

Research for Inclusive Education in International Cooperation

Executive Summary of the Final Report

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1 Background and Research Design

The Education for All – Fast Track Initiative (now: Global Partnership for Education) and the Millennium Development Goals 2 and 3 call for free, compulsory, and quality elementary education for all children and young people. However, according to the last UNESCO World Education Report (2013/14), 57 million children and young people worldwide still do not go to school, and some 774 million adults cannot read or write. The international community unanimously stated that inclusive education is a key strategy for bringing education to everyone (UNESCO, 1994, 2009).

This project aims to advance our understanding of developing inclusive educational systems in developing countries in order to improve inclusive policy and practice in technical cooperation. The overall guiding research questions are: How is the concept of inclusive education constructed at the different levels (macro, meso, micro) from various perspectives in Guatemala and Malawi? Which success factors of and barriers to inclusive educational systems can be identified in order to draw conclusions for further developing cooperation measures?

The specific research questions are structured and based on the four dimensions of inclusive education as identified by various researchers (e.g. Booth, Ainscow, Black-Hawkins, Vaughan & Shaw, 2000; Kalambouka, Farrell, Dyson & Kaplan, 2005 as cited in Artiles, Kozleski, Dorn & Christensen 2006), namely Access, Acceptance, Participation and Learning Achievement. This research project focuses on the first three of the four dimensions. The research is designed in a qualitative and multi-perspective manner. It combines macro- (national), meso- (district) and micro- (school/community) levels and focusses on primary education with transition phases. The following data collection methods were applied:

- document analysis of country-specific existing research results, policy papers and practice papers (Wolff, 2008);
- focus group discussions (Lamnek, 1998) and problem-centred interviews (Witzel & Reiter, 2012) with experts from various stakeholders from macro-level;
- problem-centred interviews with district education managers and representatives of relevant organisations on district level in the districts the case study schools were located; and
- instrumental case studies (Stake, 2005) at selected schools and their surrounding communities in each country, which included problem-centred interviews and focus group discussions with students, teachers, parents, school principals, local authorities, community members as well as participatory observations.

In order to consolidate all the data and to keep the process of analysis transparent, comprehensible and controllable, consolidated analysis papers were developed on the basis of scientific source texts (Apel, Engler, Friebertshäuser, Fuhs & Zinnecker, 1995; Friebertshäuser, 1992; Laging, 2008). Transcribed interviews and focus group discussions, as well as observations and field notes, were analysed with thematic coding based on Flick (1996; 2004) and open coding based on Strauss (1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1996). The thematic coding was pre-structured by means of a code tree. The analysis was done with MAXQDA®.

The research project was implemented in the two study countries Guatemala and Malawi at the same time. In both countries the process of data collection and data analysis was based on the same research design. On the one hand the research team tried to align the two country studies and on the other hand needed to be able to react to local conditions, which

made country-specific adaptations necessary, sometimes at short notice. This balancing act was all the more acute given the short period of time available for the research process in the two countries.

Based on the intention to maintain the heterogeneity engendered, for instance, by country-specific conditions or the specific composition of the national research teams, the results differ in structure and style. Given the challenges connected to language, terminology also differs between the two countries.

2 Main Results and Recommendations Malawi

2.1 Perspectives of Inclusion

It is important to note that when inclusive education in Malawi is analysed at macro-level, its history is no more than a decade old. Only few Malawian education policy papers mention inclusive education as a government commitment. The term 'inclusive education' is carefully and rarely used, while the term and the concept of special needs education are to be seen more often. In the strategies analysed in the document analysis, some approaches towards inclusive education can be discovered, other strategies are even contradictory to an inclusive education approach. When it comes to strategies to be implemented, measures documented in Malawian educational policy papers for supporting learners with special learning needs mainly target children who have sensory and motoric disabilities. It can be concluded that no resultant and clear orientation towards inclusive education and its implementation has been established yet in Malawian education policy documents.

The analysis shows that concepts referred to by participants are still strongly related to special education concepts. Moreover, the ideas voiced are partly contradictory. On the one hand some respondents express a broad inclusive education concept, which means they refer to all children, or children who face disadvantage in particular. On the other hand, other respondents tend to refer mainly to students with physical, hearing and visual disabilities and emphasise the dimension of access.

