

Enabling Education Review

Issue 12 - Knowledge, power and ownership

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Contents

In memory of Hayley Scrase (1979-2024)	2
Editorial	3
Developing training on trauma-informed approaches for practitioners working with street-connected children	6
Preserving the syllabic approach to Hausa reading instruction in Northern Nigeria	8
‘Doing rather than claiming inclusion’?	10
Public participation and the competency-based curriculum in Kenya	12
Two projects, one goal: promoting learning through a love of music	14
Understanding young people’s agency globally	18
Colonialism and education in Afghanistan	20
Adaptation, inclusion, and the purpose of education	22
Sign language interpreter as advocacy champion in Nigeria	24
Power and personnel in education programmes	26
Reflections of a disabled education consultant	28
Gaza: Education under occupation and war	30
Supporting equal international relationships	32
Decolonising the curriculum in Nigeria	34
Reflections on perceptions and privilege	36
Deadlines vs wellbeing	38
About EENET	39
Useful publications	40

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In memory of Hayley Scrase (1979-2024)

Hayley, a much-loved EENET team member, lost her life to cancer in March 2024. Our team is devastated by her loss. Hayley was dedicated, organised, creative, supportive, and had an incredible sense of humour. She brought many important skills to EENET, including her ability to question the status quo.

Hayley embodied EENET’s commitment to investigate, challenge, and ask the most difficult questions of others and ourselves. She was increasingly frustrated with the flaws in the international development and humanitarian sectors and questioned the disempowering, top-down ‘management’ of national NGOs by more powerful European/Western partners.

Hayley was determined to find out how she and EENET could support positive change. She motivated the team to engage in the debates around ‘decolonising development’. This edition of EER exists because Hayley challenged us to use EENET’s platform to support the sharing of critical reflections around power, knowledge and ownership. So, in memory of Hayley, let’s all ask the most difficult questions, call out bad practices, and refuse to accept the status quo.

Editorial

Kanwal Singh and Aubrey Moono

Talking about change

International development and humanitarian donors and organisations are crucial in supporting countries facing social and economic challenges, natural disasters, war and conflict, or epidemics. However, the negative impact of their traditional, top-down approaches on effectiveness, inclusion, and sustainability is increasingly recognised.

During the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in 2016, prominent donors and humanitarian organisations launched the 'Grand Bargain' agreement. This sought to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of humanitarian action by pledging to direct more resources and responsibility to local entities.

Discussions followed the summit, but the impact was largely confined to theoretical debate and events. The localisation of aid processes has not sustained momentum. Many donors' systems, strategies, practices, and actions remain unchanged.

Crisis-driven change

The concept of localisation became increasingly significant during the COVID-19 crisis, driven by necessity rather than choice. When countries implemented lockdowns and travel restrictions, operational approaches had to be re-evaluated. Humanitarian organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and technical experts had to adapt in response to affected populations' evolving needs. Such adaptations included:

- shifting to remote operational management and virtual training, using digital technology for communication and coordination;
- implementing innovative technological and creative solutions to deliver services that minimised the risk of infection;
- adapting programmes to include COVID-19 response measures;

- adjusting project budgets and deadlines to meet changing and unpredictable circumstances.

Implications for knowledge, power, and ownership

The pandemic highlighted the limitations of existing top-down approaches where international organisations dictate the terms and strategies of assistance. Overnight, the significance of handing ownership of development processes to local communities had to be acknowledged, even by organisations that had previously been reluctant to do so. Central to this paradigm shift is the relationship between knowledge, power, and ownership as pivotal components shaping the effectiveness and sustainability of development and humanitarian initiatives.

Knowledge is the bedrock for effective development and humanitarian strategies. Historically, in this sector it was monopolised by external actors, such as international NGOs, funding agencies, and academic institutions. While they have contributed expertise and resources, there is growing recognition that the insights, experiences, and solutions generated within and by communities are equally, if not more, valuable. Local knowledge is rooted in context, shaped by lived experiences, and informed by cultural norms and practices that outsiders may not fully grasp. While local knowledge is not always researched or published in the same way the international actors present theirs, it is no less valid or valuable. It holds the key to developing contextually appropriate solutions that are more likely to succeed in addressing complex challenges.

However, the unequal distribution of **power** within the development and humanitarian sector hinders the full realisation of local knowledge's potential. Power dynamics,

within and between organisations, often dictate whose voices are heard and published, and whose perspectives are prioritised in decision-making processes. Power imbalances can marginalise local actors, dismiss their knowledge, and prevent them from being active participants in the development process. This is especially so when local actors feel they cannot question inappropriate NGO or donor policies and practices for fear of losing their funding.

