

Reflection on inclusive education: based on experience in Cameroon and Indonesia

(overview essay)

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Abstract: *As a worldwide trend for the development of special education, inclusive education has been implemented in various forms in different countries. This article is based on two qualitative researches about inclusive education for children with hearing impairment in north-region of Cameroon and Indonesia. In both researches, interview and observation were used for collecting data. Based on comparison of these two studies from the aspects of background, research methods and main research findings, reflections on inclusive education in terms of understanding of inclusive education, practice of inclusive education for children with hearing impairment and limitations of research methods has been described in this article.*

Keywords: *inclusive education, hearing impairment, reflection*

1 Introduction

Inclusive education, as a desirable form to implement Education for All, had been formally initiated in June 1994 during the World Conference on Special Needs Education, held in Salamanca, Spain. Since then, inclusive education has been gradually accepted in different areas of the world and has written into educational laws or governmental policies in many countries. Over the past two to three decades, in most developed countries there has been a significant trend towards the placement of students with special educational needs in mainstream schools rather than in segregated special schools and special classes (Prakash, S. S., 2012). On one hand, the wide spread of inclusive education has led to dramatic change of the forms of special education all over the world (Deng, M., Xiao, F., 2009). On the other hand, considering of different cultural backgrounds and socioeconomic conditions in different countries, inclusive education may have various forms and broad ranges.

As an approach to achieve Education for All in different countries, inclusive education may vary from physical placement for students with special educational needs into mainstream classrooms to thoroughly transforming of educational system including curricula, teaching program and evaluation method in consideration of every child's unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs (Alur, M. & Timmons, V., 2009; Xu, S. Q., Cooper, P. & Sin, K., 2017). Generally speaking, the practice of inclusive education in developing countries is more preliminary compared to the situation in developed countries because of many social factors, including restricted understanding of disabilities, limited social resources, unsatisfied professionals and so on.

Hearing impairment, together with blindness and intellectual disability have long been regarded as the most traditional and widely accepted three kinds of disabilities with long history of educational practice for persons with these three kinds of disabilities. Hence, in some developing countries, these three kinds of disabilities are often taken into consideration of access to inclusive education as priorities (Deng, M., & Poon-McBrayer, K. F., 2012; Xu, S. Q., Cooper, P. & Sin, K., 2017). For children with hearing impairment, on one hand, receiving education in general classrooms is a guarantee of their equal access to education as their peers without hearing impairment. On the other hand, they have to deal with their different communication way and learning characteristics deriving from their hearing loss.

Based on diverse practice of inclusive education among different countries and practical characteristics of children with hearing impairment, this article is aiming at revealing the practical situation of inclusive education in developing countries on the basis of two articles about inclusive education from Cameroon and Indonesia.

2 General description of two articles

This first article was published in 2017 by Beryl Ndongwa Bamu and her colleagues in Ghent University in Belgium with the title of "Inclusive Education for Students with Hearing Impairment in the Regular Secondary Schools in the North-West Region of Cameroon: Initiatives and Challenges". This research is part of the results from an ongoing qualitative study in the North-West region of Cameroon addresses the different initiatives and challenges involved with including students with hearing impairment in regular schools by collecting data through interviews, participant observations as well as field notes from six teachers and six students with hearing impairments in the only regular school at secondary and high school level in the whole region provides education to students with hearing impairment. In this research, academic support, classroom placement and the way of working of the sign language interpreters were considered the major initiatives and challenges in the education of the students with hearing impairment in regular schools. Moreover, it was found that adequate adjust-

ments had not been made within the schools to meet the needs of the students with hearing impairments.

The second article with the title of “Risks and Resilience of Students with Hearing impairment in an Inclusive School at Bengkala, Bali, Indonesia” was also published in 2017 by Kadek Suranata and other three researchers in Indonesia. It is a phenomenological study describes some risks and sources of resilience of students with hearing impairment in an inclusive school by collecting data from four students with hearing impairment and some related key informants through semi-structured in-depth interview and observation. This research has found that family poverty, student’s difficulties in understanding verbal language and learning materials, student’s emotional distortion are three serious risk factors for children with hearing impairment to receive education in general classroom. Moreover, for children with hearing impairment in inclusive education, self-efficacy, cooperation skills, talents or special skills, gratitude, and positive hope have been regarded as five personal sources of resilience and family, school, peers, and community have been regarded as four social support sources of resilience.

