed by policy dialogue meetings and capacity-development workshops held at inter-regional, regional, and national levels, partnered among UNESCO, UN-sister organizations and other international organizations, Ministries of Education, universities, and civil society institutions (UNESCO-IBE, 2012). Conceptual and policy discussions focused strongly on the need to rethink the visions, cultures, policies, and practices of the educational systems while understanding inclusion as a key to democratizing education and society, and as a ‘model of the kind of democracy one would like to see throughout society’ (Thomazet, 2009).

This transformational line around inclusion has brought in a series of challenges and issues that contribute to progressively moving the inclusive education agenda from diverse and often contradictory visions, approaches and practices structured around categories and groups, to a more holistic perspective based on the idea that understanding, respecting, and responding to expectations and needs of all learners within their contexts and circumstances is the pathway to truly attain inclusion.

Some of these issues include:

- Visualizing inclusive education as a transversal approach to all dimensions and levels of the educational system within a lifelong learning perspective encompassing formal, non-formal, and informal settings and provisions;
- Understanding, addressing and responding to the diversity of expectations and needs of all learners through personalizing education within the common aims and objectives pursued by the educational system at large;
- Understanding, identifying, and removing institutional, curricular, pedagogical and teachers’ barriers that hamper the democratization of educational opportunities (the domains of culture, policy, curriculum, and practice);
- Aiming at presence (access and attendance), participation (quality learning and processes) and achievement (quality outcomes) through the synergies between social and educational inclusion policies and programs;
- Using the triad inclusive curriculum – school – teachers as a comprehensive and integrated policy framework to facilitate and ensure the engagement and the welfare (academic, social, and emotional) of all learners;
- Promoting school cultures and environments that are child-friendly, conducive to effective learning, inclusive of all children, healthy and protective, gender-responsive, and encourage the active role and the participation of learners, their families and their communities; and
- Training teachers by equipping them with the appropriate competencies to teach diverse student populations and to support the development and strengths of the individual learner within the community of the classroom (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2010).

Based on these recent developments, UNESCO followed up the 2008 ICE by releasing its 2009 Policy Guidelines on Inclusion. The objective is to assist countries in strengthening their focus on inclusion through their strategies and plans for education, to introduce the broadened concept of inclusive education, and to highlight the areas that need particular attention to promote inclusive

education and strengthen policy development (UNESCO, 2009). The guidelines are comprehensive in nature and highlight the definition, rationales, practical concerns, and suggested solutions to diverse policy concerns and domains regarding inclusive education. It is understood as a process that allows all learners access to a quality education grounded in personalized learning.

Overall, the conceptual discussions, policy developments and capacity-development training activities lead by UNESCO-IBE and taking place in different regions since the 2008 ICE, indicate renewed commitments, foundations, criteria, and tools to advance the inclusive education agenda. It entails, among other aspects, an increasing focus on revisiting the policy frameworks within a socially-inclusive perspective; overcoming narrow conceptualizations of inclusive education as mainly category/group-oriented and differentiated by ability levels; fostering/strengthening partnerships to engage diverse stakeholders in understanding, being convinced of and backing up inclusive policy initiatives; facilitating curriculum development processes at the school and classroom levels, targeting all learners in heterogeneous learning environments; and strengthening inclusive education as a guiding principle and cross-cutting dimension to teachers' education and professional development (Ainscow et al., 2012; Operti & Brady, 2011; Operti et al., 2009; UNESCO-IBE 2012). The discourse and practice are moving from the emphasis on the necessity, advocacy and investment for inclusive schools, to the recognition, acceptance and promotion that all schools should be inclusive regardless of their contexts and students' profiles.

REGIONAL COMMONALITIES AND DIFFERENCES AROUND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

The following section identifies some major issues and challenges informing the inclusive education agendas and practices in six regions: Africa, the Arab States, Asia-Pacific, the CIS, Europe, and Latin America (see Table 9.1).