When local knowledge and indigenous approaches are overlooked in favour of external influences, development and humanitarian interventions become disconnected from reality and fall short of meeting the community's needs, leading to unintended negative consequences. Central to addressing these power imbalances is the principle of **ownership**.

Communities should have primary agency and control over their own development trajectories. Ownership goes beyond tokenistic and pseudo-participation. It entails genuine empowerment, whereby communities are enabled to shape agendas, define goals and lead the implementation of development initiatives. When communities take ownership of their development, they are more invested in its success, more resilient to challenges, and better able to sustain long-term progress.

Localisation is fundamentally about rebalancing the distribution of power and fostering greater equity and inclusivity in the development framework. It requires a fundamental shift in mindset, from viewing local communities as passive beneficiaries to recognising them as active agents of change.

All change is tough and achieving localisation in development and humanitarian work is no exception. It comes with its own set of challenges and hurdles. The practical, social, political, and logistical challenges include:

- capacity gaps in local organisations for project management, financial management, evaluation, and documentation – especially when funders only fund project costs rather than core organisational development costs;

- cultural and language barriers between donors and local organisations;
- frameworks for coordination between multiple stakeholders or partners;
- rethinking power dynamics involves a shift in existing hierarchies and decision-making authority;
- local actors might not get along with each other or negotiate local hierarchies of power. For example, women and people from certain castes or economic backgrounds can be limited by cultural norms.

How can development and humanitarian interventions be localised?

Facilitating localisation requires effort and practice change among various players. International agencies, donors, governments, and NGOs must all adapt their approaches to facilitate local ownership and empowerment. Agencies that provide funding and technical expertise must prioritise partnership-building with local actors, including community-based organisations (CBOs) and civil society groups, and recognise their experience and expertise. Instead of imposing solutions, agencies must engage in genuine dialogue with local stakeholders to co-design and implement initiatives that reflect local priorities and knowledge. Many organisations believe they already do this, but without processes for frequent, honest, and critical self-reflection, they are often fooling themselves.

A more flexible and adaptive funding model is needed. This means moving away from rigid project cycles and predefined outcomes, towards greater experimentation, learning, and adaptation. By embracing innovation and risk-taking, agencies can fund initiatives that better respond to evolving needs and complex challenges, ultimately leading to more impactful outcomes. Donors should be transparent about their decision-making processes, funding criteria, and evaluation methodologies to build trust with local organisations and ensure that resources are allocated equitably and effectively. Donors must also prioritise longer-term support for local initiatives. Real change happens slowly, and local organisations need time to build their operational and management capacity (leadership, governance,

and technical skills), plan and implement programmes, and adapt implementation to suit evolving contexts.

With COVID-19-related travel bans and restrictions removed, let's hope organisations and donors don't slip back into their old comfort zones and again sideline localisation.

This edition of Enabling Education Review

The call for articles left the theme of 'knowledge, power, ownership' open to interpretation. We wanted to know what authors felt was important within this wider topic. The submissions focus on the top-down processes described above as well as bottom-up community approaches to education. The articles span a range of topics. Each explores what it means to value everyone's knowledge and how giving people a voice enables ownership of education and development.

Local knowledge and participation

Authors from the Consortium for Street Children, We Yone Child Foundation and Concern for the Deprived Welfare Association reflect on the process of developing training on trauma-informed approaches for practitioners working with street-connected children in Sierra Leone. Local knowledge framed the initial development process before practitioners from other country contexts contributed to making the training internationally relevant. Later, Eunice discusses the role of public participation in the development and roll out of Kenya's competency-based curriculum.

Language

Mikailu's article from Northern Nigeria considers local-language education policy. The author explores the RANA programme, which has demonstrated the value of literacy teaching methods based on Hausa's linguistic features rather than English-centric modes of teaching children to read. In the second of three articles from Nigeria, Yemisi reflects on her own experiences as a sign language interpreter and advocacy champion for deaf learners.

Young and old

Amanda explores the importance of community and intergenerational relationships for learning

and development in England, while Ruth highlights the importance of understanding young people's agency in different contexts.

Colonial influences

Ian and Mustafa explore the colonial influences that shaped education development in Afghanistan and what directions may be taken in future. Meanwhile, Jamie interrogates the colonial impact more globally to focus on adaptation, inclusion, and the purpose of education. Mohammed reflects on his own education in Gaza and how Israel's illegal occupation, oppressive colonial policies, and relentless bombardment have affected the education system. In the final article from Nigeria, Nnenna discusses the importance of decolonising the curriculum in Nigerian primary schools to enable students to see themselves and their contexts in the books that they study.

