An African Perspective on Inclusive Education Content, Conversations and Policy Debates: The Case of Lesotho

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INTRODUCTION

Education is an important aspect of the human life. In this regard, it is the view of du Plessis et al. (2007, p. 198) that, "education matters because it is a fundamental human right … it opens new horizons and raises quality of life of the individual as well as the nation." To this effect, basic education has been declared as an essential human right by several international declarations and conventions such as, the Declaration of Universal Human Rights (1948), UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960) and Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) to mention a few (Moore and Mitchell 2008). However, a study conducted by McCowan (2010) found that almost half of the 75 million children that are out of school come from south Saharan Africa. The study further identified that the most affected groups are that of underprivileged and

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destitute children that include girls, children with disability and those living in remote, inaccessible and isolated areas. The foregoing paragraph paints a gloomy picture pertaining to the provision of education for disadvantaged groups in Africa, particularly south Saharan Africa. It is because of the atrocities faced by destitute groups that international, regional and national organisations which are custodians of education find it imperative to develop mechanisms and strategies that will assist in changing the status quo. It is for this reason that the United Nations, in its attempt to strive for inclusive education that will accommodate even the marginalised children, developed and implemented the Salamanca Statement and Framework1994.

The Salamanca statement and Framework, 1994 (hereafter Salamanca Framework) is a very important document that endorses inclusive education and gives direction on how best it can be achieved by various countries. Despite the presence of the Salamanca Framework, various actors in inclusive education still hold different views and interpretations of the concept of inclusive education (Magnússon 2019). In this regard, Ainscow et al. (2019, p. 672) argue that "… the document contains some ambiguities that have become apparent when used in the field." The implication is that what is written on paper regarding inclusive education poses problems for implementers as it appears not to be clearly stipulated, thus resulting in a barrier to smooth implementation and access to inclusive education. Other barriers affecting access to inclusive education that the Salamanca Framework also alludes to include but are not limited to ethnicity, gender, poverty, social status and disabilities (UNESCO 1994). These barriers are particularly more evident in developing countries such as Lesotho as they are devoid of African relevance. To this effect, the chapter looks at inclusive education through the seMoshoeshoe philosophy.

Conceptual Framework

The concept of inclusive education is defined differently by different authors depending on the context in which their definition is based. For other authors, inclusive education is education that entails the accommodation and inclusion of the disabled, those with complications, those with specialised talents and those who are gifted in ordinary school system (Tchombe 2017). According to Mosia (2014, p. 294) "… inclusive education denotes a total change of attitudes, practices and ideologies that govern performance-based curricula." Furthermore, there are authors like

Jonathan and Uchechi (2017, p. 2), who state that, "inclusive education can be seen as a process of enhancing the capacity of the education system in any country to reach out diverse learners."

In addition, (Engelbrecht et al. 2017, p. 684), "inclusive education is generally seen as being not only about *access* to education, but also *acceptance* and *participation* and the promise of *quality education* for all." It should be noted that although there is existence of a variety of definitions on inclusive education, consensus on one universal definition has not yet been reached (Mahlo 2016). It is imperative to notice that the definition of inclusive education is fluid and depends on the context in which it is being used. The definition of inclusive education that will guide this chapter is that of Grover (2014) who explains the term inclusion. According to Grover (2014), p. 5324; p. 5449), "inclusion advocates absorption of every child in a normal system of education and school, [and comprises] "physical inclusion, social inclusion, academic inclusion, emotional inclusion and cultural inclusion." This is because while other definitions tie inclusive education to disability, this one tries to encompass all spheres of the human life.

For that reason, the term inclusive education is taken to mean the kind of education that includes all learners, irrespective of their physical appearance, social background, academic performance, emotional being and cultural affiliation. Other concepts related to inclusive education, which are central to this chapter, include inclusive education content, conversations and policy debates. In the succeeding sections, these concepts are explored and tied to the Lesotho context.

Inclusive Education Content

The tenets of an Afrocentric approach to inclusive education are not limited to the demands of "what is learnt, by whom, and how quickly it is learnt, to consider questions of how the knowledge being disseminated is structured and applied particular to diverse and inclusive classrooms" (van Wyk 2014, p. 292). More so, inclusive education is the kind of education that strives to create a conducive environment free from barriers of learning and coupled with availability of relevant and appropriate resources that support the inclusion of those with disabilities in the teaching and learning process (Ntombana and Mokotso 2018). This view is reiterated by Ackah-Jnr (2020, p. 171) who posits that, "having knowledge, skills and positive

attitudes towards inclusive education has been conceptualised as an indication of preparedness for inclusive practice."