Despite the wide-scope development of regional policies and practices, many countries are struggling to address the deeply rooted barriers towards a more inclusive society, both within and outside the education system, and increasingly framed in a rights-based perspective (core idea 1 referred to in Section I). Some countries still refer to a narrow understanding of inclusive education that focuses mainly on children with special needs (core idea 2) and to a lesser extent on marginalized learners (core idea 3), while others continue to face challenges of bridging the gaps between policy rhetoric and practices. In general, regions are still far from effectively implementing the concept of inclusive education as transforming the education system at large (core idea 4). In addition, the scarcity of financial and human resources as well as the lack of inclusive curricula and teaching also represent common obstacles for designing and implementing inclusive education policies. Based on the commonality of the issues and

challenges presented in Table 9.1, we herein identify five policy priorities for all regions regarding the development of truly inclusive education systems.

a) *Creating a common societal understanding of inclusive education*

Policy-makers and education officials in many countries have accepted the broadened conceptualization of inclusive education since the 2008 ICE. However, it is still understood primarily as a process of integrating children with special needs or disabilities into mainstream schools by larger society, especially in the Africa, Arab States, and Asia-Pacific regions. Moving inclusion beyond the cultural, institutional and educational boundaries of special needs implies a worldwide challenge of promoting changes across the education system, most significantly within schools, and involving communities at large. Teachers' efforts to attain inclusion are often hampered by constraints within the education system (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2010). As long as the concept of inclusion remains narrow, the discussion will continually focus on accommodating specific groups of learners within existing frameworks, structures, settings and provisions, instead of reflecting upon the educational system as a whole to ensure inclusion. Building on consensus around a common societal and cultural understanding of inclusive education is crucial to democratizing education and to the attainment of just, peaceful, inclusive, and cohesive societies.

b) *Promoting fundamental mindset changes*

Mindset transformations are at the core of open, plural, and constructive dialogue around inclusion. The most troublesome barriers to inclusion come from entrenched values, attitudes, and behaviors that disdain and/or disregard the idea of a just society; that do not recognize or accept diversity as key foundation of a more inclusive and cohesive society, and that do not consider the scope and implications of glaring social and educational gaps as a priority issue. The broadened conceptualization of inclusive education entails a completely different perspective of the current issues, which suggests that the fundamental problems reside in the mindsets of the education system itself, rather than in children who do not fit into the system. This perspective is derived from the belief that all learners have a right to quality education and the diverse needs of all learners should be addressed by the education system on an equal foot. It also implies a fundamental paradigm shift of inclusive education from a traditional 'Charity/Social welfare approach' to a 'Rights-based approach' (Gaad, 2010), which makes it possible to overcome a categorical approach towards inclusion. Placing inclusion as the right of individual learners contributes to understanding and appreciating the uniqueness and specificity of each learner and highlights the need to personalize education while taking into account the diversity of contexts and circumstances.

Table 9.1 Inclusive education from a regional perspective

| | Africa (Ji & Bégin-Caouette, 2011) | Arab States (Brady, Harb & Bubshait, 2011) | Asia–Pacific Region (Shaeffer & Lindeberg, 2011) | CIS (Zagoumenov, 2011) | Europe (Donnelly, Meijer, & Watkins, 2011) | Latin America (Amadio & Opertti, 2011) |
|---|---|--|---|---|--|--|
| Conventional perception | In Africa, inclusive education refers to a process of integrating children with special needs (mainly disabilities) into mainstream schools | In the Arab states, inclusive education has been traditionally associated with efforts targeted at supporting learners with special educational needs, focusing on their rights and their inclusion in society | In many Asian countries the term inclusive education does not exist or is not recognized by all; otherwise it refers to education for children with disabilities | In CIS countries, inclusive education is still considered as education for students with physical and/or mental disabilities, guaranteeing access to quality education for children with special needs | In European countries, the most common understanding of inclusive education is an approach for meeting special education needs (SEN) within mainstream settings; usually seen as a component of social inclusion | Countries in Latin America interpret inclusive education in terms of equal educational opportunity, provision and access of quality education for all. However, the term still strongly relates to special education of children with disabilities into mainstream schools |
| Broadened conceptualization as point of comparison | A general guiding principle to strengthen education for sustainable development, lifelong learning for all and equal access of all levels of society to learning opportunities (UNESCO, 2008) | | | | | |
| Some regional issues and challenges | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Poverty alleviation b) HIV/AIDS education c) Early childhood care and education (ECCE) d) Mother tongue instruction e) Life skills and competency-based approach | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Lack of societal understanding about inclusion and its implications for society and local values b) Exclusion of parents and other stakeholders from decision-making processes c) Gaps between policy design and implementation d) Lack of inclusive curricula and inclusive teachers e) Lack of data on education systems f) Situations of emergency in post- and/or current conflict areas | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Early childhood care and education (ECCE) b) Exclusion in Primary and Secondary Education (especially for children with disabilities, children affected and/or infected with HIV/AIDS, children from ethno-linguistic minority groups, children of illegal migrant workers, refugee children, girls) c) Non-formal education d) Fragmentation and low quality of teacher training | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Lack of awareness about the value and broadened conceptualization of inclusive education b) Lack of policy and legislative framework for inclusive education c) The need to diversify education to address multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and migration changes in the population d) Tracking system which streams and segregates students based on their differences e) Financial restriction f) Lacking commitment from other public sectors involved in social policies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Differences in concepts and terminology b) Merging and reshaping of systems c) Collection of qualitative and quantitative information d) Eastern and South Eastern Europe: overcrowded classrooms, inappropriate infrastructure in schools, lack of a qualitative inclusive curriculum, uninformed and untrained teachers, lack of resource teachers and resource rooms in schools, and lack of appropriate knowledge about school legislation and inclusive education | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Envisage a holistic vision of educational change b) Viewing the diverse student profile as a valuable resource instead of attempting to homogenize learners c) Initiate intersectoral programs for successful education d) Rethink citizenship education to reinforce democracy and improve the governance of education systems e) Address the most vulnerable groups to reduce their disadvantage and foster equity in primary and secondary education f) Promote competency-based approaches |