Various and partly contradictory approaches to inclusive education are also revealed in both specialised teacher training and regular teacher training. This means that broad concepts regarding inclusion are apparent in primary teacher education, and a concept on special needs education in specialist teacher training.

2.2 Barriers to Inclusive Education in Malawi

A main barrier on the macro-level lies in the absence of a consistent, clear orientation towards inclusive education in Malawian education policy. Through the focus group discussions it became obvious that the roles and responsibilities of the various ministries involved in the implementation of policies are not clear.

Traditional beliefs regarding gender roles are one reason why girls, in particular, are challenged when it comes to educational access. Education for girls is still less valued. In specific areas, girls are expected to become married for financial reasons. In other areas, initiation customs have a strong influence on the attitude and the mind-set of the girl and her family towards early marriage and the value of formal education. Initiation ceremonies are of relevance for both boys and girls. As the analysis shows, though, consequences differ according to gender. Whereas girls are more likely to drop out of school because of early

pregnancies and early marriages, boys are more likely to get into conflict with teachers as they perceive their role differently after being initiated, bearing consequences for their participation. The competing relationship of formal education and traditional attitudes points to the importance of sensitisation.

Students of teacher training say that they feel prepared only 'on the surface' and refer to limitations in their training. Primary teacher students are challenged by the variety of different subjects that they study in a short period of time. As a consequence, some students feel poorly prepared for teaching practice. Moreover, all teachers in Malawi face low recognition in their job practice. At macro-level, the low motivation of teachers as a barrier towards inclusive education is discussed. However, analysis reveals a high commitment by teachers, regardless of the challenges and the low recognition they face in practice.

Broad goals in connection with inclusive education contrast strongly with lacking resources, e.g. learning materials, and inadequate conditions such as overcrowded classes. Particularly for teachers who face the consequences of these discrepancies, this leads to 'negative pressure' on them (Fullan, 2009). Teachers meet a challenging and overburdening situation in their daily job practice. In all cases, personnel resources are mentioned as a huge challenge for schools. This is confirmed by statistical data that points at a high pupil-to-teacher ratio.

Resource centres are used in some cases to provide support to students for joining regular classes. In other cases students with special educational needs are simply placed in the resource centre, which is even described as exclusion by some participants.

Concerning the transition to primary school, there is a growing awareness of early childhood development as relevant for easing the transition to school. Parents are encouraged to send their children to the community-based childcare centres, and there is an increased attendance rate at these centres. Although the analysis also shows that initial transition practices can be identified, there is a great need to further develop adequate practices for transition to primary school.

Some students are more likely to face stereotyping and discrimination by their fellow students. Learners with disabilities, girls and orphans, as well as poor children, are the most disadvantaged groups in this particular regard. Children with physical, hearing and visual disabilities, and learning difficulties, are mentioned as disadvantaged with regard to educational access, because they are affected by stigmatisation in the community. Motives such as protection from bullying and preventing stereotyping are resulting in parents keeping their children at home and therefore lowering access to education of children with disabilities.

With respect to aspects discussed above, the overwhelming number of respondents at micro- and meso-level identify similar barriers.

2.3 Opportunities for Inclusive Education in Malawi

Studies and other publications by different non-governmental stakeholders express that Malawi's legislative framework includes issues on the education of children with disabilities. However, implementation is still regarded as low. In the Malawi policy papers it becomes apparent that awareness of inadequate access to education for children with special needs is existent.

Sensitisation is a means mentioned at meso- and macro-level used within schools to address students and outside schools to address the community. In the implementation of

sensitisation NGOs play an important role. Different forms of sensitisation taking place in the case study schools can be identified. Most of the participants, regardless of position and profession, aim at ‘primary prevention’ (Caplan, 1964) sensitisation strategies to improve children’s access by focusing on parents and communities.

Besides the clear need for learning and teaching materials, adequate facilities and financial support, the need for adequate teaching methods was raised by many participants in order to implement inclusive education. Many teachers see teaching methods as a way to improve acceptance and participation in the classroom. It could be observed that teachers come up with many creative solutions to deal with large class sizes and heterogeneity among the students. Teachers show a high awareness of their students’ personal situations. Teachers in most cases refer to single students, describing their living situation in great detail, and explaining the efforts they have undertaken in such cases to support them. This is striking when the high pupil-to-teacher ratio is taken into account.