It is the view of Pather (2017, p. 6) that, "one of the key concerns in Africa has been the influence of the North and the impact it has on the local contexts." This is because, the ideas and ideals that influence inclusive education are mostly influenced by the World Bank and its partner organisations, and as a result are not applicable in the less developed nations of Africa (Naicker 2018). As a result, the content of inclusive education offered in the African context, should be in line with the Afrocentric principles of inclusive education. In this regard, the context that informs inclusive education in Lesotho can be attributed to King Moshoeshoe I's philosophy (also known as seMoshoeshoe philosophy) of inclusiveness which encouraged cultural plurality and sensitivity to diversity (Mofuoa 2015).

The foregoing view is reiterated by Mahlo (2016) who suggests that learners should be taught using their mother tongue as failure to do so may lead to learners who fail to properly follow instructions due to poor comprehension of the language being used, resulting in learners being labeled as 'slow learners.'

Additionally, "inclusive education aims at expanding and increasing learning, participation, fellowship in school cultures, curricula and communities while reducing exclusion, inequalities and other contextual barriers in and within education" (Ackah-Jnr 2020, p. 1720). Conversely, curriculum appears to be a barrier to effective implementation of inclusive education in schools (Morena and Nkoane 2021).

Moreover, in the context of Lesotho, there seems to be an urgent need for robust research on teaching and learning strategies that accommodate inclusive education due to specific barriers such as 'culture, overcrowding, lack of resources and socio-economic backgrounds' (Leballo et al. 2021). Additionally, in order to teach meaningful and inclusive education content, schools need to devise user friendly environments that would facilitate smooth interactions between and among teachers, learners and families so that they have a sense of belonging (Ntombana and Mokotso 2018).

Besides, Walton (2018, p. 34) laments that,

> the pressure to adopt inclusive education comes with a scant recognition of way in which the history of colonialism and underdevelopment in countries of the Global South compound the problems of educational exclusions.

The foregoing extract calls for debates and deliberations concerning the manner in which curricula at different levels of schooling in Africa should be constituted in order to address issues of inclusion (Fataar 2018). This is because "in mainstream northern literature, there is scarcity of critical work on the conceptualisation of inclusive education in southern context" (Kamenopoulou 2020, p. 1793).

It is against this background that Africa needs to have clearly stipulated and relevant inclusive education content that will address Africa specific problems. Such content must be conscious of and seek to address the following aspects that have been identified as barriers to inclusive education in Africa such as;

- Culture
- Overcrowding
- Geographic location (inaccessibility of some mainstream schools)
- Ambiguous policies
- Community engagement
- Stigma and discrimination
- Lack of resources. (Sibanda 2018)

From the above excerpt it could be insinuated that the culture of a society in which inclusive education is to be implemented, if not taken into consideration could adversely affect how inclusive education is executed. This is because some cultural attitudes and behaviours can influence if parents sent their children to school or not (Donohue and Bornman 2014). Furthermore, another problem that hampers inclusive education is that of overcrowding in schools. In the case where classrooms are overcrowded, teachers are unable to attend to the specific and individualized needs of learners and such environment hinders the effective implementation of inclusive education (Van Vuuren 2020).

Moreover, geographical location can lead to inaccessibility of some mainstream schools. In the case of Lesotho, the country is mostly mountainous, leading to poor modes of travel. The rural areas of the country are mostly in this area, and this leads to lack of or poor accessibility to schools for children with special needs as mobility is compromised (Sefotho 2019). Likewise, when discussing barriers to inclusive education policy, it is imperative to look at policy ambiguity as it can affect the interpretation and subsequent implementation of policies. More so, because policies that are ambiguous are likely to confuse implementers because of diverse

interpretations that they are given. Regarding inclusive education policies, the ambiguity can lead to uncertainty and lack of consensus amongst implementers, thus derailing the realisation of the policy (Taylor et al. 2021).

