

2 Research Design

2.1 Research Questions

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, p. 67), namely Access, Acceptance, Participation and Learning Achievement. This research project focuses on the first three of the four dimensions. The scientific investigation of learning achievement requires different methods and is therefore not possible to implement due to the short duration of the project.

In the following, the research questions concerning access, acceptance and participation are described more precisely:

Access:

- Who has access to the educational system?
- Who is targeted in inclusive education initiatives?
- Who has limited / restrained / no access?
- Who leaves the educational system early?
- Which reasons are given by persons involved?
- Which reasons for exclusion are mentioned?
- Which measures are implemented by whom (agencies, informal groups, donors)?

Acceptance (at both interpersonal and institutional level):

- Are there disadvantaged or discriminated groups in school? / Do groups exist who have privileges?
- Which practices affect students' opportunity to learn?
- Which policies affect students' opportunity to learn?

Participation:

- Are there groups of students being separated in school / in class?
- Do groups exist that do not or are unwilling to interact with each other?
- How are supportive learning opportunities created for all students?
- How are the learning and teaching processes organised in diverse classrooms?

2.2 Research Methodology

2.2.1 Data Collection

The research is designed in a qualitative and multi-perspective manner. It combines macro- (national), meso- (district) and micro- (school/community) levels. On the basis of assumptions of a constructivist methodology, it is not only the theoretical definition of the object that can be observed and how the research design is developed (Graue & Hawkins, 2005, p. 45), but at the same time the object is constituted in a reciprocal process (Flick, 1999). In the context of the research project this results in the decision to put the focus within this complex interweaved structure of subjective theories and reflective knowledge of processes of action, interaction and communication as well as directly relevant political and organisational conditions on the constructions and interpretations of inclusive and exclusive processes of involved groups of persons on the respective system levels.

In the context of this research project, this leads to the decision to place the focus on multiple, socially constructed realities (Mertens, 2005). This implies the following: within this complex, interweaved structure of subjective theories and reflective knowledge of processes of action, interaction and communication, as well as directly relevant political and organisational conditions, the emphasis falls on the constructions and interpretations of inclusive and exclusive processes of involved person groups at the relevant system levels.

This kind of multi-perspective approach means that this research project needs to take into account different system levels (macro, meso and micro) and various perspectives of the actors involved in the educational system (political decision makers, principals, teachers, students, parents and community members).

The research process was structured in several phases. In a first step (macro-level) experts were questioned by means of focus-group discussions (Lamnek, 1998) and problem-centred interviews (Witzel & Reiter, 2012). According to Kozleski (in preparation) “focus groups act not only as a source of information to be interpreted elsewhere but also as a space for transformative understanding to emerge. Data from focus groups are socially constructed in the enactment of the focus group. Pooled understandings of concepts, events, and ideas give rise to meanings and interpretations within the process of the focus group that might not have occurred in individual, separate interviews”. The form of problem-centred interviewing of experts (Witzel & Reiter, 2012) combines orientation towards a guideline with open forms of questioning. Through this approach, in-depth knowledge of a specific problem area of inclusive education was collected through various perspectives, in order to gain a deep understanding of the problem area from the perspective of the experts.

Access to the experts was provided by three stakeholder workshops/meetings of experts in each country. Relevant persons participated from different areas; namely, ministries, parent organisations, disability organisations, universities and teacher-training institutes, as well as bi- and multi-lateral donors.

In a second step, ‘deepening’ interviews were conducted with experts in each country. Experts are persons who participate in decision-making processes, and/or persons with specific knowledge, skills or experiences in (inclusive) education. In these interviews, a problem-centred interview approach was followed (Witzel & Reiter, 2012).

Parallel to this, an analysis of central documents was taking place concerning inclusive education in both countries. Wolff describes official documents as institutionalised traces through which conclusions on activities, intentions and considerations of the institution can be drawn (Wolff, 2008, p. 503). Documents were analysed according to thematic and open coding.

The document analysis includes three different kinds of documents:

- 1) Existing research results (country-specific);
- 2) Policy papers (laws, white papers, sector strategies, etc.); and
- 3) Practice papers (situation analysis by NGOs, donors, etc.).