Even though these two researches had been carried out in different countries, it is obvious that both of them are about the practice of inclusive education for children with hearing impairment in developing countries with common poor socioeconomic status. Thus, family poverty or limited resources has been mentioned as challenges for children with hearing impairment to receive high quality inclusive education. At the same time, the emphasis of these two researches are different as the first one pays more attention to superficial limiting factors about the organization of inclusive education for children with hearing impairment in the preliminary phase of inclusive education practice in that area of Cameroon, while the second one has aimed at exploring the deep-seated risk factors as long as personal and social support source of resilience. The research perspective of the second research is more integrated as children with hearing impairment have also been regarded as one important factor for successful practice of inclusive education in consideration of their personal resilience factors besides of the environmental limiting factors and social supporting sources.

3 Comparison of the two articles

Apart from the general comparison of these two articles, further analysis in terms of research background, research method, main research findings and research limitations will be described in the following paragraphs.

3.1 Social background for inclusive education

Even though both of these two researches had been carried out in developing countries, the socioeconomic situation and development level of special education are different, which constitute specific social background for the development of inclusive education in these two researches.

The first research took place in the north-west region of Cameroon, which is one of the 10 regions of the country and equally one of the two English-speaking regions. Moreover, this region is also one of the poorest of the 10 regions with agriculture being the main source of livelihood for many families. According to previous research, prevalence of hearing impairments of moderate severity or greater is estimated at about .9%, which accounts for 12,000 to 20,700 people. (Cockburn, L., Cleaver, S., & Benuh, E., 2014) Moreover, only one regular school in the whole region provides education to students with hearing impairment at the secondary and high school level with students enrollment of 56 in a total of 571 students. As teachers in that regular school do not have knowledge in the sign language, students with hearing impairment are facilitated by sign language interpreters provided by a Christian-oriented organization. And there were just 3 sign language interpreters for all 56 students and American Sign Language is the mainly used sign language within the school system, along with poor organization in the provisioning of the sign language interpreters. Moreover, the school does not feel it is their responsibility to provide reasonable accommodations for all students, which on the contrary means that the inclusive education there is more about placement and children with hearing impairment are supposed to take the responsibilities of having abilities or supports to catch up with the instruction in general classrooms.

The second research was carried out in Indonesia, one developing country in Asia. As a response to the Salamanca statement in 1994, the Indonesian Government has issued new government regulations and policies to support the implementation of inclusive education in Indonesia (Suranata, K., Atmoko, A., Hidayah, N., Rangka, B. I. & Ifdil, I., 2017). In 2004, the first national conference on Inclusive Education in Indonesia was held in 2004, which is known as Deklarasi Bandung. In Indonesian government policy, inclusive education is an education system that provides opportunities for all learners who have learning needs and have special intelligence and/or talents enabling them to follow education or learning in the educational environment along with learners in public schools (Ministry of the National Education Republic of Indonesia, 2009). Based on this understanding of inclusive education, designated public schools as providers of inclusive education are supposed to make adjustments in terms of their curriculum, educational facilities, and infrastructure, as well as the development of learning systems tailored to students with the special needs (Suranata, K., Atmoko, A., Hidayah, N., Rangka, B. I. & Ifdil, I., 2017).

However, according to previous research, the implication of inclusive education in Indonesia is not satisfied in consideration of decrease in quality, limited number of inclusive schools compared to the total population of children with special needs, failure of applying adjustments to the curriculum, or providing facilities to support the learning process, absence of art and sports activities as well as vocational education for children with special needs (Suranata, K., Atmoko, A., Hidayah, N., Rangka, B. I. & Ifdil, I., 2017). Moreover, other recent study also shows that problems faced by inclusive schools in Indonesia are linked to teachers' competence in developing an appropriate learning process for children with special needs, the lack of parental care, poor support from social, government, and related professionals within the inclusive school (Suranata, K., Atmoko, A., Hidayah, N., Rangka, B. I. & Ifdil, I., 2017).