People and practices

In a trio of articles from EENET team members, Ingrid reflects on some of the power dynamics that contradict a movement for inclusive education; Helen writes about being a disabled consultant from the UK working in other countries; and Su discusses the problems researchers face trying to ensure local ownership when leading projects funded through overseas development grants.

An anonymous author reflects again on the role of consultants from the UK working in other countries. And from India, Veera focuses on the importance of taking a critical and reflective approach to equality, diversity, and inclusion.

The editors also reflect on why Enabling Education Review is being published late, and why a focus on worker wellbeing is more important than deadlines. We hope you enjoy reading the articles and that they leave you with food for thought. Contact us if you wish to talk about any of the issues.

Kanwal is an Indian education consultant with over three decades of experience in special and inclusive education.

Aubrey Moono has 26 years experience as an educationist in Zambia, half of which as an inclusive teacher educator.

Developing training on trauma-informed approaches for practitioners working with street-connected children

Santigie Bayo Dumbuya, Alfred Kargbo and Lauren Kinnaird

In this article, the authors reflect on the importance of ensuring that local perspectives and practitioner knowledge are prioritised by the Consortium for Street Children (CSC) when developing training resources for their 200 network member organisations working with street-connected children.

CSC is a global network and children's rights organisation. It links organisations, practitioners, researchers, and policymakers globally who are addressing the needs and rights of street-connected children. CSC works with and through its network to deliver advocacy, research, and learning initiatives. We Yone Child Foundation (WYCF) is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) based in Freetown, Sierra Leone. WYCF improves the lives of vulnerable children and their families through access to quality education and self-empowerment opportunities. Concern for the Deprived Welfare Association (CoDWelA) is an NGO based in Waterloo, Sierra Leone. It facilitates children's access to emergency assistance, psychosocial support, family reintegration, education, advocacy, and legal aid support.

Project rationale

The Grafton community near Freetown, Sierra Leone, has been hugely affected by devastating civil war, Ebola, COVID-19 and natural disasters. These have impacted children through direct and intergenerational trauma. In August 2022, street workers¹ in Grafton conducted street mapping. They identified over 300 street-connected children who had dropped out of school and were frustrated about not accessing education. Even when in school, poverty, stigma, lack of livelihoods, sexual exploitation, and teenage motherhood, often hindered them from learning.

More than 80% of the street-connected children had experienced trauma, highlighting to WYCF the dire need to address this trauma. Many young people expressed a desire for trauma healing and support to learn skills for future self-reliance. In response, CoDWelA and WYCF engaged vocational teachers, stakeholders, youth leaders and young people in group discussions to decide what is needed within trauma-informed training.

Two assumptions became clear in conceptualising the training: the importance of the training having local relevance, and the need for transferability to other contexts. Therefore, while partners in Sierra Leone initially shaped the approaches, CSC coordinated processes so the wider CSC network could input into the training development. In 2022, CSC set up a global Education Working Group. Members come from organisations with a wealth of expertise in education programming focused on street-connected children. These organisations formed an advisory board to review the training. In addition, Yvonne Gache, an expert Critical Psychologist based in Kenya, supported the training development.

Developing the training

An online focus group with teachers and social workers from WYCF and CoDWelA, captured the team's understanding of trauma, how to build resilience, and where they needed further training. During the focus group, participants described experiences of working with trauma-affected children. They shared observations of how children display trauma, how they currently seek to support them, and what they would like to know more about.

For example, the need for basic trauma first-aid skills was raised, to help participants deliver support on the street or in schools

in the absence of trauma specialists and psychologists. The session helped identify knowledge gaps which were incorporated into the training content list alongside participant suggestions. The focus group discussion developed a deeper understanding of practitioners' experiences of children's trauma and how it affects learning outcomes.

The learning was shared with CSC's Education Working Group, who gave positive feedback. They wanted to receive the training and were particularly interested in how to:

- understand children's challenging behaviours and immediate responses;
- build trust with children who have experienced trauma;
- define resilience;
- identify different types of trauma;
- develop strength-based approaches to trauma.

Members of the working group from Cities for Children and Glad's House Kenya shared their expertise around resilience, which they felt was crucial to the training content. In their experience, children who say that they are 'fine' or not affected by their trauma, are not necessarily showing resilience, but their responses could be mistaken for this.

When researching topics to inform training content development, we prioritised sources written in or referencing the global South. This was difficult for some themes, but it was essential to avoid basing the training solely on US and UK practice. We developed a training manual and accompanying handbook, containing further detailed reading for trainees. Cities for Children further reviewed the resilience activities and provided a case study to include in the training.