Policy implementation is sometimes affected by the context in which it is implemented. One of the significant factors that form part of the context is the community. The community can be receptive of special education learners or be hostile, discriminatory and stigmatise them. As such, it is important to acquire parental and community support during the implementation of inclusive education policies so as to create an enabling environment for the realisation of the policy goals and aspirations (Firm 2021).

Lastly, the lack of resources, in the form of financial and human resources negatively affects the implementation of inclusive education (Donohue and Bornman 2014). This is because when there are no resources allocated for implementation, the envisaged goals of a policy may not be realised, leading to policy failure (Cerna 2013). Additionally, the content of inclusive education in Africa should not just be meant to counter the north or developed countries curriculum. Rather, it should be developed with the purpose of emancipating the African people so that they become empowered and independent people.

Inclusive Education Conversations

Inclusive education faces many challenges in the African context. Some of these challenges include, but are not limited to insufficient teacher training, poor infrastructure, inadequate resources such as teaching and learning materials, rigid curriculum and poor modes of assessment (Pather and Slee 2019).

It is based on the preceding paragraph that it becomes important that conversations which inform inclusive education are based on the notion that inclusion is informed by the struggles, determinations and efforts made by human rights movements who fought for equal rights of all the people irrespective of their 'gender, race, socio-economic background and/or disability' (Nyaaba et al. 2021). A view that is echoed by Ackah-Jnr (2020) who posits that the major contention of the human rights proponents was to safeguard the inclusion of children with disability in ordinary schools where they could get similar education to those considered normal.

Additionally, inclusive education is now forming part of intellectual and academic discussions because it seems to be penetrating the academic field through its prevalence in research, courses and policy deliberations (Walton 2018). The discussions can then inform the acquisition of "… knowledge, skills and positive attitudes towards inclusive education [which] has been conceptualised as an indicator of preparedness for inclusive practice" (Mwarari 2020, p. 2). This stance is echoed by Schuelka et al. (2020, p. 3) as they stipulate that, "much scholarly attention has been placed in the last few decades on the structural and existing barriers towards access and participation in education for students from historically marginalised groups." Furthermore, inclusive education is strongly supported by 'principles of justice and equality of opportunity' (Ndofiperi and Musengi 2020, p. 4), thus making it a platform that could be used to protect and safeguard the rights of the marginalised minorities (Katitas and Cockum 2020). Additionally, Zakiah et al. (2021), p. 131) posit that, "through inclusive education, it is expected that it can eliminate discriminatory education and accommodate all of the needs of children with special needs in the scope of education." The implication is that it is through inclusive education that people can interact and learn together and subsequently live harmonious with each other. In the case of Lesotho, inclusive education conversations should subscribe to seMoshoeshoe philosophy of inclusion and coexistence. According to Illongo (2021, p. 30), "frontiers of integration implied for King Moshoeshoe I the finding of compatibility and interconnectedness behind and beyond the façade of 'apparent differences.'" The implication is that the conversation on inclusive education should be informed by the binding and mainstreaming of the sidelined groups into inclusive schools.

Policy Debates

The policy that directed and informed Moshoeshoe I governance was that of acceptance. To this effect, Moshoeshoe I was able to integrate the *Lifaqane* wars refugees, despite cultural and ethnical diversity, into his nation of the Basotho (Mofuoa 2015). The insinuation of this policy on inclusive education in current day Lesotho is that inclusiveness should not be restricted by cultural and ethnic differences, rather, it should be all encompassing. Globally, the advancement of the principle of inclusion led to the development and adoption of policies in several countries (Benson 2020). It is because of the adoption of these policies that this section will

discuss a macro policy framework that informs inclusive education policy in the context of Lesotho. This will be done through a document analysis.

Conversely, we should take note of the challenges surrounding policies and their implementation. In this regard, it is the contention of Abdulrahman et al. (2021, p. 48) that, "realising the global policy ideals of inclusive education in local schools and classrooms had proved to be difficult." A document analysis is a process of systematically reviewing printed and electronic documents with the purpose of eliciting meaning and gaining understanding from such material (Bowen 2009).

