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Africanizing Inclusive Education: Why, How, Who, Where and What to be Included

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21 April 2022 Although a lot of attention has been given to inclusive education (IE) both as a

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human right and a means of achieving equality and education for all goal, there has been controversies and complexities in its implementation. Moreover, there has been concerns on the need to decolonize/contextualize it to increase its relevance in African settings. The purpose of this study is to review relevant literature on IE in the African region. It aims at exploring IE progress and challenges in Africa as documented in existing literature and thereafter propose mechanisms of Africanizing education to ensure inclusion of African philosophy and culture to make education more accessible, meaningful, and productive. Integrative literature review was employed to analyse and synthesize database, publication, and online sources to present a more comprehensive understanding of the concept. Reference was given to the theories of inclusion and exclusion models to amicably conceptualize inclusion in a school setting. The focus was on African countries: Lower income countries are reported to adopt the western education systems with little regard to their context and as influenced by colonialism and globalization. There is therefore the need of an education system that addresses African-centred knowledge and values. The author therefore attempts to identify education elements in need of Africanization and strategies of achieving it. The study recommends restructuring policies and curriculums to make them more relevant and applicable to their regions of implementation, redefining diversity in an African setting, improving school conditions, and equipping teachers to accommodate a diverse population of learners, diversifying methodologies and adapting a whole school and community approach.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is a pivotal part of any society in the maintenance and growth of social structure as well as bringing about transformation or revolution (Mwamwenda & Lukhele-Olorunju, 2020). It is a tool for eradication of poverty, improvement of living standards, and a source of knowledge and information that influences thoughts and actions in day-to-day life (Nwanosike & Onyije, 2011). On the other hand, inclusive education (IE) gives children from all backgrounds a fair chance to learn and develop skills in the same environment to the benefit of all (Schuelka, 2018). Education in Africa has been greatly influenced by westernization and colonialism. The initial aim of colonial education was reinforcing the colonial powers, indoctrinating the culture of the colonial society and equipping individuals for the service of the colonizers (Akinpelu, 1981; Windel, 2009; Woldeyes, 2021). Consequently, the African education entails too much borrowing leading to 'abstraction of knowledge and the alienation of actions and skills from the economic, societal, political, and environmental domains' (Barongo-Muweke, 2016, p. 24). The African countries have never managed to restructure their pre-colonial identities and their education systems are yet to be decolonized. They are still dictated by foreign policies, causing social divisiveness and inequalities as well as foreign curriculum context (Woolman, 2001; Nyamnjoh, 2012). Secondly, in the spirit of globalization, it will be hard for Africa to trace back its roots (incorporating indigenous education) since most of

the global Acts, decisions, policies, and economies are determined by the West with less consideration and involvement of the African states (Mosweunyane, 2013). Likewise, IE has been critiqued as being preponderant of western philosophies. Consequently, there has been global calls to remodel or 'decolonize' inclusion to transpose from the western discourse to a more meaningful, practical, and productive system (Dei, 2016; Walton, 2018; Mukherjee, 2018; Muthukrishna & Engelbrecht, 2018; Elder, 2020).

Significance of the Study

Many African states have committed to the provision of IE, a move aimed at achieving education for all hence addressing the issue of diversity and equality. It promises to change attitudes and perceptions towards diversity and create a just society by first changing the school community and magnifying the changes into the greater society (UNESCO, 2009). However, despite this commitment, Africa seems to lag behind in actualizing inclusion fuelled by the fact that the continent is still facing challenges of delivering general education (Evans & Mendez, 2021). There are still many children on the margin of education, poor learning outcome, and education inequities mainly based on disabilities and household economic powers. The flop of inclusion maybe attributed to the ambiguity of the concept and lack of adoptability to the African situation (Elder & Kuja, 2018; Elder, 2020; Migliarini & Stinson, 2020). The direct transfer and application of

concepts have posed serious challenges to education stakeholders due to mismatch in cultural, social, financial, and historical situation (Singal & Muthukrishna, 2014; Werning et al., 2016). Because of this, learners especially those with disabilities are being placed in schools without proper preparation, teachers are experiencing confusion, and the end result is increased frustration for teachers and learners (Migliarini & Stinson, 2020). This therefore calls for African countries to ground the IE concept to their context. There is need for theoretical and practical strategies that are applicable to their context putting into consideration their needs, values, and capabilities.