(Continued)

Table 9.1 (Continued)

| | Africa (Ji & Bégin-Caouette, 2011) | Arab States (Brady, Harb & Bubshait, 2011) | Asia–Pacific Region (Shaeffer & Lindeberg, 2011) | CIS (Zagoumenov, 2011) | Europe (Donnelly, Meijer, & Watkins, 2011) | Latin America (Amadio & Operti, 2011) |
|------------------------------------|--|---|---|--|---|---|
| Some regional policy priorities | a) Ensure equity in education | a) Promote social awareness regarding the broadened concept of inclusive education | a) Raise awareness around the broadened concepts and practices of inclusive education | a) Promote the improvement of national legislation and its closer adherence to inclusive education international norms | a) Strengthen the social dimension of education | a) Develop rights-focused, long-term educational policies supported by broad social participation |
| | b) Promote early childhood care and education (ECCE) | b) Encourage participatory policy-making and enact legislation for all categories of students | b) Design coherent and sustainable policies to address the issues of social exclusion and anti-discrimination laws | b) Promote public awareness and acceptance of inclusive education goals and objectives | b) Enhance social inclusion to promote equal opportunities in education | b) Extend early childhood care and education (ECCE) programs, especially for most disadvantaged and vulnerable social groups |
| | c) Extension of basic education | c) Provide access to ICT and facilitate its incorporation into curricula | c) Adopt inclusive teaching and learning practices into the regular pre-service teacher training programs | c) Shift from the educational paradigm focused on students' 'defects' to the paradigm focused on support to each child development | c) Improve pre-primary education for children with SEN | |
| | d) Improve community involvement | d) Inclusive teacher training and professional development | d) Initiate early intervention programs | d) Diversify school-curriculum learning framework | d) Build support systems for mainstream schools | c) Reduce inequalities in learning achievements and knowledge distribution in primary and secondary education |
| | e) Provide mother tongue instruction | e) Build partnerships among diverse stakeholders | e) Create a database of children to monitor the progress of inclusion | e) Support to educational initiatives aimed at promoting culture of tolerance in schools and society | e) Personalize learning to meet diverse needs in mainstream classrooms | d) Address cultural diversity by developing inclusive curriculum, and diversifying teaching strategies and assessment systems |
| | f) Adopt competency-based approaches | f) Develop inclusive curriculum | f) Pay special attention to children affected by war, civil strife and natural disaster | f) Adopt ICT and distance education to broaden access to high quality education for all children | f) Coordinate support services and inter-disciplinary teamwork | e) Invest more in teachers and other educational staff; develop comprehensive and inter-sectoral policies to maximize their abilities and motivations, and improve their working conditions |
| | g) Develop inclusive curriculum | g) Diversification of assessment criteria and methods | g) Provide health services for children in a child-friendly way and offer voluntary testing, counseling and treatment for HIV and related illnesses | g) Develop a system of comprehensive monitoring of all students' development and social inclusion | g) Provide learners with SEN the access to post-compulsory education | |
| | h) Improve inclusive teacher training and education | i) Engagement of parents, students and communities at school level | | h) Improve teacher training to increase their capacity to work in inclusive educational settings | h) Raise achievements of all pupils in inclusive settings | |