Reviewing and piloting the resource

The first draft was shared with the Education Working Group who reviewed it before giving feedback at an online workshop. This session helped to identify topics the group were most interested in and areas that needed to be further developed. The group also identified where the language was too technical to ensure nothing was lost in translation.

The working group members shared their experiences and highlighted the similarities between different contexts.

As a result of the process, street workers and teachers at all levels of the development process felt that their experiences, views, and contributions were valued, especially as they were used to develop the training content. This gave them ownership and enabled the inclusion of content from their own local contexts and points of view.

The training was trialled in October 2023 in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Participants from eight organisations provided feedback that informed the final training manual and handbook. The training is being shared with members of CSC's wider network to guide street workers and teachers in their engagement with and support of trauma-affected, street-connected young people. Street workers are using the training to engage youth leaders, community stakeholders, and 'street champion' peer leaders, to support young people in their local areas to overcome daily trauma, advocate for a reduction in stigma and discrimination, and promote more inclusion in societal activities.



Street workers at a training

[1] Street workers are education and social work practitioners who directly support children through street-based outreach work.

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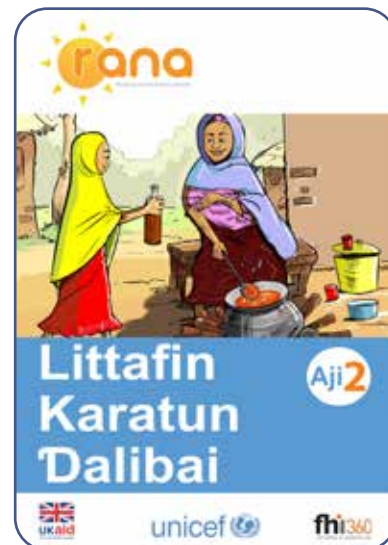
Preserving the syllabic approach to Hausa reading instruction in Northern Nigeria

Mikailu Ibrahim

Hausa is the language of most communities in Northern Nigeria. Although Nigeria's local-language education policy encourages instruction in the mother tongue, young children were taught to read through English, despite very little English being present in their lives. I realised that, even if children were taught literacy in Hausa, they would not learn to read effectively if teaching methods remained English-centric. We developed the RANA programme, which has demonstrated the value of literacy teaching methods based on Hausa's linguistic features.

It is now accepted that learning to read is more effective in a learner's mother tongue, or the language used by their immediate community, than it is in a language alien to the learner's world. Several countries that used official languages from their colonial past for teaching have now adopted policies that value learning in indigenous languages. Adopting such policies causes concern: how to establish independent pedagogical practices for learning to read in the mother tongue.

Each language has different characteristics and may need completely different teaching approaches. Often pedagogy is still centred on approaches suitable to colonial languages, making it very difficult to deliver literacy in local languages. For example, the phonics approach applicable to learning English may not be appropriate to some African languages which have linguistic features different from English. In this article, I use the terms mother tongue, local language, and community language to talk about learners' most used language. But these terms do not always mean the same thing within policies (see Enabling Education 12 (2008) for more information).¹



Cover of one of the Hausa booklets

The syllabic approach to literacy

Paulo Freire's concept of emancipatory pedagogy calls for culturally and linguistically responsive classroom practices to make learning easier. Using these ideas helped us to develop a plan to both change the language of literacy and establish teaching methods that fit the Hausa language. The RANA programme (Reading and Numeracy Activity) was part of the Girls' Education Project III, funded by the UK's Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office from 2015 to 2021. RANA showed how literacy and numeracy could be taught through Hausa in mainstream and Quranic schools. We anticipated that it would not be easy to convince decision-makers that a shift in teaching methods was needed, especially as several state governments recently invested in teacher capacity building in English phonics. The RANA team produced a plan to restore a syllabic approach to Hausa literacy teaching.

Hausa teachers have traditionally taught literacy through syllable sets, such as "ka ki ko ku ke". Many words in Hausa and other Chadic Afro-Asiatic languages follow a consonant + vowel syllable pattern, as a simple way into early literacy. Teaching starts with syllable recognition through spoken rhythms of "ba

bi bo bu be”, “na ni no nu ne”, and so on. Children learn the sounds of syllable groups and connect them with written equivalents, establishing the central idea of literacy – that text contains the same meaning as speech.

The word “kaka” in Hausa (meaning “grandma”) can be read easily by combining “ka” and “ka”. In English, a lot of words with simple meaning like “grandma” contain more varied and difficult-to-recognise syllables, and create confusing relationships between the sound of spoken words and the look of written words.

