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Review Brief: Social Exclusion within Education Systems in Low and Middle Income Countries

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REVIEW BRIEF

How is social exclusion addressed within education systems in Low and Middle Income Countries?

Aims of the Review

- Identify the studies that address the process of social exclusion within education;
- Comprehend how social exclusion processes are being viewed within education in Low and Middle Income Countries (LMICs);
- Identify knowledge gaps that exist in evaluation of social exclusion in education in LMICs;

Main Findings

- At the theoretical level there is a need for clarification of the concepts of inclusion, inclusive education and social exclusion which are used most often interchangeable and most often with reference to questions of access.
- In terms of national and international education policy, there is contrast between narrow focus of inclusion in education solely on issues relating to disability and focus on broader questions of multidimensional vulnerability.
- In terms of assessment, moving beyond traditional perspectives of basic learning outcomes (literacy and numeracy), there is a need for new family of dynamic “indicators” to unpack inclusion.
- Research and policy have a new impetus created by the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (quality education) to navigate the much needed paradigm shift.

At the theoretical level clarifying and defining concepts: Understanding Inclusive Education and Social Exclusion through a capabilities approach

The confusion between concepts that are not clearly defined and distinguished in terms of what they refer to contributes to the inability to move towards considerations of process and allow for more dynamic attention to the influence of “context”. The definition of social exclusion as it is framed within the capabilities approach presents a grid within which to understand the process within learning systems through 3 main ideas:

- To view social exclusion (and inclusion) as capability deprivation and focus more deliberately on the role of relational features of the education process;
- Stress the distinction between the intrinsic value of education as well as its instrumental value. Focusing on this distinction would allow for a lens for scrutiny of learning processes within education in order to grasp the very nature of the process.
- Pertaining to education and questions of access, it seems crucial to make the distinction between SE and unfavourable inclusion (situations where people are in fact included but on unfavourable terms) (Sen 2000).

Viewing Evidence through analyses of Context-Mechanisms-Outcomes

Based on principles and theory of change and taking a realist perspective that aims to decipher the mechanisms of how initiatives impact behavioural change, we focused our analyses identifying the situational triggers by deciphering the Context-Mechanism-Outcome (CMO) processes in the evidence base (Blamey and Mackenzie 2007). . It was challenging to identify mechanisms that explained the links between the context and the outcomes as the arguments to make the causal connections were often not stated clearly in the papers but often inferred. Moreover, the outcomes stated often did not reflect the complexity and the multidimensionality of the links with the mechanisms.

- ***Moving from Inclusion as Access to Inclusion as Context***: In some documents, when inclusion was not seen as a mere question of access to school or as synonymous of special education, the concept lent itself to a broader framing by being viewed as a context within which educational equity can be achieved and where the intrinsic value of learning is wholly recognised.
- ***Mechanisms of exclusion or inclusion appear to occur most prominently on the psychosocial and sociological level***. Common psychosocial processes consist of social identity (associated with gender, socio

economic status, etc.), personal motivation of students and stigma and the relationship to performance in the classroom. In addition sociological mechanisms of exclusion or inclusion surrounded barriers experienced in relation to discrimination or inability to participate due to gender status or socio economic status.

- **The main outcome was achievement of education that is most often viewed in terms of access and presence within schools**, as well as basic learning. Drop out rates were a prominent assessment of inclusion. As a result, a number of interventions remain focused on retention for those likely to drop out.

Applying a systems thinking perspective to analyse the dynamics of inclusion in education.

- International policy couches education development in terms of promoting sustainable development (instrumental value of education). Cultural bias in international policy tends to create education policy that is heavily influenced by western frameworks; national and local contexts are not sufficiently taken into account. National policy language echoes international language with use of general concepts that are not systematically defined in relating to the local context.
- High-level international policy goals are siloed by sector, rather than addressing intersectionality (i.e.: Health and Education are treated independently). Separation of sectorial policy seems to constitute a missed opportunity for understanding and planning for the intersectionality and interactivity between multiple sectors.

Methodology for a “living” review

- **Preliminary theoretical review on social exclusion in education to design the analysis tools to be used in successive stages.**
- **Searching:** 1941 documents identified through searching major databases. Websites of international organisations were also searched. 184 duplicated were removed.
- **Mapping and analysis:** 1757 papers were screened on title and abstract. 115 studies were profiled using a key wording tool; 58 documents pertaining to education programmes were analysed using CMO tool; 24 documents pertaining to policy were analysed using systems dynamics (45 documents were excluded due to unavailability or being dissertations).
- **Next steps:** The next step of the review will entail analysing the documents that were identified as focussing on assessments of inclusion/social education. Using our content analysis grid developed in we will scrutinise this body of evidence to identify “unfavourable inclusions” as well as relational aspects of learning with specific focus on psychosocial processes.

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