| | Africa (Ji & Bégin-Caouette, 2011) | Arab States (Brady, Harb & Bubshait, 2011) | Asia–Pacific Region (Shaeffer & Lindeberg, 2011) | CIS (Zagoumenov, 2011) | Europe (Donnelly, Meijer, & Watkins, 2011) | Latin America (Amadio & Opertti, 2011) |
|---|---|---|--|---|--|---|
| Some regional initiatives and practices | UNESCO-backed Basic Education in Africa Program (BEAP) | a) Adapt school curricula and support to accommodate students' needs (Oman, Qatar and United Arab Emirates) | a) Develop inclusive education policy in countries (i.e., Laos PDR, Timor-Leste and Pakistan) | a) View linguistic and cultural diversity in the classroom as a valuable resource and promote the use of the mother tongue in the early years of instruction (i.e., Armenia and Kazakhstan) | a) SNE data collection program (a biennial exercise with data provided by the Ministerial Representatives of the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education) | a) Successful policies to advance universal access to primary and secondary education |
| | a) Extend and democratize basic education towards a minimum of 9–10 years, including 1 or 2 years of early childhood education | b) Initiate programs of early intervention and preparatory, and preferential practices for the disabled (i.e., Kuwait) | b) Establish pilot inclusive schools (i.e., Afghanistan, Indonesia and Pakistan) | b) Working closely with a number of key actors, including other government agencies, civil society and the private sector as well as parents and community (i.e., Armenia and The Russian Federation) | b) Establish inclusive educational institutions and adopt individual teaching plans | b) Intercultural and bilingual education programs valuing students' learning in their mother tongue (i.e., Chile, Ecuador, Guatemala and Peru) as well as intercultural initiatives |
| | b) Set up a 'Knowledge Hub' of early childhood care and education (ECE) in Mauritius | c) Adapt teaching methods and strategies to meet all students' needs, peer instruction, teacher and educational staff incentives and training (i.e., Kingdom of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman and Saudi Arabia) | c) Improving inclusive teacher training (i.e., Brunei Darussalam) | c) Strengthen the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to ensure greater access to learning opportunities, in particular in rural, remote and disadvantaged areas (i.e., Ukraine) | c) Comprehensive schools' model (i.e., Finland) | c) Inter-sectoral policies to support inclusive education |
| | d) Support the revision of basic education curriculum frameworks (i.e., Gambia) | d) Promote awareness and positive attitudes (i.e., Kuwait, Qatar and Yemen) | d) Promoting awareness and positive attitudes towards inclusion (i.e., Indonesia and Mongolia) | | | d) Some initiatives to mainstream students with special needs into regular schools are currently taking place and specific teacher training programs, supporting mechanisms and materials have also been developed for special needs students |
| | e) Initiate a postgraduate Diploma in Curriculum Design and Development for African countries (hosted by the Republic of Tanzania and co-sponsored by UNESCO) | | | | | f) Decentralization and participative design of the curricula |

c) Restructuring schools to provide comprehensive support to all learners

Inclusive education reforms are calling for radical changes to the traditional one-size-fits-all approach, encouraging and supporting the personalization of education. The comprehensive support approach tends to accommodate the diverse needs of all learners and support learners from at least the following dimensions:

- **Pupils' welfare:** Schools provide comprehensive services to ensure the physical, psychological, and social well-being of all students.
- **School infrastructure:** School infrastructures are adjusted for children with special needs. Adequate facilities to accommodate children with disabilities are provided to allow barrier-free access on campus. Parents and students are informed by the facilities available.
- **Early support:** Schools provide support to students and families as soon as the needs are identified.
- **Financial support and scholarships:** Financial supports are provided to students in need.
- **Mother tongue instruction:** Teaching approaches, curricula and textbooks are adapted to the lingual needs of minority students.
- **Specialist provision:** Special education teachers and resource centers/rooms are provided for students with special needs. Existing special schools can be transformed into inclusive education resource centers to serve the mainstream schools in the neighborhood.

d) Addressing expectations and needs of all learners through an inclusive curriculum

An inclusive educational system entails a broader understanding of the curriculum as a tool to understand, respect, and address the expectations and needs of all learners by personalizing the learning processes and looking for multiple ways to develop each individual's potential. It implies an inclusive pedagogy that creates options for students to choose 'how, where, and with whom they learn' (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2010) and respectfully accommodates to their expectations and needs. An inclusive curriculum is not about adjusting mainstream provisions and settings to consider special needs learners, but it is about developing shared goals, frameworks, strategies and practices as key dimensions to respond to the uniqueness of each learner within the classroom community. Holding high expectations for all learners supports the development of an inclusive curriculum. The system should provide support when needed and make curricula solid, open, and flexible, allowing for different learning styles and content which are relevant to learners and society.

e) Empowering inclusive teachers to address diversity of learners

Teachers are key policy-makers in class as their decisions determine what the class experiences once the classroom door is closed (Fulcher, 1999). However, teachers could not serve as agents to 'deliver' a new paradigm of inclusion without being informed about and convinced of the rationale, aim, strategies, and contents of inclusive education. Empowering teachers to be truly inclusive of all learners entails that teacher education curricula enhance their competences and support

customized learning for each individual within diverse contexts (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2011; Florian, 2011; Forlin, 2010; Rouse, 2010). After all, 'effective teaching is effective teaching for all students' (Ainscow et al., 2012).

