

chapter 7

Disability Studies in Inclusive Education

Overview: Connecting schools, families and communities, and decoloniality in Disability Studies in Education

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Section learning outcomes

After completing this section, you will be able to:

- ✓ Explore experiences of childhood disability in families.
- ✓ Describe an ecosystemic model of inclusive education.
- ✓ Explore inclusion and exclusion as connected processes in a mainstream school on its journey to becoming an inclusive school.
- ✓ Identify the role of the children, teachers, parents, school leadership and the broader community in the process of creating an inclusive school.
- ✓ Understand how education in Africa reflects colonial practices.
- ✓ Understand decoloniality in Disability Studies in Education.
- ✓ Understand the importance of collaborating with parents in the schooling of children with impairments.

Introduction

In this section, we focus on how to enhance collaboration between schools, families and communities in order to improve the education of children with disabilities. Schools are part of our communities and our communities are made up of various families. It means that these different spheres are interconnected and they need to be synergistic in order to benefit from their interconnection. We will explore the links between schools, families and communities, illuminating how impairment and poverty are related, policy supporting inclusive education, and the roles of different education stakeholders in addressing the challenges faced not only by children with disabilities, but also their families.

We also present a decolonial perspective to our thinking about the education of children with disabilities. This is in acknowledgment of the fact that contemporary formal education in Africa, including that of children with disabilities, has Western roots and influences. We highlight the need to critically examine current philosophies, policies and practices of education so that we do not replicate the marginalisation that has taken place in Africa due to colonialism. A decolonial stance to the education of children with disabilities would advance an education system that addresses our contextual realities rather than only pursuing a Western academic ideal. We end with a further discussion on the importance of collaborating with parents in the schooling of children with disabilities.



Let us begin with a glimpse of the views of a parent regarding the education of his child with an impairment.



GLOSSARY: Impairment

The terms “impairment” and “disability” differ from each other. Impairment refers to the medical condition a person has that results in a loss, limitation or difference of bodily functioning. Impairment forms part of the definition of disability. Disability refers to the experience of limitation and loss of opportunities to take part in society and the environment because of the social and environmental barriers a person with an impairment experiences. This leads to the person experiencing disability. It is important to note that a person’s impairment is not the cause of nor does it justify the experience of disability.

Insider view: Perspectives on education

In the transcript below extracted from Karisa (2020), Zoezi (not his real name), a father, shares his views regarding the schooling of his child with an intellectual impairment. Zoezi was one of the fathers interviewed in the Karisa study conducted in Kenya to understand the involvement of parents in the education of their children with disabilities. His views are a good entry point for our discussion on the impact of community values on education.

My most important thing is to ask teachers to try hard to make everyone meet his or her goals. If that happens, even us the parents we will see, “Our child has gone to a certain place, but as at now, he is doing a certain work.” It will be a relief to us; not that the child is here and he leaves without any hope in life and becomes a burden again to the parents. It won’t be good. But take the example, he leaves the school and I am called by the teacher to be told, “These are his certificates. And we have sent him in this job, and if he takes this job well, it will support his life ...”

But in this school, it’s as if we are paying the money just for the children to eat, because they eat here. So it’s just eating and sleeping. When you think of it, the way the school acts, it’s like in this school, they have made it a way of relieving the burden from the parent. It’s better for the child to come and make noise here than to make noise for the parent at home. With some reason maybe, because the teacher is being paid. “Now that you are paid, you’ll have to take the responsibility. Let the child make noise but at the end of the month, you get a salary.”



The parent is paying but he/she doesn't see the benefits for the child. It's like, "He's in school. Alright. Let him disturb there but in the evening I will just be a little disturbed. After some time, the child will sleep and tomorrow he will go back to school and I'll go to work or to look for a job. I will be able to relax; I will not have many problems – many of the problems will be with the teachers." So the teachers ... I'm just saying, not that all the teachers are like that ... the teachers consider the responsibility of teaching the disabled children as a way of getting what they [teachers] want.

This extract touches on several aspects that will be explored in depth in this section. These include the influences on contemporary education systems in Africa, the roles of parents and teachers in the education of children with disabilities, as well as the need to reimagine education systems in order to address the contextual needs of families of children with disabilities. Making reference to the extract, please engage with the reflection activity below as an introduction to this section.



REFLECTION

Estimated time: 10–15 minutes

Reflect on how the interests of this father towards the education of his child with an intellectual impairment relate to those of the school in this context. Whose interests does the school serve and why? Write down your reflections and discuss them with someone else.

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