



INCLUSIVE EDUCATION INITIATIVE

Transforming Education for Children with Disabilities

African Scholarship Exchange

Researching Disability-Inclusive Education in Sub Saharan Africa and South Asia

Dates: September 8th, 2021| Time: 7:00 - 9:30 am EST

On the 8th of September, 2021, the [Inclusive Education Initiative](#) (IEI) conducted its third of four workshops within the [Research Exchange Workshop Series](#). This workshop brought together early career and established researchers from universities across South Asia.

The workshop aimed to bring forth Southern researchers' voices and provide a platform for early career and established researchers to share their perspectives on the disability-inclusive education research priorities. It offered them the space to explore what they needed to advance their research agendas, both in the global context of the Sustainable Development Goal for Education and their national contexts.

The objectives of the scholarship exchange were outlined as:



The workshop was attended via Zoom by 18 researchers from 7 countries across the region who represented 12 universities. The participants had, on average, 0-5 years of experience.

The content and the discussion questions for this workshop were guided by a research study conducted by Dr. Matthew Scheulka on [“Research Capacity, Training, and Culture in South Asian Universities: Understanding the research landscape in South Asia and building capacity for disability-inclusion”](#). The report brought forward research issues as related to South Asia, particularly to build an understanding of how to better build capacity and support for disability-inclusion research in South Asian universities. It was conducted in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

In order to facilitate discussions among the participants, they were divided into breakout groups, ensuring representation from different countries and universities, along with a facilitator and cofacilitator to help

guide the conversations. The breakout groups sought to tackle four key questions, and their responses are summarized below.

What challenges are faced by the South Asian scholarship in conducting robust research on disability-inclusive education?

- **Lack of community:** The participants mentioned feeling a lack of a community of researchers in disability-inclusive education specifically and inclusive education in general, leaving little-to-no room for collaboration and knowledge-sharing. Additionally, there is a lack of knowledge being accrued in a structured manner on disability-inclusive education; as a result, scholars are unable to build off of each other's research and start afresh each time.
- **Administrative hurdles:** There is a lot of red tape that researchers are faced with when it comes to research clearance such as ethical and collaboration approvals. Additionally, a lot of administrative work is also handed to the researchers, like examination evaluation and other paperwork that is not directly related to their academic areas.
- **Time:** One of the biggest challenges identified by researchers is enough time to actually conduct research. Due to staffing issues, they find themselves teaching several classes, monitoring attendance and examinations and also monitoring online engagement during the pandemic. All of this leaves them unable to have time for desk research, field work and seeking out collaborations externally.



- **Funding:** Funding challenges especially in the areas of social sciences and humanities as compared to natural sciences. Based on funding limitations and research targets set by schools towards promotion, researchers tend to rely on the research work done with their PhD students. Funding structures are skewed, enough to do research but not hire support



- **North-South imbalance:** In order to do research at the international level, researchers have to tie up with universities but there are few opportunities for them to access these connections. Access to international journals is limited or hard to get to, and this is a major challenge particularly for those researchers who are required to publish as part of their university agreements. There is also a lack of alignment when it comes to research priorities across geographies leading to Southern research being left behind.

What should be the research priorities in the area of disability-inclusive education?

- **Intersectionality:** Participants highlighted the value of prioritizing intersectionality within their research, looking not only at people with disabilities but crosscutting communities as well, particularly in marginalized spaces.
- **Stakeholder voices:** It is extremely crucial to capture the lived experiences of parents and caretakers within research to ensure their needs are catered to and learned from. Gathering this information is also helpful in understanding how to ensure that research tools are made more inclusive as well, not just research.

- **Baseline studies:** In order to accurately understand the various challenges faced by people with disabilities, a baseline study should be conducted that looks at what their day-to-day life is like. This should also include the ecosystem within which the target group lives. One participant pointed out how in the Maldives there are several islands, each with its own geographical and cultural difference, and how baseline studies help gather important data to inform study design.



What kind of research design and methodologies should be considered while researching disability-inclusive education?

Participants prefaced their responses around research methods with two important points

- Ethics should be built into the entire research design and into the dissemination, no matter what the method.
- There should be no hierarchies in research design – it should be influenced by the research question

- **Participatory research:** Participants stressed that it is vital, with the right ethical clearances, to include people with disabilities, parents, teachers and other stakeholders into the study process to ensure accurate representation of all voices.
- **Mixed methods:** Research should employ mixed methods approaches in order to be holistic in its results. Having just quantitative data does not provide the whole story, qualitative data helps to ensure data isn't misinterpreted and provides context.
- **Emancipatory research:** Researchers pushed for narrative inquiry, allowing for more story-telling and allowing for the study participants themselves to represent their narratives. Allowing the actors themselves to articulate their lived experiences can lead to powerful research outcomes.
- **Sequential Mixed methods:** Sequential multi-phase and mixed method design was thought to be more appropriate for disability research.
- **Action research** – One participant pushed the group to ask 'Everyday there are many opportunities to do a piece of research – how do I gather evidence?'. They also recommended asking teachers to maintain diaries and document happenings in the classrooms and learning spaces to create a more robust repository of knowledge.
- **Validity, reliability and replication:** It is important for researchers to think about how their research is disseminated and received once it is completed, and whether it is possible for their work to be replicated in several contexts. If these research outputs exist in silos, they stand to do no good to other communities who would otherwise benefit from the findings.





What are the current opportunities which can be leveraged on strengthened?

- Participants highlighted that although several informal networks and conversations exist, they are hard pressed to identify concrete platforms where they can access resources, collaborators and general discussions around their work.
- Field connections– Participants mentioned the importance of leveraging the strong connections they are able to build with contacts in the field as a result of their research. Having a gateway into schools and access to participants gives them a space to pilot studied and do surveys easily.
- Southern-southern partnerships – Participants mentioned how there is valuable space for creating south-south collaboration through regional conferences and networking opportunities. These can be used to connect, discuss and collaborate.
- South Asia research hub: A few participants mentioned that they were working on the creation of a research hub for South Asian researchers to connect with each other.



The workshop was full of insightful and rigorous conversations that allowed participants to thoughtfully engage with each other and create long-lasting collaborations. Participants will have the opportunity to continue these engagements through the IEI CoP as well as through future blog posts.

Visual Summary

On the following page, the above report is summarized through visual notes.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION INITIATIVE RESEARCH EXCHANGE

RESEARCHING DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN SUBSAHARAN AFRICA & SOUTH ASIA

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EXPLORATORY CASE STUDY



CHALLENGES & PRIORITIES



DESIRED RESEARCH PRINCIPLES & APPROACHES