Theoretical and Philosophical Framework of the Study

This study is guided by theories of social inclusion and exclusion model. Social inclusion is the process of enhancing the opportunity, ability, and status of people especially those who are disadvantaged in one way or another to help them participate adequately in the society (Guildford, 2000; Gidley et al., 2010). Contrariwise, social exclusion is the process where some individuals are persistently disadvantaged in accessing certain rights, opportunities, and resources (Commins, 2004). This exclusion occurs in areas such as education, employment, politics, housing, healthcare among others to people associated with certain race, social class, religion, ethnicity, appearance, education status etc. (Labonte, 2004; Barrigye, 2014). Social exclusion can affect individuals or groups. Individually, a person is alienated due to certain characteristics such as disability, appearance, and belief. At a group level, a community is segregated due to their race, social class, religion affiliation among others. This results to absence of equity and justice in terms of access to resources, opportunities, and political/social powers (Barrigye, 2014). As a result, the segregated people lack not only access to good and services but also lack security, civil engagement, and representation (Kurian & Bedi, 2004). To counteract this, social inclusion focuses on ensuring that no one is left behind (Social Inclusion Unit, 2008). This means creating conditions that give equal opportunity to all so that they are able to adequately access education, deal with personal crises, secure jobs, and participate in community and national agenda

(Atkinson, et al., 2002; Allman, 2013). They are therefore able to learn, work, and engage freely without biased limitations or fear of discrimination.

The concepts of inclusive education and social inclusion are intertwined. Inclusive quality education prepares individuals for social inclusion through acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values (Robo, 2014). An inclusive education system benefits all learners especially those who are at risk of marginalization due to poverty, special needs, nature of households et cetera (Lindner & Schwab, 2020; Operti et al., 2009; Ainscow & Miles, 2008). To achieve this goal, schools have to be adequately equipped according to the needs of its learners and the surrounding community (Imaniah & Fitria, 2018). This implies that IE provision has to be customized based on specific factors and necessities of a country, region, and individual schools. For instance, countries with scarce resources will require cost-effective measures and innovations to actualize inclusion (Robo, 2014). The curriculum also needs to be aligned with cultural values and socio-economic needs of communities in order to make sense of inclusion (Uzomah, 2018; Kessi et al., 2020).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: INTEGRATIVE LITERATURE REVIEW

An integrative literature review is a study that reviews, critiques, summarizes, and/or synthesizes knowledge from existing literature on a chosen topic (Griffin et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2009; Gegenfurtner et al., 2009). It mainly deals with past literature that needs an update, reconceptualization or expansion and also emerging topics that needs growth and clarification (Torraco, 2005). Literature review contributes to theory development and is directly applicable to policy and practice (Whittemore & Knafel, 2005). Through finding integration from different data and observation, literature review helps synthesize knowledge for the emergence of a theory (Webster & Watson, 2002).

Torraco (2016) identifies the goal of literature review as synthesizing knowledge by weaving together findings and ideas from existing literature to re-conceptualize a given topic. This provides a new debate and way of thinking about the given topic and help answer questions that may have been

raised by other researchers. For instance, in the case of this study, several concerns have been raised by scholars regarding the progress and applicability of IE in low-income countries (Srivastava et al., 2015; Eleweke & Rodda, 2002). Charema (2010) observes the need of practical inclusion strategies by developing countries to shift from theory to practice. Forlin (2013) adds that while the philosophy of full inclusion has been embraced by governments in developing countries, its implementation is far from being accomplished and hence the need for more strategic efforts. In the view of this, the author explores raised concerns, inputs, challenges, and recommendations from various researches to establish the gap between theory and practice of IE in African continent. Literature published between 1994-2022 (the major wave towards inclusion was established in 1994 in the Salamanca Statement in the conference of special needs education) was searched guided by relevant key themes such as IE in Africa, decolonizing education, challenges in African education and education inequalities. The literature was carefully examined to determine the trends, challenges, and predictions of IE in Africa in an attempt to identify effective intervention mechanisms applicable to the African situation and also catalyse the need for further studies.