English literacy, needs to be taught in several stages: identifying individual letters; identifying phonemes; linking phoneme sounds to groups of written letters; using phonemes as building blocks for syllables and short words; and combining syllables to form words. Syllabic teaching goes straight to the second-to-last step, giving learners an easier route into reading.

Re-introducing Hausa literacy without syllabic teaching would see teachers continuing to use previous English-focused methods. If Hausa had been taught using those methods, RANA’s results would probably have been lower, leading to condemnation of mother-tongue teaching before it could become established.

How RANA established syllabic teaching

A randomised test was organised in 267 schools across Kebbi and Niger States in North-West and North-Central Nigeria to compare the syllabic approach with an alphabetic method based on English. The alphabetic approach taught letter sounds as the first step, while the syllabic method started with syllable groups. The experiment was significant because it was deliberately situated within assessment practices and the development of learning materials for learners and teachers. As well as training teachers to use syllable groups, syllable chants were introduced in the order of their frequency count in the Hausa language.

We developed decodable stories and illustrations based on Hausa syllabic chants for each syllable group. A simple story repeating

words made up of the focus syllables was added to Grade 2 pupil books and supported with scripted lesson plans. These included syllable flash cards used by learners to form words in fun and engaging ways.

To further adapt literacy teaching to the linguistic and cultural context, RANA used proverbs and folklore from Hausa’s abundant oral resources to develop comprehension passages for advanced literacy in Grades 3-6.

Improved learning results

When early grade reading assessments were done, a major finding was that learners getting syllabic literacy teaching showed a drastically higher rate of improvement. The test showed that the syllabic approach can shift pupils’ learning trajectory, especially when baseline reading ability is virtually non-existent. Pupils taught using the syllabic approach were 15% less likely to end the programme as a non-reader compared with those taught using the alphabetic approach. Reaching more non-readers, who make up a huge proportion of learners in Nigeria, is urgent.

Following the completion of the experiment and the encouraging learning outcomes, RANA adjusted the way it used early grade reading assessments (EGRA) to follow the syllabic approach. EGRA enumerators were given training to recognise syllabic units used by learners as ‘correct’.

All these added up to create buy-in for the RANA programme to act as a model for Hausa literacy, with unprecedented replications in related learning contexts in Nigeria. From a pilot in 200 schools in only two states in 2015, RANA is now a model for teaching literacy in Hausa in over 30,000 schools in nine states across Nigeria.

[1] <https://bit.ly/eenet-ee12>

Mikailu Ibrahim is an Education Adviser at the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office. He was part of the technical team that implemented RANA project.

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‘Doing rather than claiming inclusion’?

Veera Mookerjee (Ph.D., LMSW)

Equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) are global ‘buzz words’ used everywhere. However, under the umbrella of these terms, institutions often do the exact opposite of inclusion, which is detrimental to the individuals who are supposed to be ‘being served’. In this article, I share how an incident in a school triggered this thought process.

The incident

During a summer camp programme for children with intellectual and developmental disabilities, a child threw an object at a teacher and other students. The teacher narrowly escaped getting hit on the head and filed an incident report according to camp rules.

However, the school’s response was that the child comes from a distressed immigrant family with a single mother. The camp managers tried to ignore the incident as the camp was nearly over and the child would soon be with another group.

The teacher pushed back, saying that the child’s behaviour was unsafe for other children and proper measures should be taken. The school responded that it gets funding to enable diverse communities to access services, so the child should be allowed in the inclusive environment.

Afterwards, the teachers and other students at the camp started to avoid interaction with the child. The question is, was the child now in an inclusive environment?

Developing an inclusive response?

Factors such as a family’s socio-emotional and socio-economic conditions certainly influence access to services for a child with disabilities. But is it not the responsibility of an inclusive school to respond appropriately to all children’s behaviour?

In an ideal world, parents would see the incident report. Teachers and parents would discuss the situation and develop a plan for understanding and addressing aggressive behaviour. Together, they would enable access to additional and appropriate resources and support. It is important to address aggressive behaviour that can be dangerous for the child and those working with them.

Adapting the pedagogies used by summer camp teachers and in the classroom could avoid aggressive behaviour developing. For example, providing a child with counselling and therapy, supporting parents to develop skills to deal with the behaviour, or indeed supporting teachers to learn from effective behaviour management approaches parents already use.

Unfortunately, in this instance, no appropriate steps were taken to help the child or family to access services. Therefore, was equity in service provision taken under consideration while addressing the concerns with this child?

The situation created a ripple effect of negative outcomes at multiple levels:

- The child missed important learning opportunities to understand the consequences of actions and self-managing behaviour.
- The staff became disappointed with school administration and potentially prejudiced towards the child, their family, and their community – which risked them being racially labelled and affected by stereotypical assumptions.

