

Policy Note

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Disability and Education Responding to the Diversity of all Students

JICA Research Institute / Human Development Department

Summary

- To respond to the diversity of all students, it is important to have full understanding of the living and educational situation of children with disabilities and their families.
- Awareness change of stakeholders is important.
- Teacher training should be reconsidered to improve the awareness of teachers and teaching skills.
- Educational infrastructure including educational materials should be well equipped and utilized so that children with disabilities can learn as children without disabilities learn.
- Promotion of technological advancement and innovative ideas becomes more important to promote quality education for children with disabilities.

1. Educational situation of students with disabilities

It is estimated that 150 million children under the age of 18 live with a disability¹, and most of them do not have enough educational opportunities. It is also

reported that one third of children who are out of school have some form of disability, and further, according to a survey conducted by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 51 countries, the primary school completion ratio of students with disabilities is 10% less than their counterparts without

disabilities and the schooling years of children with disabilities are also shorter by one year than their counterparts².

To improve the learning situation of children with disabilities, much effort has been expended to improve their access to school even in developing countries. For instance, in Mongolia, the government runs six special needs schools for students with disabilities in addition to the mainstream schools that also accommodate students with disabilities. Also, in Cambodia, there are local NGOs that run special needs schools from the early ages of students with disabilities, to prepare them to learn at mainstream schools when they reach a certain age. However, many students with disabilities are still left out of school because of educational budget constraints, insufficient educational environments, and deficiencies in the capacity of teachers. In many developing countries, the number of special needs schools is limited, and the system to include children with disabilities in mainstream schools is also not fully functional. Further, even though they can attend a school, they do not get special attention and their needs are often left unattended. As a result, the number of students with disabilities who can attend a school may increase, but the quality of their learning may be compromised.

International community must provide quality education to all, including students with disabilities, and provide assistance so that they can enjoy healthy growth and a bright future. Further, we should not limit the concept of inclusion to those with disabilities, but we should also strive to achieve an inclusive society where all people respect and support each other, embracing individual differences, and accept the many ways people live.

2. Inclusive education in the Sustainable Development Goals

International community agreed on the SDGs agenda in 2015 and pledged to provide quality education for all. The concept of inclusive education in the SDGs is to include all children regardless of sex, disabilities, race, and vulnerability, and this concept echoes what UNESCO defines as inclusive education³. Thus, providing educational opportunities to children with disabilities is a part of a wider effort to promote inclusivity through which we aim to provide equity in education by responding to the diversity of various students and to provide quality education by providing continuous support for student learning.

In addition, there is a realization that promoting inclusive education also has a positive influence on children who study alongside children with disabilities. For instance, there exists research evidence that shows that including students with disabilities in mainstream school and classrooms increases the variety of interactions among all students and raises the quality of education by providing students and teachers with more opportunities to respond to other students' needs. Further there has been some research conducted in developed countries that endorses the importance of inclusive education by showing academic improvement in both cognitive and non-cognitive abilities in children without disabilities when they are put together with students who live with disabilities. For those reasons, the promotion of inclusive education leads to the achievement of the SDG that seeks to ensure quality education for all.

3. Research output to promote inclusive education

As mentioned above, governments in developing countries implement inclusive education policies, but because of budget shortages and teacher capacity, not all children are learning to a satisfactory level. To fully implement inclusive education, education policy should be made realistic and feasible through the understanding of what is required in the education system by conducting empirical research in each country context. Nonetheless, there is little empirical research that has evaluated the impact of inclusive education policy, while there exists much research and case studies about the policies and philosophies themselves. This trend is particularly prominent in developing countries where some 80% of the people with disabilities live, which means we do not have enough evidence to formulate implementation policy.

Considering these backgrounds, in 2014 the JICA Research Institute started a research project, “Disability and Education”, to obtain empirical evidence about the education of children with disabilities in developing countries. This policy note develops policy implications for quality education which can respond to the diversity of all students, including the one of children with disabilities, by extracting the findings from three working papers generated by that research project.

4. Policy implications to respond to the diversity of all students

4-1. To respond to the diversity of all students, it is important to have full understanding of the living and educational situation of children with disabilities and their families

Even though WHO and UNESCO have conducted research on the actual situation of children with

disabilities, not much has been understood, particularly in developing countries. Some of the reasons for that inadequate understanding are the lack of educational statistics and the lack of methods to identify and categorize disabilities in comparison with other countries. It is therefore important to have much stronger capacity in dealing with educational statistics and to have a full picture of the educational circumstances of children with disabilities in a way that is comparable across countries.

4-2. Awareness change of stakeholders is important for education of children with disabilities

It is essential to raise the awareness of stakeholders such as parents, community, teachers, and policy makers to promote education for children with disabilities. For instance, teachers should pay close attention to their needs when they receive children with disabilities into their classes, otherwise they will be left not learning even though they are attending that school. In addition, there is a case that they feel isolated when they cannot make communication with other children. These challenges are also recognized by teachers and parents. According to the survey conducted in Mongolia, lack of community awareness is identified as one of the challenges in the provision of quality education to children with disabilities.