Status of Inclusive Education in Africa

IE was formulated in the 1980s as an alternative to special education and aimed at increasing access and participation in education for marginalized group of learners (Graham & Jahnukainen, 2011). The move towards inclusion was propagated by The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1994 to integrate students with disability to mainstream schools (Meijer & Watkins, 2019). This came along with more research, support, and policy to ensure no child is left behind in full school participation. IE became a worldwide notion incorporated in education policies and systems across continents. Initially, the focus was on persons with disabilities as they were the most vulnerable to exclusion (Chambers & Forlin, 2021). As a result of changes in philosophical, social, and cultural beliefs, education, and acceptance of individuals with disabilities has improved (Salend & Duhaney, 2011). They have gone through segregation, categorization, integration, and now inclusion. With

time, this focus has shifted from ‘disabilities’ to ‘inclusion as a right of every child’ (Miles & Singal 2010; Ainscow & Miles 2008). The scope has expanded to include marginalized children, those from remote areas and slums, ethnic and political minorities (UNESCO, 2000). Inclusion therefore focuses on schools being more supportive to diverse groups, change of school policies, advanced teacher education, and parental involvement especially in the western countries (Pijl & Meijer, 1997; Ainscow et al., 2006). However, the momentum of inclusion is not the same in every part of the world. Lower income countries are still struggling with Education for All (EFA) goals even before inclusion (Armstrong et al., 2011). They are still working towards maximum enrolment of children equipping schools with basic teaching/ learning resources, observing the proper teacher-pupil ration, and improving school infrastructure (UNESCO, 2011; Oyedotun, 2020; Srivastava et al., 2015).

When exploring the progress of IE in Africa since Salamanca (1994) and Pather (2019) records some improvements across countries. They note an increase in enrolment owing to the implementation of universal primary education and also significant change of attitude and thinking about diversity and disability. However, IE still remain obscured due to struggling economies and the resilience of colonial powers in school systems leading to tension between reality, policies, and practice. Similarly, Eleweke and Rodda (2002) observe that IE is not being sufficiently implemented in developing countries including Africa citing insufficient support services and relevant resources, inadequate trained personnel, inconsistent funding structure and poor policy formulation and implementation. Wodon et al. (2018) adds that Africa continues to face enrolment problems with some parts experiencing low enrolment of girls and children with disabilities. Although there is improvement in enrolment of children with disabilities, they are likely to perform below average because their placement in schools comes with limited support. There lack intervention mechanisms for specific needs, proper teacher training, and inclusive infrastructure. This results to these learners being left behind with minimal benefit from educational attainment and missed opportunities in after-school life.

Khochen-Bagshaw (2020) terms the development of IE in North Africa as slow and fractured. In Egypt for instance, a clear working definition has not been documented, there lacks comprehensive inclusive policies and models to guide its implementation and some learners are still locked out due to unsuitable facilities and environments (Parnell, 2017). In Algeria, there has been great consideration of children with special needs with regard to legislation and pedagogy and as evidenced by the increase of these learners in mainstream schools. However, there is still the need to make changes in the education system, develop strategies and programs that are suitable for the learners' diversity and more collaboration of stakeholders (Boutebal & Yah, 2018). The North African region therefore needs to generate research-driven national strategies to promote inclusion especially for learners with disabilities to align with national and international goals and efforts. There is also the need to enhance integration of cultural, linguistic, and social values of specific regions (Khochen-Bagshaw, 2020).

The West African countries have found the need for intense cooperation in education with some countries adapting a common curriculum to boost education accomplishment (Opoku et al., 2022). They however note that although there is positive change in attitude and social norms, the region needs to prioritize public education and sensitization on inclusion. In Nigeria, Brydges and Mkandawire (2020) records limited capacity of the government to deliver IE, surplus demand from the parents especially of children with special needs, appalling resource pressures, limited government will, and social cultural barriers. For the last 15 years, Ghana has taken significant steps towards IE implementation. However, there are barriers to inclusion at all levels of education, the main hindrance being lack of teacher training and non-preparation of schools for inclusion (Opoku et al., 2021).

Like in other African regions, Central African States has also embraced IE in policies and practices but still have a long way to go in achieving the goal. Congo for instance is motivated towards inclusion by three factors namely education (to ensure all learners have access to it), social reason (creating an inclusive society), and economic reason (creating a complex school system instead of different

specialized ones). Still, IE implementation is limited in finance, material, information, technological, and human resource (Tshionza et al., 2018). In South Sudan, education is gradually being rehabilitated after the effects of war and political instability in the country. Inclusion is therefore in a fragile state with the country struggling to create a system and infrastructure for all and poor documentation of trends and future plans of education (Lako et al., 2010).