A document analysis will inform the chapter in that it will highlight if the stipulations of the Lesotho Inclusive Education Policy, 2018 subscribe to the ideas and ideals of seMoshoeshoe philosophy of inclusion and coexistence. One such idea of seMoshoeshoe philosophy came in the form of *lipitso* (community dialogues). King Moshoeshoe I was famous for engaging his subjects in issues that affected them through dialogues that were known as *pitso* (singular) or *lipitso* (plural). It is at these gathering where opinions of the people were gathered so that they can inform the decisions of the King. The engagement of people led to collective decision making (Shale 2005). In essence, the purpose of community dialogues was to get local solutions for domestic problems. In policy debates, it is important that the voices of the communities in which the policies are to be implemented are heard. This is so that the communities have ownership of the policy and find it necessary that a policy is actually realised. Also, debates help the communities to adopt localised implementation strategies, instead of foreign and Eurocentric approaches that may not be beneficial to them.

Lesotho Inclusive Education Policy, 2018

The enactment of inclusive education is accompanied by many challenges in education systems globally (Mfuthwana and Dreyer 2018). These problems affect both developed and developing countries alike. In order to overcome such glitches, countries should develop and implement policies that are relevant to their contexts and informed by their own ways of life. In the case of Lesotho, the Lesotho Inclusive Education Policy, 2018 (LIEP 2018) was developed with the aim of promoting inclusive education. It is hence important to review the policy in line with the seMoshoeshoe philosophy of inclusion and coexistence. Additionally, a look at the policy silences, omissions and consequences for implementation will be beneficial in the review of LIEP, 2018.

The call for the implementation of inclusive education seems not to have always been a priority for the Lesotho government. The efforts made by the Lesotho government can be considered as lacking political will as Lesotho trailed behind in its efforts to legitimize inclusive education as it is only in 1989 that they developed their first inclusive education policy and later established the Special Education Unit in 1991 (Mosia 2014). Thereafter, Lesotho developed and implemented the Lesotho Inclusive Education Policy 2018, almost twenty years from their first policy.

Silences, Omissions and Consequences for Implementation

McConnel and Hart (2019, p. 648) contend that,

> during the process of policy making process, policy makers, governments, organisations and networks are inclined to select which issues are of potential relevance to them, and marginalise or exclude those which they do not wish to devote their attention and resources.

The implication of the foregoing extract is that there are bodies whose work is to dictate the direction that policies should take. It is hence imperative to look at how decision made by such organisations or institutions can marginalise and exclude some important issues in their development of policies. This is because, such marginalisations and exclusions are likely to manifest into policy silences, omissions and in some cases have consequences for the implementation of policies.

Silences

Taylor et al. (1997) are of the view that what a policy may imply, but not directly stipulate, is as equally important as what it explicitly stipulates. This is to say that, when looking for policy silences, it is important to address the question: "how else could this have been said?" (Tlali 2010, p. 131).

In the case of Lesotho Inclusive Education Policy, 2018 (heareafter reffered to as LIEP 2018), the following silences have been identified. Under the goal of the policy, there is a silence pertaining to the duration and manner in which "MOET will undergo restructuring process with the aim of creating conducive environment for successful implementation of

Lesotho Inclusive Education Policy (LIEP)" (Kingdom of Lesotho 2018, p. 6). Failure by the goal to indicate the timeframe and the means by which the restricting will be done, leaves the policy goal rather vague and silent on the when and how part.

Furthermore, in Objective 3 (a), of the LIEP, 2018, it is stipulated that, "… MOET shall rehabilitate existing school facilities to accommodate LSNE" (Kingdom of Lesotho 2018, p. 13). The silence that can be depicted from this stipulation is that the policy here again does not put a timeframe for the achievement of the said objective. This is in line with the preceding claim by Mosia (2014) that Lesotho appears to lack political will in the implementation of inclusive education. As a result, failure to be specific on how long rehabilitations of schools will take place points to a lack of political will to implement such an objective and that can be to the detriment of policy implementation.

Omissions

Another important issue to look into when dealing with inclusive education content is the education pedagogy. According to Makoelle (2014, p. 307) "Inclusive Pedagogy … is based on constructivist notions of teaching which hold that learners have to be at the centre and in control of their own learning." The preceding view is reiterated in the CAP, 2009 which states that "pedagogy must shift towards methods that can develop creativity, independence and survival skills of learners." (Kingdom of Lesotho 2009, p. 6). Furthermore, Kingdom of Lesotho (2009) suggests that the importance of collaborative learning, is aligned to the seMoshoeshoe philosophy of inclusiveness which was evidenced through his principles of *mafisa* (livestock loan system) and *matsema* (cooperatives) that ensured that Basotho became cooperative and helpful to each other in times of need (Kingdom of Lesotho 2009). This is an indication that the government of Lesotho intends to offer learner centred-curriculum that will address the problems which the country is faced with and that subscribes to the values and principles of seMoshoeshoe. Conversely, the issue of pedagogy is omitted in the LIEP, 2018, an indication that the policy has some shortfalls that may affect its effective implementation.