To improve the awareness of stakeholders at the school level, initiatives have been taken to organize social gatherings of teachers, students with and without disabilities, and their parents before formally receiving them into classes. These are carried out to fill the awareness gap among stakeholders, and are also implemented in the JICA technical cooperation project (cf. the JICA project

case in Mongolia). In addition, at a policy level, stakeholders also need to have their awareness changed. There are several ministries related to education policy for children with disabilities, and some important decisions are sometimes made outside the Ministry of Education. Sharing information is imperative among various ministries. Awareness change in various stakeholders leads to the promotion of quality education for children with disabilities.

4-3. Teacher training should be reconsidered to improve the awareness of teachers and teaching skills for children with disabilities

Teachers' awareness and teaching skills have a significant influence on children's educational access and quality of learning, and the research conducted in developed countries reports that teacher training has great influence on teachers' attitudes toward education for the disabled. It is, however, reported in the research conducted in Cambodia⁴ that cascade teacher training for receiving children with disabilities does not have a positive influence on teachers' attitudes or their thoughts on the inclusion. This is because the cascade training system, where delegates get trained and transfer knowledge to others at the school level, is not fully able to transfer all information that needs detailed explanation such as educational objectives and teaching methods for children with disabilities. To improve this system, it is necessary to reconsider training content by identifying that which is transmittable through the cascade training system, incorporate a bottom up approach which fosters the mutual learning of teachers, and provide training where participants can get practical solutions according to the context of their tasks.

4-4. Educational infrastructure including educational materials should be well equipped and utilized so that children with disabilities can learn as children without disabilities learn

Equipping all schools with appropriate educational infrastructure in accordance with the diverse needs of children is expected to foster their learning. According to the research⁵ conducted by the JICA Research Institute in both mainstream and special needs schools, interviews with the parents and the teachers of children with disabilities reveals that one of the most severe barriers is the lack of infrastructure such as friendly slopes and toilets for disabled people rather than teacher capacity or understanding. In addition, in the case of Mongolia, compared to special needs schools, mainstream schools lack educational facilities for children with disabilities due to insufficient budgets. Furthermore, teaching aid is also required in many schools to help teachers to provide specific support to their students. For example, it is important to prepare teachers' guides, which explain the challenges teachers often encounter, and the approaches needed to deal with those challenges, and also it is necessary to hire teacher aides, to support teachers to meet the specific needs of children they are faced with. For example, providing visually impaired students with braille textbooks fosters quality of learning of that student.

On the other hand, the insufficient use of infrastructure for students with disabilities such as toilets and elevators is also reported in Mongolia, as is the mismatch of services with children's needs. For example, the school bus is not really catering for children who live more than 10 km away from school and who really need the service. Thus, in addition to

meeting individual children's needs and equipping the appropriate educational infrastructure, the provision and utilization of those ancillary services is also particularly important.

4-5. Promotion of technological advancement and innovative ideas becomes more important to promote quality education for children with disabilities

With the advancement of technologies, it is expected that educational opportunities of children with disabilities will be improved. For instance, in Japan,

the educational evaluation and effective teaching method with the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is well-developed, and further, individual learning through digital teaching materials is implemented, while connecting mainstream schools and hospitals through TV meeting systems with a digital white board is promoted. UNESCO also reports that ICT enhances the learning of students with disabilities and teaching quality of teachers in Belgium, Portugal, and Syria. In the near future, these cases will be seen in developing countries as well.

¹ United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). 2006. "The State of the World's Children 2006 - Excluded and Invisible." New York

² World Health Organization (WHO). 2011. "World report on disability. Chapter 7: Education."

³ Inclusive education is, according to UNESCO definition, "a process intended to respond to students' diversity by increasing their participation and reducing exclusion within and from education."

⁴ Kuroda, Kartika, and Kitamura 2017 (JICA Research Institute working paper).

⁵ Kameyama, Kuroda, Utsumi, and Hosoi 2017 (JICA Research Institute working paper).

JICA-RI publications for reference

- Kameyama Y., K. Kuroda, Y. Utsumi, and Y. Hosoi. 2017. "Teacher and Parental Perspectives of Barriers for Inclusive and Quality Education in Mongolia." JICA Research Institute Working Paper 159, JICA Research Institute, Tokyo.
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- Kuroda K., D. Kartika, and Y. Kitamura. 2017. "Implications for Teacher Training and Support for Inclusive Education in Cambodia: An Empirical Case Study in a Developing Country." JICA Research Institute Working paper 148, JICA Research Institute, Tokyo.
https://www.jica.go.jp/jica-ri/publication/workingpaper/175nbg000006u18l-att/JICA-RI_WP_No.148.pdf
- Sugimura M., and M. Takeuchi. Forthcoming. "Inclusive Education for People's Well-Being -Rethinking of Concept of Inclusion through the Case of Inclusive/Special Needs Education in Nepal-." JICA Research Institute Working Paper, JICA Research Institute, Tokyo

Related publications and information are available at the website below.

JICA Research Institute, Research Project "Disability and Education"

https://www.jica.go.jp/jica-ri/research/strategies/strategies_20140401-20170331.html

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