

Creating an inclusive school environment

Edited by Susan Douglas



Book reviewed by



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It has been a pleasant experience reviewing the book “Creating an Inclusive School Environment” published by the British Council. This book has the merit to contribute to the robust knowledge and research gaps in the context of Nepal as well as in other developing countries across Asia, Africa and Europe regarding teaching English as a second language as well as supporting gender equality and inclusive education. The Editors have established their commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion, which requires differential and context specific interventions. This was helpful in enabling me to understand the stance which the British council team has taken in relation to key issues discussed in the book.

In the introductory section, Susan Douglas sets the scene by stating that all children have the right to education irrespective of their differences and diversity. However, several factors create barriers to realize their rights to education. These factors include policies, infrastructure, teaching learning practices, social values, norms and resources. In many cases the interactions of these factors result in the complete exclusion of many children from education. The author suggests that teachers need to be equipped with skills and knowledge in providing equitable and need-based support to children. She proposes three modules that teachers need to consider - 1) social relations and gender equality 2) unconscious bias and, 3) the social model of disabilities.

Chapter 1 discusses a range of interventions through formal and non- formal modes for displaced children, vulnerable female students, female and male teachers, young people and teachers, around the inclusion of children in education in Nigeria, Iraq, Lebanon and Greece. Titilope Fakoya discussed, girls club, safe school initiatives, education crisis response programs and trauma counselling programs for students and teachers were implemented to provide safe and inclusive learning environments for girl students and marginalized children in Nigeria. Fiona Robertson highlighted the contribution of the English for Resilience program, an English language support

training to 12 to 19 year old's in Iraq. The program not only provided access to education for the displaced population but also resulted in their social integration and developed their human potentials. The next component of the English for resilience program was training and mentoring of teachers in remote locations. Both these programmes proved to be an excellent opportunity for the coaches and teachers residing in remote, inaccessible and conflict affected locations.

Eirini Adamopoulou reported the benefits of training teachers with multicultural and multilingual pedagogy, as well as crises intervention strategies. The program provided the skills to manage diversified classrooms and empowered teachers psychologically in order to cater to the needs of migrant children entering Greece from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran and Pakistan.

Finally, Isabelle Grappe and Claire Ross highlights a programme to support conflict affected children and parents - the integration of Syrian Refugee children and their parents into Lebanese early education system. The British Council applied plurilingual approaches to motivate students to learn new languages by linking them with their home language. Parents were involved along with the teachers in their children's language learning. This didactic approach to teaching a second or third language is conceivably a useful strategy in the Nepalese context where 129 languages are spoken.

Chapter two discussed the processes and outcomes of the projects on gender and inclusion through girls' education challenge programmes in the classroom supported by the UK government in 15 countries around Africa and Asia. Emily Boost and Sally Ross Cornes reported a project in Turkey adopting gender responsive pedagogy, extra and co-curricular support, mentor and role model approach to enhance girls' participation in education as well as their learning achievements. The beauty of this project was the piloting of the programme in pre-primary, primary and secondary schools in diverse contexts that examined the outcomes of the intervention. However, all the project sites were in urban locations which were not able to address more prominent issues of girls' education in remote rural locations. This finding is a lesson for any future projects that should focus more on the issue of girls' education in rural context in Africa, Asia as well as in Nepal.

In the same section, Anu Upadhaya and Pramod Kumar Shah explored the relationship between education, English language and girls' capacity development in Nepal. Nepal has made an encouraging progress on girls' access to education with equal parity between girls and boys in primary and secondary levels. However, the issue of quality education - the foundation of learning competencies, continuation of education for professional growth and employability continue to be a challenge in Nepal due to the domination of male gender over female. The authors believed that this patriarchal belief was the barrier to girls' access to and participation in education, which eventually results in their performance being lower than boys. There are three factors affecting female subordination to males in the Nepalese society - Religious, Socio-cultural and economic. Parents want to enroll their sons in private schools and daughters in public schools believing that private schools provide quality education. Parents' preferential choice in their son's education

over their daughters has resulted in girls having less opportunity to study Science, Technology and Engineering, Mathematics and English in higher level.

With regards to curriculum and pedagogy, boys and girls were not provided equal opportunities for classroom interaction, which is crucial for English language learning. For example, separate sitting arrangements for boys and girls, gender stereotypes in girl's participation in extracurricular activities as well as a lack of gender responsive curriculum and textbook. Although many public schools are adopting English as the medium of instruction, teachers are not competent in delivering curriculum content in English.

The authors discussed the programs on supporting marginalized girls with English language and Digital literacy skills by the British Council in partnership with the US Embassy and Equal Access as well as by VSO Nepal. These skills are necessary to continue for 14 to 19 year old girls' education and to find jobs.

Chapter three focused on the research report on inclusive education for children with disabilities in Mexico and the authors empirical knowledge of helping teachers to create more inclusive learning environments in Macedonia, India, West Africa and Russia. Caroline Grant and Loanne Newton reported an innovative project on teachers' professional development based on extensive research and collaborative approaches with partners. The programme included inclusive education in pre-service initial teacher-training programs across university programmes in South Africa to realise every child's rights to access quality education. The ways to support the needs for linguistic diversity and inclusion of children with disabilities in classroom can be addressed by the knowledge of disabilities, inclusive pedagogy, curriculum differentiation, social emotional and mental health support, positive behaviour support, sensory and physical development as well as by removing societal barriers.