Even though in general students of primary school teacher training and special needs teacher training feel poorly prepared for their later teaching practice, they report that their training touches challenges in teaching practice like the lack of teaching and learning materials, large classes and heterogeneity.

Concerning the transition to school, it becomes apparent that there is a growing awareness of the importance of early childhood development centres for successful transition to school. Transition to secondary school is supported mainly by NGOs, through grants for covering school fees. Another strategy to support secondary education is the establishment of vocational centres for students who are not able to attend secondary school.

Whereas identified barriers are similar in all case studies, most of the opportunities and positive developments identified are examples that occur at single schools. These positive examples are the results innovative local adaptations to general challenges, and they reveal local ownership and commitment. Coordinating the innovative strategies adapted locally and sharing lessons learnt might increase the effect of these opportunities in achieving inclusive education.

2.4 Challenges and Suggestions

Table 1

Challenges	Suggestions
Challenge: lack of shared understanding of the concept of inclusive education in Malawi	Suggestion: coordination committee for inclusive education
Challenge: lack of collaborative networking and coordination	Suggestion: cultivate collaborative networks between schools and other institutions
Challenge: regional differences in barriers and opportunities	Suggestion: develop locally adapted measures for implementation
Challenge: existing heterogeneity at schools is perceived as a burden, and teachers are faced with overburdening workloads	Suggestion: promote inclusive schools within inclusive school communities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • organisational development • development of learning and teaching • personnel development (both pre- and in-service teacher training)

2.5 Laboratory schools as a suggestion for meeting the issues proposed

We suggest the establishment of inclusive laboratory schools as nuclei for inclusive school development in different districts. Aspects addressed by such laboratory schools are: networking with surrounding schools and institutions, in particular with teacher training colleges and teacher development centres. The concept of a laboratory school also refers to the relevance of school development, which includes curriculum development, organisational development and personnel development. It is suggested that laboratory schools collaborate intensively with other schools in the district. Accordingly, two or three schools are suggested to establish a network to work closely on similar developments and benefit mutually through exchange and collaboration in the process of inclusive school development. The development of inclusive schools and communities should be accompanied by evaluation studies.

3 Main results and recommendations Guatemala

3.1 Main Results of the Document Analysis

It is evident that the country's legal framework guarantees the right to an education for all and the integral protection of children, teenagers and youth. Furthermore, there are education policies in place, among which are an equity policy and an inclusive education policy for populations with special education needs with or without disability. However, the notion of inclusive education mainly focuses on persons with special education needs with or without disabilities. Furthermore, previous investigations show that there is no common or shared concept in the education laws or policies that govern the national education system.

3.2 Overarching results from interviews, focus group discussions and observations

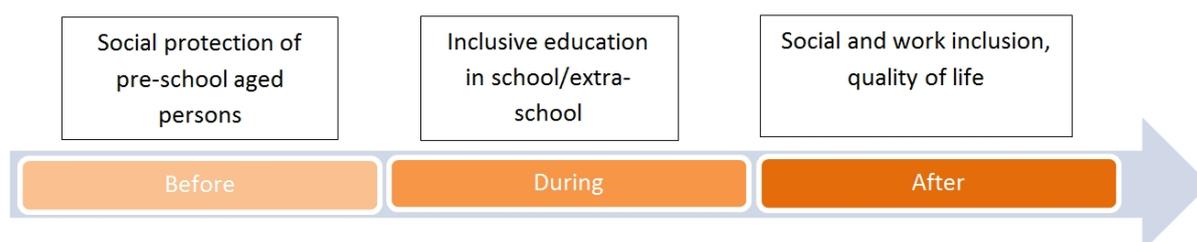
3.2.1 Perspectives of Inclusion

- The concept of inclusive education is a paradigm in transformation framed in the country's historic and social context, which questions notions like the function of the school and the definition of the target group.
- Education is a matter of national interest, considered a motor for development and the means to reduce the poverty and inequalities that characterise the Guatemalan context.
- Promoting an inclusive education system is a process that implies changes in approach, organisation and education management.
- Education is a human right even though compliance is limited by measures and actions applied arbitrarily by stakeholders in response to particular conditions or situations of the subject who is recipient of this right.
- The notion of inclusive education proposed by Guatemala (emic notion) is: 1) access, related to the conditions for entry to, permanence in, and transition within the national education system; 2) acceptance can be explained axiological (respect for the other person, tolerance, inter-personal relations between the members of an education community); 3) participation in the learning process achieved in the classroom or

school; and 4) the final result of the education system as the development of competencies for personal fulfilment and the full exercise of citizenship.

