

Chapter 12

The Challenges of Inclusive Education in Developing Countries in South East Asia

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ABSTRACT

This conceptual chapter presents an overview of the current developments in special education, specifically in inclusive education, and focuses only on the barriers experienced by the different stakeholders in developing countries in South East Asia. To support inclusion and equity in education, governments need to influence public opinion, implement legislation and policy regulations, and provide financial resources. The three key stakeholders are the government, educational professionals, and families. There are also others including instructors and other education professionals, teacher trainers and researchers, national, local, and school-level administrators and managers, policy-makers and service providers in other sectors, civic groups in the community, and members of minority groups who are at risk of exclusion. Awareness of the value of inclusive education should be raised amongst all stakeholders to develop a network of support for all learners.

INTRODUCTION

This conceptual chapter reviews recent developments regarding special and inclusive education in developing countries in South East Asia. It focusses mainly on the barriers experienced by the three key stakeholders, namely the government, educational professionals and families. Apart from these key stakeholders, there are also other important contributors who play a vital part in guaranteeing that each individual has an equal opportunity. These contributors include instructors and other education professionals, teacher trainers and researchers, national, local and school-level administrators and managers,

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policy-makers and service providers in other sectors, civic groups in the community, and members of minority groups that are at risk of exclusion. Including all learners and guaranteeing that each individual has an equal opportunity, is still a challenge in almost every developing country. Learners with disabilities are among the most sidelined and excluded groups of learners. Although inclusion is an essential part of a progressive society, this rarely occurs in developing countries, due the practical difficulties of the inclusion of students with special needs in mainstream classes. In order to support inclusion and equity in education, governments need to influence public opinion, implement legislation and policy, regulations and provide financial resources.

This chapter presents an overview of the current developments in special education, specifically in inclusive education and focuses only on the barriers experienced by the different stakeholders in South East Asia, with a specific focus on Vietnam. This region includes for example the following developing countries: Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Myanmar (Burma), Malaysia, Indonesia, India, Pakistan, Philippines, East Timor and Brunei. A developing country is defined as a poor agricultural country that is seeking to become more advanced economically and socially (Minister of Foreign Affairs, 2015). All countries, including developing countries should focus on:

[I]ncluding all learners and ensuring that each individual has an equal and personalized opportunity for educational progress is still a challenge in almost every country. Despite commendable progress made over the past two decades to expand access to basic education, further efforts are needed to minimize barriers to learning and to ensure that all learners in schools and other learning settings experience a genuine inclusive environment (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2017, p. 4)

Education is seen as the right of all children, according to many international treaties and texts (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 2014). They further state that there is a responsibility to respect and protect the right of *all learners* to education. The aim of inclusion is to abolish social exclusion that is a result of responses and attitudes to diversity in gender, social class, race, ethnicity, religion and ability of the learner (Vitello & Mithaug, 1998). Including all learners and guaranteeing that each individual has an equal opportunity for educational advancement, is still a challenge in almost every country (UNESCO, 2017). Despite admirable progress made over the past years to increase access to basic education, more needs to be done to diminish barriers to education and to ensure that all students experience a genuine inclusive environment (UNESCO, 2017). The objectives of this chapter, therefore, aims to identify the key barriers that exist in this region for the implementation of inclusion for all learners. The following research questions are investigated by a review of the current literature that underpin this study:

1. What is inclusive education?
2. What are the challenges of inclusive education in developing countries in South East Asia specifically in Vietnam?

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