An International Perspective on Issues in Special Education

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Imam University Students Visit

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Opening remarks

• Laws and policies assure the right to education for students with disabilities.
  
  – Yet there are huge differences in:
    
    • **How many students** receive special education.
    
    • **Quality** of special education services
Challenges of Doing International Research

1. Comparable international data on education?
2. Large variability in terms of
   – Classification and types of disabilities,
   – identification and eligibility criteria,
   – number of students served, and
   – types of placement
Empirical Research?

- Lack of a systematic empirical analysis in **cross-national differences**

- In health care:
  - much empirical research and a thriving field of comparative health care policy

- In special education:
  - Few studies at the international level
A 6-year research project


Inclusive education in Italy: description and reflections on full inclusion

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Inclusion of students with disabilities when appropriate is an important goal of special education for students with special needs. Full inclusion, meaning no education for any child in a separate setting, is held to be desirable by some, and Italy is likely the nation with an education system most closely approximating full inclusion on the continuum of inclusiveness. The legal background of inclusion in Italy is sketched, along with description of some of the problems in implementing its nearly fully inclusive system of education. It is suggested that appropriate educational response to specific special needs of children with disabilities should be seen as more important than uncritical inclusion; and that such educational response requires a continuum of placement options.

Keywords: inclusion; full inclusion; right to education; right to receive education; right to quality education; Italy
Special and inclusive education in Ghana: Status and progress, challenges and implications

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ABSTRACT

This case study investigates the special and inclusive education in Ghana. The authors first delineate the wider human well-being and historical contexts. Applying a descriptive design based on measurable pre-established indicators, drawn from Anastasiou and Keller's (2011) typological framework, the authors provide a systematic description of the 2008 status of special and inclusive education in Ghana. Furthermore, the produced outcomes compared to pre-established observable goals set in the Education Strategic Plan 2003–2015 were recorded to evaluate the progress in Ghana's special and inclusive education. The main challenges for special and inclusive education in Sub-Saharan African countries are discussed.

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Cross-National Differences in Special Education Coverage: An Empirical Analysis

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ABSTRACT: This study investigated the role of educational and socioeconomic factors in explaining differences in national special education coverage. Data were derived from several international and governmental sources, targeting the year 2008 and covering 143 countries. Descriptive statistics revealed huge disparities in access to special education among countries. Using a theoretical model linking socioeconomic and educational variables to differences in how many students receive special education at a national level and structural equation modeling, the authors evaluated the relationships among the variables. The structural equation model showed that gross national income per capita, adult literacy rate, educational variables, and expected years of formal schooling accounted for 77.3% of the variance in special education coverage, and that the contributions of gross national income per capita and adult literacy were unique and significantly important. The implications for special education and inclusion policy and research are discussed.
Like the attempt to provide education to exceptional learners in countries both rich and poor throughout the world, this chapter is fraught with many challenges. Whereas the preceding 56 chapters of this volume have addressed myriad aspects of special education predominantly in the United States, we have about 40 manuscript pages to cover the rest of the world, a charge usually addressed by whole books describing or comparing practices across several countries. Insufficient resources for the task—possibly the one characteristic of educational provision for students with disabilities that is universal across the globe—is not our only challenge, however.

Another is the quantity, variability, quality, and stability of the world of information which we must summarize. How the world provides education to exceptional learners varies enormously in terms of, for instance, disabilities served, identification and eligibility criteria, types of placements, staff, instructional arrangements, and funding. International comparability is hampered by differences in concepts and the use of terms as well as by the variety of categories of exceptional students receiving special education. Reporting international differences must take into account many realities and peculiarities, striking a difficult balance between simplicity and complexity. The quality of the data reported by countries, even if included in refereed publications, is difficult to judge definitively. And, whereas there has been a stability of sorts to the special education system in the United States since enactment of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975, the situation elsewhere is often different. Policies and practices sometimes turn on a dime or Euro, producing significant transformations based on changes in government, the publishing of a report, or the influence of an international organization, as has been the case with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Despite the decades that special education has been in existence as an educational provision in numerous countries and has been a profession with an ever-increasing knowledge base, the situation is still exceedingly dire for individuals with disabilities in some parts of the world. Given that there is no universally agreed upon definition of disability and difficulties abound in gathering standardized data, the following statistics may be more illustrative than definitive:

- The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that about 10% of any given population is disabled, which would fit with UNESCO figures of 650 million people with disabilities (UNESCO, 2006, 2009).
- Some 100–150 million disabled people are children, and 80% of them live in developing countries (Eleweke & Rodda, 2002; UNESCO, 2009).
- Children with disabilities comprise one third of the 75 million children of primary school age who are not enrolled in school (UNESCO, 2006; United Nations, 2009).

An analysis of the major approaches of how countries provide education to exceptional learners within the context of their national educational systems may serve a purpose. It is not to show leaders and educators in countries that are not providing as many services as others what can be done. Rather, it is to highlight the needs for full educational provision for students with disabilities that still exist, as well as some of the barriers and issues to that challenge, in the hope that somehow changes to this situation can be brought about.

Key Factors in Special Education Provision
We begin by briefly considering two factors that shape both how education is provided to exceptional learners and how
Ethnicity and Exceptionality

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Both ethnicity, or cultural differences in general, and exceptionality can cause children to behave in ways that are dissimilar to educators’ expectations for learners (Artiles, 1998). However, this common point does not mean that they pose equivalent or similar teaching challenges. In many circumstances, responsiveness to ethnicity and exceptionality has been different for educational purposes (Kauffman, 2005; Kauffman & Landrum, 2009).

