

Inclusive Quality Education for Children with Disabilities

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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world innovation summit for education
مؤتمر القمة العالمي للابتكار في التعليم

An Initiative of Qatar Foundation



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Executive Summary

Education for all cannot be realized without the inclusion of all marginalized groups, and particularly children with disabilities. Inclusive quality education is crucial to creating interconnected societies based on values of social justice, equity of opportunities and freedom.

Our focus in this report is on the education of children with disabilities. We critically review the literature in order to develop a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the key issues and debates in the field of disability and education. Drawing on what has been achieved so far, we propose a new Three Rs model: ‘Rights, Resources and Research’. We argue that in order to achieve inclusive quality education we need to focus on these three interrelated aspects.

Across the globe there is growing focus on the benefits of inclusive quality education for all children. The Sustainable Development Goals (UN, 2015) make an explicit commitment to children with disabilities, and other marginalized groups, to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” (Goal 4). Despite some progress, children with disabilities remain the most marginalized in education. Estimates provided by various international organisations suggest that high numbers of children with disabilities in the global South do not go to school. Of those children with disabilities who do make it through the door, they are half as likely to transition to secondary school as their peers without disabilities. Gender also plays a pivotal role; girls with disabilities are less likely to complete primary education than boys with disabilities. The Sustainable Development Goals (UN, 2015) clearly recognize that this gap must be closed, as the international community more explicitly addresses the challenges of quality and equity.

Structure of the report

This report is organized in four sections. Section one gives an overview of the global mandates and the developments that have been made in the past three decades to ensure and uphold the rights of children with disabilities in education, particularly in mainstream settings. Based on our review of the literature we note that there are three significant and interrelated rationales for investing in the education of children and young people with disabilities. We highlight available evidence on each of these, namely the human rights argument, evidence in relation to economic development and the motivation that inclusive schools are better schools for all children.

Section two focuses on mapping out the different understandings of disability. Here we track the developments in conceptualizing disability from the medical model to the most current bio-psycho-social model, often used in international literature. We also address the strengths and challenges in

measuring the prevalence of disability. We make the point that disability is a social and cultural construct and that the legal definition of disability also differs across contexts thus presenting challenges when trying to establish cross national rates. We then discuss in detail the progress made by the Washington Group on Disability in establishing a common language on disability. Drawing on their work we discuss how questions on disability when framed using a functional approach can provide significant insights into the range of difficulties that people face. Thus helping countries plan provision for people with disabilities across a range of sectors. We conclude this section by reiterating the World Report on Disability's (WHO, 2011) final recommendation that disability research must be strengthened and supported.

Section three elucidates two contrasting country contexts, India and England. We examine these two countries, one in the global South and one in the global North, both with strong histories of disability legislation. In the case of India, we examine policy perspectives and provide an overview of the two key government supported national level programs: Sarv Shiksha Abhiyan and Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan. Despite increases in enrolment rates for children with disabilities, our review suggests that schools remain ill-prepared to accommodate these children and struggle to offer them quality education. We discuss the enrolment data in detail, while also reviewing the impairment categories used in the national school survey, the District Information System for Education (DISE). Drawing on insights gathered from school and classroom based studies, we identify four key areas of focus, namely (1) training of mainstream teachers, (2) recognising special educators as important resource for supporting mainstream classrooms, particularly teachers, (3) promoting the use of cost effective teaching aids and adaptations to school infrastructure and (4) supporting students with disabilities to be part of the school culture.

In the case of England, we present legislation which has recently been implemented, including the new Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (DfE, 2015). We put forward the argument that the language used within the new legislation fails to incorporate concepts from the social model of disability and retains a medicalized lens. Similar, to the Indian case, we provide an overview of the development of inclusive education in England and elucidate the current educational status of children with special educational needs. We use disaggregated data to explore different intersecting variables, and proffer that children with special educational needs from black and minority ethnic groups are likely to experience multiple levels of exclusion. Additionally, we also highlight the disparity in educational outcomes for those with and without special educational needs. Finally, drawing on the literature regarding what works in inclusive education in England we expand on three key issues: (1) the nature and efficacy of support provided by teaching assistants, (2) need for developing an inclusive curriculum and finally (3) the need for better teacher education

Section four concludes this report by proposing the Three R's model: 'Rights, Resources and Research', which provides a framework for moving forward the debates on inclusive quality education. We assert that if inclusive education is to be achieved then the interrelated aspects of rights, resources and research must all be addressed. Central to our rights argument we assert that, as well as rights to and in education, persons with disabilities have the right to be counted. Gathering rigorous disaggregated data on disability is essential to ensuring the rights of persons with disabilities are met. We reiterate the importance of resources – human, material and infrastructural, in order to develop inclusive quality education systems. Finally, we assert the need for rigorous research involving strong alliances between researchers in the field of disability and development and people with disabilities themselves. This will ensure that the research conducted is inclusive and responds to real life concerns. Finally, we highlight the challenges of influencing policy through research. We conclude by arguing that research must be accompanied by strategic activism if it is to effect change.

Reflection on terminology

Before we begin, we wish to acknowledge the tensions surrounding the term 'disability'. When writing in a general context we use the term 'children with disabilities' or 'persons with disabilities'. However, with respect to each country context we use the appropriate terminology in line with local policy – for India, 'children with special needs' and England, 'children with special educational needs and/or disabilities'. Both countries define 'special needs' and 'special educational needs' rather differently and these concepts have been subject to much analysis and debates, highlighting various limitations in their usage. While we raise some of these issues in various sections of the Report, we have decided to use person first language to forefront the individual. Additionally, we have decided to use the concept of disability/disabilities, while being wholly mindful of the heterogeneity of the population we are focusing on. The aim here is to acknowledge that terminology is highly political in nature, and its usage must be person, contextual and culturally sensitive.

Within this report, global North and South are used in order to highlight the “fundamental economic inequality between the two blocs which results in inequalities in the standard of living, resources available and domination by the Northern bloc in international development” (Singal, 2010, p. 417). These terms do not refer solely to a geographical divide; rather, they place nations together broadly along the lines of 'rich' and 'poor'. Notably, most countries under the term global South have a colonial history. Despite some criticism of these terms in the literature (Crossley & Watson, 2003), we have chosen to use these to avoid the inherent bias situated within the terms 'developed' and 'developing' countries suggesting a “transmission of knowledge from so-called developed to developing nations” and a lack of recognition of the rich histories of many of the so called 'developing countries' (Singal 2010, p. 417).



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