In the East African region, there are still cases of social exclusion in schools affecting mainly persons with disabilities specifically girls. The governments' efforts towards inclusion in schools is unsatisfactory and hence the need for creation of safe inclusive schools with improved societal attitudes to aggrandize IE. Adoyo and Odeny (2015) note that the Kenyan government has put citable efforts in reforming education leading to increase in children enrolment. However, a number of challenges still persist. This includes a persistent view of diversity as a weakness, inadequate school and teacher capacity, and lack of IE policy awareness and reinforcement. In Uganda, Bannink et al. (2020) observe the need to address the effect of post-colonial education as the starting point of actualizing IE. They call for a more culturally and relevant approach in recreating attitudes, values, and intervention for inclusion.

Muthukrishna and Engelbrecht (2018) observes that IE movement in Southern African countries is greatly influenced by colonial education systems and the traditional special needs ideologies. Consequently, there is a huge gap between what is documented and what is practiced. There is therefore the need to decolonize their systems to address exclusion and inequality issues. The need has particularly been recommended in South Africa for its distinctive need to transform education beyond post-colonial and post-apartheid socio-political factors towards provision of equal and quality education for all (Mfuthwana & Dreyer, 2018). Botswana records lack of adequate preparation in all areas of implementation (Mangope et al., 2018). They identify the need of a whole school approach, well calculated and researched steps towards inclusion and school restructuring to accommodate diversity. This should

be followed by consistent reflection and assessment of the process and results.

As observed from all African regions, there is a dire need to build a school system that is responsive to the particular needs of a community and individuals. The purpose and delivery of education need to be framed putting into consideration the culture, values, needs and social systems of a community or a country.

Africanizing Inclusive Education

For a successful educational or school system change, the various elements and stakeholders need to be scrutinized to get rid of any loopholes. The education elements include policies, curriculum, funding channels, resource allocation, human resource, and school infrastructure/facilities. Africanizing education will necessitate an intense reconstruction of education in all areas so as to be relevant and applicable to the needs and values of Africans. Mwinzi, (2016) and Msila (2009) worry that the manner in which African systems continue to borrow from the West may live a connotation that there is no such thing like African philosophy or epistemology. They therefore identify the need of creating a link and a balance between local and global aspects.

Why Africanize IE?

Since Africa is now politically independent, there is a need to break from the colonial systems that had no regard of the African culture or their indigenous knowledge (Mwinzi, 2016). The irrational transfer of IE models from Western countries has put pressure on educationists to imitate systems that they are not even conversant with (Werning et al., 2016). There are many indirect limitations imposed upon African education system by westernization which limits the ways, strategies, and extent that learners come to know their world (Phasha et al., 2017). Africa therefore needs to tap its rich cultural resources, acknowledge their social and economic differences so that they do not 'bite more than they can chew' in the chase of achieving international standards.

How should inclusive education be implemented?

Africanizing inclusion will require reforming curriculums to accommodate African indigenous knowledge systems. There is need to look at legitimacy of the content, relate to social justice, and reality (Chilisa, 2012). Practical inclusion will ensure that there is a correlation between what is taught and the values and norms of a society. The curriculum should be designed in a manner that all group of learners feel accommodated and appreciated by encompassing all histories and identities so that minority learners do not feel marginalized or excluded (Leonardo, 2016; Arday et al., 2021). Because language is a major determinant of learning outcome and inclusion aims at accommodating diversity, language as a media of instruction needs to be diversified (Lebeloane, 2017). He also suggests the use of indigenous language to diversify learning. If a learner comprehends a task but cannot express oneself in a foreign language, should he/she be considered incompetent? In addition, teaching methodologies, should also be enhanced to ensure real life experiences are brought in class and not just borrowed concepts. Productivity should be ganged, not on mastery of foreign language or abstract concept but on skills acquired and knowledge application for self-sustenance and economic growth.

By who and for who?