- Inclusive education assumes the challenge of responding to the diversity present in the classroom. As such, it calls on academic centres to use education tools based on a pedagogy of inclusion for development.
- The actions to achieve the objectives of inclusive education start before school, encompassing the whole period of school or extra-school learning, and transcend to bring about social mobility and poverty eradication, as shown in the following graph.

Evolving Perspective Towards an Inclusive Education System



3.2.2 Barriers to Inclusive Education in Guatemala

- Poverty opens gaps and becomes a barrier to access, permanence, acceptance, participation and performance. It relates to: a) unemployment and child work; b) place of residence (greater difficulties to attend school in rural areas and urban-marginal contexts); c) internal and external migration (migrating to the United States); d) health conditions and food insecurity; e) crime and general insecurity (in both the public and the family environment); f) pregnancies among girls; and g) over-age.
- Financial limitations exist within the education system, which mark the rhythm and priorities for the delivery of education policies.
- The management of academic services is reflected in: a) the quality of the education infrastructure (conditions and location); b) the lack of education resources; c) the management of human resources for teaching; and d) the absence of education services at some levels within the education system.
- Aggressive behaviour and discrimination in the relations between boys and girls present challenges the acceptance and participation in the classroom and the school.
- Persisting education expectations are culturally differentiated for boys and girls.
- There are limitations when it comes to: a) transport and school infrastructure; b) handling problems in the management of support programmes; c) solving problems related to internal coordination and with organisations working with the education system.
- Problems exist in the delivery of inter-cultural bilingual education, which have an impact on inclusive education (access, permanence, acceptance, participation and school performance).
- The sectorial organisation of the State and the internal organisation of the ministries involved make it difficult to implement inter-sectorial programmes or projects that favour education.
- There is a lack of knowledge about the respective laws and regulations.
- There is a lack of methodological strategies to work on acceptance and classroom participation.

3.2.3 Opportunities for Inclusive Education in Guatemala

- There are governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, international cooperation agencies, and civil society members who support the national education system and invest in public education. It is necessary to articulate the different actions that target education policies and the regulations of the governing body.
- A majority of stakeholders involved (for example fathers, mothers, students, teachers, leaders, and authorities) have high expectations linked to education and also favourable attitudes.
- There is an offer of education services although it needs to be improved in rural areas and at the middle school and diversified levels.
- Assistance programmes are offered by the Ministry of Education and other government entities, which favour access to and permanence in school.
- Efforts are being undertaken by different institutions outside the schools system in favour of acceptance and participation within the school and the education community.
- A number of stakeholders who promote inclusive education were identified as 'institutional agents'.
- Certain modalities and types of schools favour acceptance and participation in the classroom.
- There is a history of inter-sectorial management in favour of the school.

3.3 Suggestions for the Implementation of Inclusive Education in Guatemala

- A) Promote state policies and strategies in favour of inclusive education, as part of a development agenda for the country. This implies:
- protecting children and youth before they begin their school life, during the development of their education trajectory until they are fully incorporated to society;
 - align actions for investment and delivery of education services already under execution in the school sub-system and in the extra-school sub-system;
 - linking school education services to extra-school programmes with development policies in the country; and
 - developing technical capacities and generating tools for the inter-sectorial management of public policies and for inter-sectorial work, with horizontal networks at the micro-, meso-, and macro-level of the education system.
- B) Strengthening the education system with tools for an inclusion pedagogy and for the development of schools includes:
- the expansion of the competencies and capacities of those responsible for education to 'learn to learn' from their education practice and to promote the development of their schools;
 - the creation of tools for the practice of inclusion to transform 'regular classrooms into inclusive classrooms' and the application of institutional measures in favour of an inclusive education system with its two modalities: school and extra-school;
 - the promotion of initial and continuous training of teachers for a flexible and creative application of an inclusive pedagogy in the classroom as well as the promotion of training of school principals with respect to their capacities to manage inclusion internally within the school and to articulate an inter-sectorial management of other public policies at the local level; and

- the promotion of pedagogical accompaniment, i.e. the support of teachers and principals in the implementation of an inclusive pedagogy and the leadership for the management of inclusion at the local and regional levels (bottom-up strategy).