To address the issue around the inclusion of children with disabilities in education, the interaction of disability, language, race, socio-economic status, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion and non-visible differences (including cognitive, sensory and psychosocial differences) need consideration with a focus on quality teaching and learning for all in the local context.

Subsequently, Els Heijnen-Maathuis, Ana Maria Elisa Diaz de la Garza, Maria de Lourdes Gutierrez Aceves and Maria Eugenia Serrano Vila discussed teacher professional development for teachers in Asia and Mexico in order to address the multiple barriers of the inclusion of children with disabilities and improve these children's participation in learning which is relevant to the Nepalese context. David Crabtree highlighted 'the theatre of the classroom' as a powerful approach in which complexities in the classroom interaction are identified and simplified through the role play technique.

Chapter four focused on supporting students from marginalised cast and ethnic communities' for easy access to and engagement in education with the English language support in India, storytelling approach in the UK and Germany as well

as the adoption of culturally responsive pedagogy and the use of indigenous knowledge and skills in classroom teaching and learning in Namibia. Nupur Samuel, David Heathfield and AllaGöksu and Kenneth Matengu and his colleagues reported several interventions and strategies to support students from marginalised and indigenous communities. Given the diversity of caste, ethnicity, religion, language and geography, these strategies are of relevance to Nepal to engage students in learning. The direct replication of these strategies may not work in the Nepalese context. Considering the “same for all” approach might not help achieve the objectives of equality, diversity and inclusion in education, as there is a need for localisation and adaptation of the strategies in diverse communities in order to make it context specific.

Recommendations for organizations/ institutions in Nepal working for Inclusive Education could learn from or gain from this book

This book outlines evidence of successful practices and interventions in education and their contribution to equality, diversity and inclusion of all children in education with a focus on teacher and mentor commitment to these three agendas. Drawing on these interventions, Nepalese organisations working in education will be able to develop suitable policies and strategies to ensure the right to education for every child. Equality, diversity and inclusion begin with policy intervention. Culture, practice of inclusion and the ways to address diversity are equally important. Child protection measures and psychological counselling for traumatised girls as part of the safe school initiatives in the book are of relevance to the inclusion of migrant workers’ children including girls in education in Nepal.

Centuries old practices on gender roles and relations resulting in girls’ exclusion and discrimination is prominent across a number of Asian, African and European countries. The book recommended diagnosing the root cause of discriminatory practices and seeking ways to overcome such practices. This recommendation needs to be considered by the organisations involved in inclusive education in Nepal. The English language support programme is highly important as many English teachers are not competent in teaching English as a second or third language and this also limits their girl students’ potential for digital literacy and future employment needs in local as well as in the global context.

With regards to the inclusion of children with disabilities in education, this book identified that teacher professional development is at the heart of inclusion of children with disabilities and suggested developing teacher’s capacity in instruction differentiation, including curriculum adaptation and modification, learning materials development, classroom management and techniques in making curriculum content available for all children with disabilities. For example - the use of Universal Design for Learning, and various grouping strategies, tactile for children with visual impairments, and visual aids for children with intellectual disabilities and for children with hearing impairments. The strategies suggested by the book needs to be considered in order to provide education for all children, including children with disabilities.

Supporting children from marginalised communities through culturally appropriate teaching learning as well as linking learning activities to the local context are other recommendations from the author. These recommendations are crucial in the inclusion of children from marginalised communities. Program designers and implementors in education need to consider these recommendations. In the same vein, the book identified different approaches to classroom interaction such as storytelling and role play techniques. These two approaches can be instrumental in developing students' knowledge and problem solving skills through student centered learning. Teacher training institutions must also include these approaches in teacher training packages. They help towards improving children's learning outcomes and enhancing the quality of education in Nepal.

The book suggested that pre-school teacher training content should include disability-inclusive pedagogy, curriculum differentiation, direct instruction, task analysis and the concept of child rights, equity and equality that are most needed in the Nepalese context. These concepts of inclusive education will elucidate a confusion between special, integrated and inclusive education in Nepal.

The book recommended a quality learning framework for literacy, numeracy as well as for the wellbeing and motivation of both teachers and students, which are the key components of whole-school approach. Since, the National Qualification Framework is in the process of development in Nepal, the government and all stakeholders can learn from this learning framework. The book highlighted the need for developing positive attitudes towards disability. Parent's participation in their children's education is another crucial aspect on inclusion of all children in education, one which is very relevant in Nepal.

Finally, both Nepalese government and non-government organisations should learn from the book that accepting, respecting and celebrating diversity with empathy and compassion are the spirit of inclusion and equality in education. Teachers need skills, knowledge and positive attitudes to engage all children in education. Students' social, cultural and economic barriers and their interactions need to be considered while formulating and implementing policies, plans and programs. The Nepalese organisations involved in education need to believe that inclusive education benefits both children with and without disabilities, not only in school but also out of schools because everyone is born to learn. Inclusive education is the foundation of inclusive society. Professional development programs aimed towards teachers should adopt or adapt the intervention identified in the book in order to include diverse children in the classroom with full participation.

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