Additionally, in objective 3.3 which stipulates that, "to enhance partnerships for implementation of LIEP" (Kingdom of Lesotho 2018, p. 14). This stipulation is in line with the seMoshoeshoe philosophy as it encourages community engagement through what is termed *pitso* (public

gathering) (Peters et al. 2005). However, LIEP, 2018 does not stipulate the stakeholders it promises will be collaborating with MOET in the implementation of inclusive education. The omission of stakeholders can be interpreted to mean that the policymakers are unaware of the stakeholders involved in inclusive education. The lack of knowledge of stakeholders, who are in this case expected to implement the policy, can be a serious hurdle in the effective implementation of the policy. This is because people who do not have requisite skills can be engaged, thus causing delay or disruptions in the implementation process.

Consequences for Implementation

Policy implementation is regarded as the most important phase in the policy process as it denotes the actual realisation of the policy. However, it is a very complex and intricate activity (Seraw and Lu 2020). Also, policy failure or success is depended on the manner in which it is implemented (Hudson et al. 2019). This, therefore means that policy implementation has consequences that can either be positive or negative.

Research conducted by Leballo et al. (2021) found that while Lesotho seems to be making positive strides in the implementation of inclusive education, there is need to review and reform inclusive education policy. This review should be done to address the problems such as large classroom sizes, lack of policy implementation plan and insufficient resources to support inclusive education.

Furthermore, although LIEP, 2018 proposes to improve teaching and learning environment, the reality as indicated by Morena and Nkoane (2021) is that "… the entire learning environment, is not appealing for learners with special education needs." As such, it is important that policy makers take these issues into consideration for policy implementation to produce positive outcomes.

The above view is echoed by findings from a study conducted by Ralejoe (2021) on how visually impaired learners cope in inclusive schools which paint a rather gloomy picture for the realisation of inclusive education in Lesotho. The study revealed that VI learners have to rely on their classmates in order to get class notes and information from the books as there are no book printed in braille. The dependence on other learners means that VI learners are likely not to complete their assignments on time in the case where their classmates are too busy to read for them. Additionally, deaf learners also face the same dilemma as those who are

visually impaired as they find themselves having to cope in schools that lack properly trained teachers to assist them in their learning (Palime 2020).

This says that despite the noble efforts by MOET to include all learners in mainstream schools, learners with disabilities continue to face hurdles that can be corrected through the allocation of appropriate resources to facilitate effective teaching and learning. The implication of the above mentioned consequences for implementation is that even though LIEP, 2018 may have clear policy goal, strategies and objective, there is a need to urgently to put in place measures that will facilitate for its effective implementation. Such measures could include, but not limited to allocation of resources in the form of human and financial resources that will help inclusive education policy implementers to operate.

CONCLUSION

The chapter concludes that it is through the use of the seMoshoeshoe philosophy of inclusion (VI) and coexistence that Lesotho can realise the effective implementation of the LIEP, 2018. Looking at the current trends in the provision of inclusive education in Lesotho, it can be said that the country does not necessarily engage the Afrocentric approach to achieve inclusive education content, conversations and policy debates. That being the case means Lesotho still has a long way to go before it can realise the relevant implementation of inclusive education. Therefore, it can be concluded that although Lesotho has developed legislation and policies aligned to the principles of inclusive education, there is still a lot that needs to be done in order to achieve and acquire such education in its totality.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This research suggests that the policy makers should encourage relevant stakeholders to ensure that policies that are developed adhere to the African vision on education. The policies should also be adapted to suit the specific context of the country. Lastly, African countries such as Lesotho should try to avoid blindly following donor aided policies without making sure that they will address their problems. Rather, they should develop policies that will be implementable in their own contexts instead of policies that are barriers to the development of education. In the case of Lesotho, it would thus be beneficial to follow the seMoshoeshoe philosophy in trying to implement an effective and productive inclusive education that will be beneficial to Basotho.

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