Based on the evidence, it is proposed that inclusive education in Guatemala should be articulated with objectives that match development agendas in other sectors (e.g. health, social, economic) and which mainly aim to alleviate poverty, a factor that brings conditions of exclusion because in countries like Guatemala there are strong tensions between two different realities that should not be confused: 1) the inequality caused by poverty and reflected in the living conditions of the population; and 2) the diversity, an attribute of human beings. Inclusion tries to revert the first one, respecting and welcoming the second one.

4 Conclusions

It became clear in the study that 'developing' countries like Guatemala and Malawi cannot be assumed to be homogeneous when looking at their inner reality. Within one country or even within different regions, there are deep differences in the life conditions that people experience. Even though the economic, geographical and cultural conditions in Guatemala and Malawi differ, just as the contextual factors for inclusive education differ fundamentally, certain similarities in the results can be discovered and formulated as overlapping patterns.

The context in both study countries is characterised by a high level of poverty and huge inequalities within the population. Existing inequalities in society are reflected in the education sector with a high impact on equity and equality in education. For these reasons, focusing on inclusive education brings to the fore the overwhelming complexity of inequalities in low-income countries.

It becomes apparent that the participants in the research also consider inclusive education as a concept in need of local adaptation (contextualization). Against the background of inclusive education as a broad global agenda there is a clear need to develop locally context-sensitive ways of implementing inclusive education as became evident in our findings.

From the findings of this research it became apparent that in both countries the perception of different stakeholders and the orientation of the current educational services related to inclusive education are still closely linked to concepts of disability and special needs education. Therefore educational policies and measures under the phrase 'inclusive education' are currently still mainly pointing to children with disabilities. There is a need to develop and clarify a mutual understanding of the concept of inclusive education.

Instead of focusing on certain disadvantaged groups, it is necessary to look at the way educational systems manage diverse people, considering diversity as a natural human condition. The development of effective and regular communication, coordination and collaboration between different stakeholders in the society are required in order to improve joint efforts that go beyond educational policies and also include policies for economic and social development. Furthermore, coordination between micro-, meso- and macro-levels needs to be strengthened to achieve a coordinated approach.

The results in both countries show that broad (international) goals of education collide with interrelated conditions in both countries, including financial constraints and inequalities. This often leads to the frustration of stakeholders and produces negative pressure on professionals in the educational systems. While developing a common understanding of the concept of inclusive education, reachable goals in the context of the realities of local

conditions need to be developed likewise, in order to avoid negative pressure but also, keep 'developing' countries on the international developmental agenda.

Significant heterogeneity in the classroom is a fact in schools in Guatemala and Malawi, and this challenges teachers on a daily basis. Teachers need to continuously address the connected to this fact, and there is the clearly expressed need by teachers to be equipped with the competencies to deal with and finally use heterogeneity in a positive way. In addition to initial teacher training and continuous training opportunities, there is a strong need to provide a support system for teachers in their classrooms, as well as for the education community, in order to achieve quality in the educational support they provide.

Numerous positive examples were found in the data where individuals or groups have taken the lead and developed a positive sense of ownership. This issue is considered as a great opportunity in both countries for developing inclusive educational systems.

To conclude, both countries are characterised by the heterogeneity of their population as well as fundamental economic inequality. Inclusion aims at reverting inequalities and appreciating heterogeneity as a human trait. Following this perspective, existing heterogeneity in the country and therefore in the classrooms can be positively used in inclusive learning processes. This perspective was also expressed by participants in the study. However, in both countries there is a great need for methods that take advantage of the existing heterogeneity as expressed throughout by participants, ranging from national policy making level participants to teachers at school level who are implementing the curricula.

The full report is available on [the website refie.org](http://the.website.refie.org)

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