We should consider at least two elements regarding the development of an inclusive pedagogy in teacher education institutes: (i) responding to teacher needs and strengthening their self-esteem regarding their work in multicultural contexts that are becoming increasingly diverse; and (ii) promoting that teacher students come from different ethnic, social, and cultural backgrounds and identities (Forlin, 2010).

RETHINKING INCLUSION ENTAILS RETHINKING THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

In order to move forward with relevant and effective policies and implementation strategies to achieve quality education as the core of EFA, it is highly relevant for policy-makers and educators to understand the complexity of the four evolving and intertwining core ideas of inclusive education, the common elements of regional and inter-regional challenges and issues, as well as their implications in different social, political and educational contexts.

As indicated in the first section of this chapter, through the shared collaboration and leadership from various international agencies and conferences, inclusive education has evolved towards a process that strengthens educational systems, across all levels, provisions, and settings to provide education for all learners. Despite the progress that has been made, inclusive education remains strongly embedded in discussions about groups of learners within the paradigm of special needs education, and not so clearly about the culture, political, social and educational reforms required to sustain inclusion.

The increasing emphasis on inclusive education as a 'principled approach to the development of education and society' (Booth, 2011) challenges practitioners to reconsider their own thinking and practice (Ainscow, 2008). The new understanding of inclusion requires realizing that decisions about how to improve schools always involve moral and political reasoning, as well as technical considerations (Ainscow, 2008). Educators cannot pretend that inclusive education can be pursued without tackling institutional reconstruction and economic redistribution in highly stratified societies (Slee, 2008). The costs of exclusion are high in terms of lost productivity, lost human potential, and lost health and well-being (Peters, 2007). Inclusion entails addressing the politics of exclusion and representation (Slee, 2008). In-depth educational reforms related to curriculum change and development are visualized as social actions to remove deprivation, gender inequality, illiteracy, and barriers to schooling (Rioux, 2007).

While progress is being made, there is not necessarily deep conviction around and strong acceptance of the inclusive philosophy (Brantlinger, 1997; Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994; Sebba & Sachdev, 1997). Many educationalists resist the idea, and

some disability-focused organizations argue for separate and specialist services (Ainscow, 2008; Booth, 2011). However, attempts are being made throughout the world to provide more effective educational responses for all children, whatever their characteristics. The overall trend is to respond within the context of general educational provisions (Ainscow, 2008). Inclusion is increasingly seen more broadly as a reform that supports and welcomes diversity among all learners (UNESCO, 2001b), and that entails a paradigm change, from recognizing classroom diversity to a positive management of the singularities (Jollien, 1999). This perspective presumes that the aim of inclusive education is to eliminate social exclusion resulting from attitudes and responses to diversity in race, social class, ethnicity, religion, gender and ability (Vitello & Mithaug, 1998).

As long as the policy debates and developments about inclusive education are strongly focused on the co-location of special schools within mainstream schools (Ainscow et al., 2012), the inclusive perspective is not contributing to leading the transformation of the educational system and to effectively conceiving and developing schools for all. Within a narrow and piece-meal conceptualization of inclusive education, EFA goals will not be achieved, and remain primarily related to issues of access and input/outcome-oriented perspectives/approaches on quality education, disregarding learning processes and the role played by the curriculum as a tool to sustain educational policies.

Regarding key policy dilemmas revolving around inclusive education, we could either stand on different combinations of the paradigms of special needs education (core idea 2) and marginalized learners (core idea 3), or recognize and build on the positive initiatives and achievements of these two traditions, moving towards inclusion as a guiding principle and dimension to change the mindsets and the practices of the educational system (core idea 4) within a rights-based perspective (core idea 1). The first option does not stop, or even exacerbate, the vicious cycle of segregation, marginalization, and exclusion from inside and outside the educational system; whereas the second option seeks to address the multiple binding causes and consequences of social and educational exclusion. The double-face question is about which type of society we envisage and strive for as the foundation of inclusive education, and how inclusive education effectively supports the development and attainment of more just, inclusive, tolerant, cohesive, and developed societies by providing an effective learning opportunity to every single learner.

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