While the school states that they are obligated to encourage EDI, I ask:

1. Did the school really focus on the students’ diverse needs and ensure resources are used efficiently to enable appropriate

- learning opportunities and development of social and behavioural skills?
2. Did the school enable equity by not reaching out to the family, supporting staff, or developing a supportive team for the student?
 3. Finally, as a community-based educational institution, did the school ensure all students' and staff safety? In the long run, will this school effectively enable this student to become independent and included in wider society?

What does this mean for EDI?

This is one of many similar incidents that fail to address EDI effectively in educational institutions. While many institutions claim to support EDI, and access the funding provided for inclusion, they often ignore learners' particular needs and fail to provide helpful resources.

Managers argue that funding opportunities are limited, and the list of ever-changing needs is high. Therefore, it is imperative for community service agencies to promote their inclusion work to address diverse community needs and enable partnerships to develop. It is unfortunate that EDI claims are often limited to promotional purposes, such as poster-friendly words and the faces of vulnerable people on display, with no framework for enabling quality education and learning.

Very often, EDI data only shows the diversity in terms of race, language, culture, and disability. As a result, actual work on effective strategies is missed. EDI is more than checking boxes on a form to seek funding. Data should be generated and shared to expand on effective and real measures towards resolving problems.

Diversity is about accepting that individuals have different needs. Equity means everyone's needs are addressed appropriately. In our example school, children come with diverse needs, including various special educational needs and disabilities. If, in the name of inclusion, all children are provided with the same education plan, equity is compromised. One size does not fit all.

Inclusion does not mean simply integrating everyone in the group, or under the same roof in a school. Inclusion is about ensuring that every child is provided with a needs-based education plan and appropriate guidance from educators. This also ensures service efficacy and the appropriate use of resources for all children, but especially those with disabilities and special educational needs.

Such change is shown to be effective from the micro to macro level. With every effective step in addressing individual needs (micro level), the system creates accessible spaces for resolving similar problems. New data is generated with each individual case, ultimately informing community approaches, policy amendments, new funding opportunities and policy change at the macro level. Regardless of distance covered, inclusion starts with one effective step in progressive thinking from leadership.

We must advocate for effective EDI in community institutions. It is important that we speak up to funding agencies to ensure funds are channelled to appropriate service delivery rather than attractive promotional stunts. Professional support for agencies is crucial to retain staff and maintain trust. If policies claim no individual should be left behind, then it is essential to ensure services are tailored to learners' individual needs.

In today's world, where we often see more educational needs than there are available and accessible resources, should we just remain disability advocates or become more instrumental in creating our own resources? Should we complain about failures or provide effective solutions to existing problems? We should identify and fill the cracks in the foundation of policies, laws, and practice, and seek amendments that ensure more inclusive societies for learners of all abilities?

Veera is the founder of the Resolveera consultancy focusing on disability and inclusion www.resolveera.org.

Public participation and the competency-based curriculum in Kenya

Eunice Owino

In this article, Eunice explores the principles that are central to Kenya's competency-based curriculum. She also looks at the importance of public participation in rolling out this curriculum since 2017.

Kenya's competency-based curriculum (CBC) replaced an education system criticised for being too theory-focused and exam-oriented. There was concern about the pressure created by unnecessary competition and the related stress felt by learners. The new competency-based education system aims to harness children's creativity and talents. The Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD), mandated to carry out curriculum-related issues, led the development and approval of curriculum content and resources.

However, since the CBC was rolled out in Kenya, it has been the focus of significant debate. A key issue is how the country's citizens were involved in the new curriculum development.

Public participation in Kenya

Before devolution in Kenya, development processes were centralised, and information was transmitted through a top-down approach from the capital city of Nairobi to the people. The decisions agreed upon in Nairobi were implemented through the government machinery via provincial and district administration. However, the 2010 constitution embedded the principle of public participation in the development of both national and county-level policies as postulated in the following articles:

- Article 118 specifically emphasises the importance of citizen involvement in policy-making and implementation to strengthen and deepen good governance, promote transparency, and foster accountability.

- Likewise, Article 196 (1) highlights how County Assemblies are required to incorporate public participation before passing any bill or act at the Assembly.
- The Fourth Schedule Part 2 (14) emphasises the need for counties to ensure and coordinate the participation of communities in governance at the local level.

Given the support for public participation in the constitution, it is important to ask whether the CBC went through processes of effective public participation. Were all relevant stakeholders adequately involved in the design and implementation of the CBC?