For successful implementation of inclusion, all education stakeholders should be brought on board (Grönlund et al., 2010; LeRoy & Simpson, 1996). This includes policy/curriculum developers, government officials, school administrators, teachers, parents, learners, and the community at large. IE initially focused on learners with disabilities but have gradually modified to include other kind of differences (Boroson, 2017). This is particularly important for the African context where learners face exclusion not only because of disabilities but also other factors such as gender, ethnic background, economic status, cultural beliefs, and geographical location like slums and remote rural (Etieyibo et al., 2021; Mfum-Mensah, 2018; Fehrler & Michaelowa, 2009). IE policy developers therefore need to take note of specific regions and their vulnerabilities. Abuya et al. (2013)

observes that although sub-Saharan African countries introduced universal free primary education leading to increase in enrolment, it has not translated to quality and equity. They particularly noted that due to the increased risk of slum children, their enrolment without specific strategies on how to curb their vulnerabilities and increase quality is abortive. The involvement of other stakeholders should be strategized. Teacher training need to be restructured to ensure teachers are well equipped to handle diversity in an African context (Charema, 2010). Other professionals such as special educators, therapist, and counsellors need to be taken seriously in African countries as they provide the support services needed for a diverse community. Awareness needs to be created among parents on the importance of inclusion and their need for active participation. On the other hand, education officials as the government representatives need to do regular monitoring and evaluation to ensure sustainability of IE. In the long run, efforts should be made to ensure a whole school approach where the community within and outside school embrace inclusion as well as discarding negative beliefs and stereotypes on diversity.

Where should inclusion take place?

The principle of IE is that mainstream/local schools are equipped to enrol all children regardless of disabilities or differences (Florian, 2008). Reports indicate that inclusion has been interpreted to mean placement where learners are enrolled in schools with not adjustment calling for the need of physical and social adjustment (Hemmingsson et al., 2007; Webb-Johnson, 2002). Research findings indicate that African schools are poorly equipped for general education leave alone inclusion (Achola & Pillai, 2016; Evans & Mendez Acosta, 2021). The government need strategies to provide adequate and appropriate resources and learning aids to accommodate diversity. Simple environment care like levelling of school compound and school drainage systems need to be taken as part of inclusion. Strategies need to be put across through engagement of stakeholders on how to cater for learners' basic needs such as feeding programs, support for uniforms and medical services especially in marginalized communities. Socially, there is need for a welcoming school culture and atmosphere of respect that looks beyond gender,

economic background, religion affiliation, and ethnic background (Nishina et al., 2019; Muthukrishna & Schlüter, 2011). Within an inclusive school, achievement should be measured by acquisition of practical skills and knowledge and celebrated differently depending on set goals and capabilities rather than common scores from common examinations.

So, what should be termed as an Africanized inclusive education?

Many scholars have found the need for Africanizing/decolonizing/contextualizing education in general and inclusive education in particular (e.g., Muzata et al., 2021; Elder, 2020; Walton, 2018; Muthukrishna & Engelbrecht, 2018). Africanizing IE implies redefining diversity to consider the unique needs of learners in an African setting, looking deeper into the condition of schools and strategizing on making them accommodative, developing a community oriented, and learner-centred curriculum, using diverse methodologies such as community-based participatory, equipping teachers and classrooms for diversity and bringing all stakeholders on board in support of inclusion. This is initiated by decolonizing people's minds to avoid dominance of western philosophies and embrace their identity, language, and values (Thaman, 2003). This however does not mean relinquishing all the current systems and adopting local ones but rather calls for blending and modification of systems. Africanizing education does not mean monopolizing knowledge. Good knowledge and values transcend geography. Wingfield (2017) notes the need for balance in the decolonized system so as to integrate advances in education and technology from across the world.

CONCLUSION

Placed together, the notion of Africanizing or decolonizing IE needs to be considered by African states with each becoming independent in formulating policies, curriculum, and strategies. Countries and regions need to redefine the diversity of their population taking note of what children are at risk and what intervention suits them best. Declaring that schools are open for these learners is not enough. Effort is needed in equipping school, training teachers, and improving the relevance and

practicability of curriculums. Crucially, the society should be sensitized on embracing differences so that diversity is celebrated and not tolerated. The idea is moulding individuals with self-appreciation and independence equipped to reinforce their nation economically and socially. Finally, Africanizing/ decolonizing IE should not be interpreted as monopolizing education as knowledge cannot be limited to a country. The problem comes when little or no regard is given to African philosophy, pedagogies, and epistemologies.

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