At department level, problem-centred interviews were conducted with district education managers and representatives of relevant organisations.

The approach followed for collecting information at micro- (school/community) level was to use instrumental case studies at selected schools in each country (Stake, 2005, p. 445). Instrumental case studies provide insight into an issue (in this instance, inclusion and exclusion of students) and improve our understanding of challenges in this regard (e.g. Merriam, 2009). Schools were selected where specific questions regarding inclusion and exclusion of students appeared relevant. It was anticipated to select four case study schools in each country with the following characteristics:

- two schools from a rural area, and two schools from an urban area;
- schools with specific resources concerning support to children with SEN (e.g. resource centre); and
- schools with other aspects than disability regarding inclusion (e.g. poverty, gender, ethnicity and language).

How these categories terminated in the final selection of the schools is described in Chapters 3.1.2 (Malawi) and 3.2.2 (Guatemala).

At all schools, perspectives on inclusive education were collected – with consideration to the triangulation-of-perspectives approach (Flick, 2004a) – focus groups and problem-centred interviews were conducted with teachers, parents, students and the principal. Furthermore, problem-centred interviews were conducted with persons from the community (e.g. chief, mayor). Participatory observation of lessons and the schools' surroundings were conducted with the help of an observation guideline.

In participatory observations, the researcher takes part in the social situation and is in an interacting relationship with the observed persons. By participating in the live situation, it is expected to be closer to the subject of investigation (Lamnek, 2005; Beck & Scholz, 2000). Equipped with an observation guideline, the national researchers lived in each community for a period of about a week, conducting interviews, focus group discussions and observations. Participatory observation in this research project is relevant for identifying structures that support or display inclusion/exclusion processes which might not be conscious to interview partners and focus group participants.

2.2.2 Data Analysis

The data-collection phase was followed directly by data analysis. In implementing this research project, a large amount of different kinds of data were collected (input material: documents, interview and focus-group discussion transcripts, and observation notes). 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, see Apel, Engler, Friebertshäuser, Fuhs & Zinnecker, 1995; Friebertshäuser, 1992, p. 101-106; Laging, 2008).

Consolidated analysis papers were developed at macro-level for document analysis, focus group discussions and interviews with experts. One concentrated report was developed for each multi-perspective case study, including the interviews at meso-level. In a multi-level analysis, such a paper merges different sources and is, in itself, a scientific source for further analysis. Both country analyses were further consolidated, and a cross-case analysis of all eight case studies is foreseen.

The analysis of group discussions, interviews and observation notes contributed to these reports. Transcribed interviews and focus group discussions, as well as observations and field notes, were analysed with QDA Software in accordance with thematic coding based on Flick (1996; 2004b) and open coding based on Strauss (1994, p. 95; Strauss & Corbin, 1996). The thematic coding was pre-structured by means of a code tree. Nevertheless, relevant moments of construction and thematic dimensions that had not been known previously were added through open coding by the national research teams. This process of coding revealed central constructions of processes of inclusion and exclusion. At this level of integration, differences in the perspectives of different persons were described.

In this multi-site case study approach (four schools in Malawi, and six schools in Guatemala), two stages of analysis took place. First of all, specific conditions were analysed concerning inclusive education through the multiple perspectives of involved persons in each case (case-by-case analysis). Subsequently, once the analysis of each case was completed, a cross-case analysis followed in which comparisons were made of the case studies at country level in patterns and phenomena concerning including or excluding processes (Merriam, 2009). A central objective was to develop an in-depth understanding of overarching aspects for inclusive education in each country.

In a final step, the analysis aimed at possible transnational patterns of social construction of inclusive or exclusive educational processes in developing countries.

2.2.3 Validity, Reliability, Ethics and Limitations

As in any research, validity, reliability and ethics were major concerns. Therefore, the following strategies were used for increasing internal validity/credibility (Do research findings match reality?), external validity/transferability, and reliability of the evaluation findings (Merriam, 2009, p. 229):

- triangulation: use of multiple investigators, sources of data and multiple data collection to confirm findings that emerge;
- member checks: data and tentative interpretations were taken back to the people from whom they derived, to ask whether they were plausible (e.g. stakeholder workshops in each country);
- peer review: regular discussions with colleagues concerning the study process, the congruency of emerging findings with raw data, and tentative interpretations;
- audit trail: a detailed account is available of the methods, procedures and decision points in carrying out the study; and

- researchers' position or reflexivity: continuous, critical self-reflection by the researchers concerning assumptions, world views, biases and relationship to the study, that may affect the investigation.