Public participation in the CBC context

Public interest in any new policy can never be underestimated. For example, the reception of the CBC was the topic of many conversations and debates right from the start. Criticism started in 2016 when a pilot project was carried out. It continued through the launch in 2017 and now under Kenya's latest presidential regime. Just after the new president's inauguration in September 2022, there was a public debate calling for him to abolish the new curriculum. This forced the new government to set up a 49-bench Education Reform Taskforce to investigate the issues raised.

The task force was able to meet and interact with stakeholders in all 47 counties in Kenya. Some of the feedback they received focused on inadequate teachers and learning resources. There was a call to develop teacher competency to equip them to handle the learning requirements of the CBC. There were demands for resources to meet the scope of the new subjects, and for the development of curriculum content and infrastructure to support CBC goals. Finally, stakeholders described a lack of parent and other stakeholder engagement as well as other issues.

Parental concerns focused mainly on the cost implications of the CBC. They stressed the financial requirements for parents to support resource development and the time they needed to invest in supporting their children with homework. Parents and other community stakeholders felt that they were not consulted when the curriculum was developed, and that the new education system was rushed into place without clear implementation structures and strategies.

It could be said that there was a lack of guidelines developed for public participation in the development of the CBC, but questions remain about what exactly constitutes adequate public participation:

- Which stakeholders need to be involved and what mechanisms are required to ensure their involvement?
- How should public participation be facilitated? Should it be county-based or only done at national levels?

For the public participation component of policy development to be effective, these questions need to be considered, especially for the set-up of a major policy that informs a new school system.

Another critical factor relates to barriers in communication. Kenya is largely rural and has low levels of literacy in the adult population in these areas. Unfortunately, many of the channels used for public participation have focused on print media such as gazette notices. Many stakeholders do not have access to newspapers, especially in their indigenous languages, nor can they afford them.

Members of marginalised communities, such as those with disabilities are further marginalised and often not included in face-to-face stakeholder meetings when they are facilitated. Additionally, parents need to support their children's learning, for example with homework, yet they cannot comprehend the curriculum content or the assignments. Some are busy working long hours to support their families.

Strategies to improve public participation

The criticisms of the CBC have highlighted the need for clear guidelines on public participation and the principles of participation:

- Developing a standardised guide on public participation is critical. This needs at least to define the nature, mechanisms, monitoring and evaluation processes, and number of participants.
- The subject matter to be discussed must be simplified and clarified for all to understand.
- There must be open dialogue and enhanced communication channels right from the announcements to the discussions, using local languages and local media channels.
- Effective inclusion of all special groups like women, people with disabilities, youth, various religious groups, and ethnic minorities in the locality is vital.
- There should be localised consultation meetings, facilitated in collaboration with local chiefs who manage the smaller units of governance known as locations and sub-locations.
- Continuous civic education is required to build the citizens' capacity on public participation.

Ultimately, the government needs to improve access to information for all, strengthen civic education within and beyond schools, and develop structures for stakeholder engagement and empowerment.

Citizens are the pillars of society and likewise should be pillars in the development and rollout of any major policy if it is to be effectively translated into practice. Their input is critical as they contribute to monitoring, evaluation, and learning through their feedback. More importantly, citizens can hold the duty bearers to account, making their participation in policy development imperative.

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Two projects, one goal: promoting learning through a love of music

Amanda Wrigley

I have been a primary school teacher for 20 years, including some time as a school special educational needs coordinator and an assistant headteacher. I saw the incredible impact of music classes on children and how music and arts provide inclusive, stimulating activities. I decided to start 'Live the Beat' to deliver music classes to children in diverse education settings. Here I describe two projects developed as part of my business.

Promoting learning for children with additional needs

I deliver fully inclusive music classes to over 300 preschool children each week across 12 settings in Cheshire, England. I also facilitate music intervention for a group of primary school children with special educational needs. I use music to help children who have, for example, autism, speech and language difficulties, or who learn English as an additional language to develop a wide range of skills.

A typical lesson starts with everyone sitting together in a circle to sing our welcome song. This helps learners feel included and signals the start of the session. We use a tidy-up time and a goodbye song to end sessions. Familiar routines like this throughout the class are important because they give the children a sense of safety and comfort in order for learning to take place. In the session, I structure musical exploration using a wide range of props and musical instruments.

I plan the sessions in advance but use a child-initiated approach, especially for those with special educational needs. For example, if a child actively engages with the class for the first time, I might change the next song or prop to something I think will keep their attention a bit longer. This could mean using a sensory object or a toy that interests them like a car or animal.