According to the introduction of backgrounds issues in both two researches, it is clear that the developmental backgrounds of inclusive education in these two countries are different. Obviously, Indonesia is with better developmental situation of special education, which means the development of inclusive education is under central government policies based on the core values of inclusive education from Salamanka statement. In other words, the implication of inclusive education in public schools is guaranteed by governmental policies and has been explored in depth by recent research.

3.2 Research methods

Both two researches were carried out through qualitative research approach. Research data were gained with semi-structured in-depth interviews and observations with the aim of obtaining spontaneous information from the participants and understanding phenomena in the natural setting. Though both researches used the method of observation for collecting data, the kind of observation is different as the research in Cameroon used participant observation while passive observation was used in the research from Indonesia. In both researches sign language interpreters had been invited to interpret the research questions from given verbal language into sign language for the participants, and vice versa.

The obvious difference of these two researches lies in the research participants in terms of constitution and age. The first research was carried out in one secondary school, so the participants are six regular school teachers and six students with hearing impairments between the ages of 17 and 23 years. The second research was carried out in one primary school, so the participants were constituted by four students with hearing impairment at the age range of 7 to 11 years old. Besides them, key informants of students with hearing impairment were also included in the research, including (1) the school principle, (2) chosen teachers who had five years teaching experience in that school, (3) two special supervisors, (4) the parents of the student

participants. (5) students without hearing impairment in the same class, (6) participant's peers outside the school, and (7) public figures in the local village, namely the head of the village and adults from communities within the participants broader neighbourhood (Suranata K., Atmoko A., Hidayah N., Rangka B. I. & Ifdil I., 2017).

Even though similar research methodology and data collecting approaches has been used in these two researches, the contents and depth of the research findings vary a lot in consideration of different age and range of research participants along with different social background.

3.3 Main research findings

As the research question in the first study is "What are the initiatives and challenges in educating students with hearing impairments in a regular school in the north west region of Cameroon?" Several aspects of initiatives have been found in the study. First, use of sign language interpreters is revealed as the major initiative in inclusive education of students with hearing impairment as general teachers cannot use sign language by themselves in teaching. On the other hand, dependence on sign language interpreters leads to delay in the teaching pace as the teacher has to wait for the interpreter to finish interpretation before continuing instruction, along with the dramatic shortage of sign language interpreters with the ration of 3 : 56 (sign language interpreters: students with hearing impairment).

Secondly, academic support has been regarded as one of the initiatives implemented by the teachers in inclusive classrooms including students with hearing impairment, which is ensured through the provision of more details or extra explanation and visual clarification during teaching. It has been found out that students with hearing impairments are supposed to reach the same level as their classmates without hearing impairment during teaching through teachers' efforts in reducing the pace of teaching. Moreover, classroom placement is another initiative which has been considered in the inclusive education of students with hearing impairment. In this research, students with hearing impairment in inclusive classrooms occupy the last column of the classroom and the sign language interpreter stands in front of that column to interpret the lectures to all of them, which however, creates a distance between them and their hearing peers and hinders opportunities to work cooperatively during classes (Bamua, N. B., Schauwera, D. E., Verstraeteb, S., & Hove, V. G., 2017).

Besides these initiatives, remarkable characteristic of hearing impairment, complexity in language including English, local sign language and American Sign Language, ambivalence in collaborative teaming and ambiguity of sign language interpretation have been considered as challenges for children with hearing impairment to participate inclusive education in north-west region of Cameroon.

As the second study was intended to describe the manifested risks for students with hearing impairment in inclusive school and the ability, skills and/or personal

characteristic of them in facing difficulties, along with external sources supporting achievement and optimal development (Suranata, K., Atmoko, A., Hidayah, N., Rangka, B. I., & Ifdil, I., 2017), in-depth interview and passive observation of children with hearing impairment and key informants around them had been carried out to obtain research outcomes.