Ethics in the research was an integral part of the research planning and implementation process, and at no stage viewed as an afterthought or a burden. The following norms of scientific research as formulated in Mertens (2005, p. 34) were followed in both countries to deal with possible ethical concerns:

- use of a valid research design that can contribute to the well-being of the participants;
- use of competent researchers to conduct the research;
- appropriate sample selection for the purposes of the project, and representative - as far as possible - of the wider population to benefit from the project; and
- voluntary informed consent of every participant: that is, without threat or undue inducement, knowing what any reasonable person in the same situation would want to know before giving consent ('informed') and explicitly agreeing to participate ('consent').

A further aspect of ethics in research is research clearance through local authorities. In both countries, the respective Ministry of Education has been the official research partner. GIZ signed a formal Implementation Agreement with both ministries. On the basis of the Implementation Agreements, approval was given by the District Education Managers (Malawi), and the Supervisors and Directorates from each 'Departamento' (Guatemala), of the respective districts in which the case studies are located. Informing the school principals of the case-study schools was done in both countries through the district authorities for the sake of a common procedure. In Guatemala, the mayors of the areas in which the case-study schools are located were also contacted and visited beforehand by the national researchers, to seek for approval for the research at micro-level in respect of their role as local authorities.

Anticipated limitations on the research were identified, and strategies to minimise their impact included the following:

Language as a critical issue (Mertens, 2009): A major challenge in this project was its multi-lingual characteristic; e.g. the project was led by a group with German as home language, the two senior research advisors to the project had Spanish and Afrikaans as home languages, and the country-based teams also had different home languages (i.e. Chichewa and Spanish). It was therefore necessary to rely heavily on using English as the communication language amongst the research group members, for whom this was either the second or third language. Furthermore, many of the project participants did not speak English, and the country-specific research was conducted in the languages most acceptable to participants. In Malawi, for example, data was then translated back into English. In Guatemala, data was translated from indigenous languages into Spanish. As a result, every researcher needed to be careful in their interpretation of data and specific concepts, and acknowledge that it should be based on a thorough understanding of the wider cultural implications of the use of language.

Closely aligned with language as a critical issue and challenge is: cultural competence and sensitivity. In their understanding of the multiple cultures involved (including diverse home languages), every researcher needed to demonstrate cultural sophistication in all aspects of their work in the project. In order to illustrate multi-cultural validity, not only in data collection, but also in the analysis of data

and discussion of findings, members of the research team focused on the development of positive interpersonal connections, and tried to make appropriate cultural assumptions in the implementation of the project (Mertens, 2005).

The complex, geo-political context (Malawi and Guatemala) – and coordinating the project across three countries (Germany, Guatemala and Malawi) and the three continents on which this project has taken place – complicated project implementation frequently. For example, one of the most challenging contextual issues the members of the research teams in Malawi and Germany have had to contend with, was unreliable access to the internet in Malawi and the resulting effect on continuous communication, including scheduled Skype meetings between the two teams in Malawi and Germany. It is also important to note that the vast travelling distances between project schools in both countries, and also the local security issues, needed to be taken into account at all times.

2.2.4 Implementation of the Research in Two Countries

The research project, which had a total duration of 14 months, 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. However, it soon became obvious that local adaptation to the methodology and the implementation of the research process needed to be undertaken and the two national research teams were encouraged to do so (a description of the country-specific adaptations can be found in 3.1.2 and 3.2.2). The Guatemala team, as an example, decided to conduct six case studies instead of the suggested four. 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. This becomes especially obvious when working with the terms ‘disability’ and ‘students with and without special needs’. The terminology is not used consistently in this report, as the researchers decided to keep to the local commonly used terms which vary between Malawi and Guatemala.