Educators are mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) and the No Child Left Behind Act (2002) to provide an appropriate education for all learners in their schools. Providing an appropriate education for each learner regardless of cultural background, academic ability, social skills, and/or language differences is a daunting task (Banks, 2007). However, to do otherwise would be a disservice to learners and violate their rights to a quality education. Educators’ challenge is to discern when a child’s difference is the result of a disability that requires special education services to address his/her educational needs. IDEA clearly indicated that children should not be placed in special education if their poor performance is due to environmental disadvantage or ethnic, linguistic, and racial differences. The fact is that disability alone may not be enough to mandate special education placement (Kauffman & Hallahan, 2005). Some children with a diagnosed disability such as a physical disability (e.g., inability to walk) or health disability (e.g., asthma) may excel in the general education curriculum with only structural or medical interventions, respectively. In other words, children should be placed in special education only if they meet the definition of a disability, as stated in IDEA. IDEA defines a disability as a learner with one or more impairments/disabilities (i.e., mental retardation, hearing, language, visual, emotional, orthopedic, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health, specific learning, and/or developmental delays) who needs specialized instruction and/or related services in order to receive an appropriate education (Dunklee & Shoop, 2006).

Cultural difference, when mistakenly considered a disability, can cause children to receive inappropriate education services. Children who enter U.S. schools without proficiency in English may require additional instructional support in order to become successful academically, but they do not necessarily require special education services (Artiles, Trent, & Palmer, 2004).

How educators have addressed the convergence of cultural diversity and exceptionality in schools has been a persistent controversial issue (Artiles, 1998; Artiles & Trent, 1994; Losen & Orfield, 2002; Coutinho & Oswald, 2000; Kauffman & Landrum, 2009). One reason this topic is contentious is because of the historical treatment of minority groups by majority groups (Artiles, 1998; Patton, 1998). Therefore, when educational patterns emerge indicating that minority learners perform less well than majority learners on education outcomes, the specter of the consequences of historical and/or current biases is frequently raised as a concern.

A second reason that disproportionality is contentious is because of the potential stigma carried by labels such as mental retardation (MR) and emotional and/or behavior disorders (EBD). African Americans face greater odds to receive these labels than other ethnic groups (Hosp & Reschly, 2003). These labels may unwittingly reinforce or be influenced by stereotypic beliefs. How stigma is generated and better handled is also a highly controversial issue (Artiles, 1998; cf. Kauffman, 2003).

Third, ethnic disproportionate placement in special education is connected with vague perceptions about the effectiveness of special education. Contrary to popular
7. Conclusion

The success of the Finnish educational system is well-known. What is less known is that the performance of its low-achieving students (among them special education students and immigrants) is much higher than that in other OECD countries. The Finnish comprehensive basic education is one of the factors that may have played a role in the egalitarian and qualitative nature of Finnish education. An extended, multifaceted special education system, especially what is called part-time special education, functions as a mechanism of early intervention to play a key role in the comparatively high achievements of «weak students» (Finnish National Board of Education, 2008, Kivirau & Ruoho, 2007). Teacher education and special teacher training also seem to fit effectively into the aims of excellence and equity (Sahlberg, 2006).

Special education in Finland has drawn its own way of trying to respond effectively to many aspects of human diversity and to be a complementary system in the struggle for a better education for all. Certainly, an external observer can view a certain educational system as a model, for bad or for good. We hold the view that there is no one best education model, just as there may be not a single best school model. Special education in every country is embedded in a general education system which serves a wider sociopolitical context. Instead of simply imitating models, it seems better to formulate educational systems to respond to the challenges.
Research Strategies (1)

• **Descriptive Designs** (legal approach)

• **A Typology** based on systematic criteria to classify special education subsystems in 143 countries

• **Case Study and Program Evaluation Methodology** (EFA strategic plan of Ghana)
Research Strategies (2)

- Advanced Statistical Techniques: Structural Equation Modeling (MRA + CFA)
Presentations at Conferences (2014-2015)


Presentations at Conferences (2013-2014)


Presentations at Conferences (2010-2012)


Two Samples of International Work

• Anastasiou & Keller’s (2011) **typology**: Detecting patterns among several educational and economic indicators

• The role of special education in educational outcomes
Weakness in geographical approaches

- *Geographical lens* is not a satisfactory method.
  - Saudi Arabia & Yemen
  - Iran & Afghanistan
  - Japan & Myanmar
  - South Africa & Liberia
Three axes in the typology

– National education system
  - Special Education Subsystem
  – Inclusion
The six types

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<th>NATIONAL EDUCATION SYSTEM</th>
<th>SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISION</th>
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A question

• Do the huge differences in special education coverage (defined as how many students receive special education) play a role in education outcomes across countries?

• Do students benefit from special education system?
Proposed Conceptual Model for cross-national differences in Education Outcomes and the role of Special Education Coverage in a multivariate context
The role of socio-economic factors

- A parsimonious model of educational and two socio-economic variables accounted for about 77% of the variance in special education coverage across 143 countries (Anastasiou & Keller, 2014).

- The inclusion of economic factors and adult literacy levels resulted in a better prediction of the access to special education services than if they were not in the model.
• **The Overall Model** accounted for 77.3% of the variance in sped coverage. \((N = 143)\)

Thank you!

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