According to the findings, family poverty, difficulties in comprehending verbal language as well as comprehending learning materials, and the effects of emotional disorder has been regarded as the most disturbing aspects of risk felt by all four participants. Among these, family poverty meant that participants could not have their educational needs met, including proper school uniforms, and having money for buying something, while difficulties in comprehending verbal language and learning materials reduced their motivation for learning and emotional disorder impeded their social interaction with friends and also other people who cannot understand sign language. Meanwhile, the study also shows that there are five types of dominant sources of personal resilience, including self-efficacy, cooperation skills, talent or special skills, gratitude, and positive hope. Moreover, family support, school support, peer support, and community support has been identified as four social support sources of resilience from environments.

Generally, both two studies are about practice of inclusive education for children with hearing impairment, which could be helpful for the further development of inclusive education for children with hearing impairment in their social background. But the emphasis are different, as the first study focus more on superficial responding strategies and challenges for the situation of including children with hearing impairment in general classrooms, while the second study focuses more on risk factors which influence the quality of inclusive education for children with hearing impairment and potential sources of personal resilience and social support. To some extent, the research perspective of the second study is more integrated with consideration of individuals with hearing impairment and the environments around them.

4 Reflection about inclusive education based on these two articles

Both two articles are studies about practice of inclusive education for children with hearing impairment in developing countries. But the research intentions and main findings are different along with different developmental level of inclusive education in these two countries. Based on the introduction and comparison of these two studies above, further reflections of these two studies in terms of understanding of inclusive education, practice of inclusive education for children with hearing impairment and also limitations of research methods will be introduced in the following.

4.1 Understanding of inclusive education

Practice of inclusive education is always based on the understanding of inclusive education. According to Salamanka statement in 1994, inclusive education has been regarded as the approach to bring Educational for All (EFA) into reality by providing educational access for every community without discrimination. Inclusive education is aiming at eradicating the barrier of children with the special needs to receive education in regular schools along with children without special needs.

Nowadays, this literal understanding of inclusive education is widely spread among the world. However, when it comes to practice, the inclusive levels of education for children with special needs in general classrooms vary a lot corresponding to specific social background and economic conditions. For example, in China, the objects for inclusive education were restricted to children with hearing impairment, children with blindness or children with intellectual disabilities at mild level according to policies from government and have been broadened to children with other kinds of special needs in recent years. This restriction indicates that general education is not education for all, children with special needs can be included into general classrooms only if they could catch the instruction by themselves with limited supports.

4.2 Practice of inclusive education for children with hearing impairment

Both two studies are about practice of inclusive education for children with hearing impairment. From both, we can see that sign language interpreters are highly emphasized in classroom instruction by children with hearing impairment and general teachers. However, there are more factors which should be taken into consideration, including proper cooperation between sign language teachers and general teachers, communication abilities of children with hearing impairment, classroom placement, after-school activities and so on. Besides these, we should also pay attention to sources of personal resilience from children with hearing impairment, which could help them in coping with difficulties in general education setting as well as out of school system. Moreover, lack of supports is still a limitation for children with hearing impairment to receive high quality of inclusive education.

4.3 Limitations of research methods

As for research methods, both two studies are qualitative researches which chose interview and observation as approaches for collecting data in consideration of the advantages of obtaining information in natural setting. However, the limitation of research methods is obvious in these studies. As the studies are about inclusive education for children with hearing impairment, the number of children with hearing impairment is quite limited, as there are six students in the first study and 4 students in the second study. Moreover, the sources of research participants are also restricted

in both studies. In the first study, all participants are from one secondary school in that region of Cameroon while all the participants are from one primary school in Indonesia. Hence, it is hard to tell whether the research findings in these studies could fully reveal the situation of inclusive education for children with hearing impairment in their country or whether they could be applied to other countries with similar situations.

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