Playing with puppets
as part of a primary school music class

The sessions encourage children to share their learning with staff, peers, and families. For example, Jake¹ is autistic and was non-verbal before starting music classes. His vocabulary grows by 3 to 4 words every week through his love of music.

Amanda, don't stop what you're doing! Keep sharing it with as many children as you can! What you have given my boy is incredible. (Jake's mum)

The music is engaging for children with special educational needs. Early years practitioners have made comments such as:

Well, I've never seen him sit and focus like that before!

She has come on so much since doing your classes!

All children should be in the room throughout the class. They can decide if, how and when they join in. For example, they may start by humming as a way of joining in or just looking over at what the rest of the group is doing. Without exception, all the children with special educational needs have developed their communication, social skills, and ability to manage emotions.

I work with school staff to complete an education needs assessment grid that we fill out before the sessions. This helps me analyse children's development and supports my planning and practice.

As a result of the impact these sessions have had on the early years children, I have started a similar, age-appropriate programme for children in the first three years of a local primary school. Again, I assess each child's needs beforehand and I have been thrilled to see how they have all responded.

The most surprising thing is seeing how children who speak English as an additional language engage with the class. When people enjoy and make music together, it brings a sense of involvement and social engagement. That is what these children need when they are trying to navigate new surroundings, routines, and language.

I am now working with the chair of governors for another school in a disadvantaged area. The school receives pupil premium funding – a measure of low income in the UK that pays for free school meals and other resources – for about 80% of the children in some classes. We are applying for additional funding to deliver the music classes to the school's most vulnerable children (e.g., those who are in alternative care, have mental health issues, are involved with social services or are refusing to go to school). After COVID-19 lockdowns, an increasing number of children found it difficult to return to school, especially if they experience anxiety or have special educational needs or disabilities.

Working intergenerationally

Ready Generations Charity runs the UK's first fully integrated nursery within the care village of Belong, Chester. The Nursery in Belong is unique as it has been designed to encourage



Intergenerational interactions with puppets as part of an early years' music class.

care, learning and connections for multiple generations. Children and residents interact in planned intergenerational experiences, as well as through informal encounters. I was excited by this concept in a community where children and adults of all ages can benefit from fostering warm, cross-generational relationships. I believe music can be at the heart of this.

The project began with six 'Music and Movement' sessions called 'Harmony Wheels', funded by Arts Council England's 'Curious Minds' fund. The staff and management at Ready Generations and Belong saw the impact and potential of this work for all the stakeholders and committed to funding ongoing weekly musical 'Stay and Play' sessions. These are attended by nursery children, families from the local community, elderly tenants living independently in apartments, and elderly residents receiving care because they live with dementia. Adults with learning difficulties and family members of the residents also attend. I believe the greatest benefit of participating in the sessions is the shared learning experiences.

I offer as many opportunities as possible for generations to interact. The children develop their understanding of others, empathy, communication and listening skills, social interaction, self-awareness and confidence. The older people develop friendships and connections, self-esteem and worth, leadership and teaching skills and physical activity. Music strengthens bonds and is inclusive for individuals, making it the perfect art for an intergenerational class.

[Don't we have a lovely time when Amanda's here? \(Doris,¹ a resident in the care village living with dementia\)](#)

At the residents' request, I began leading an intergenerational choir in Spring 2023 called the Sankofa Songsters. We develop work around body percussion, singing and storytelling. Over 50 individuals of all ages take part.

Although I plan both the 'Stay and Play' and choir sessions in advance, I use a child-led

and resident-led approach. When a resident recently started singing 'She'll be coming round the mountain', I asked the children to decide what we should do to accompany that. They decided we should use ribbons and spin around. One boy led everyone as we marched around the residents' chairs creating a fantastic atmosphere. The sessions bring a sense of shared joy, smiles, laughter, and beautiful interactions between young and old. I am interested in the residents being empowered to become 'teachers' rather than only having a passive watching experience.

Certain resources that I use will spark interaction and communication. These are often life-like props such as soft toys, puppets, and bees, and the adults will spontaneously role play for their own fun and for the children's delight.

The work has an impact beyond musical learning. Children become better at developing relationships, empathy and understanding others. The older people are empowered to take on leadership roles, make progress in their singing, use their voices for performance, and take ownership of how they want sessions run.

Where next?

My experience in the primary classroom gave me the skills and knowledge to deliver these projects. I constantly reflect on what works and how I can improve my skills to adapt to support individual learners and new situations. I am participating in a research project at the Universities of Central Lancashire and Chester to analyse my practice. I unpick what is most and least effective, learn, and change my practice. I am in conversation with researchers at other universities regarding how to bring more research into my work.

I am always looking for new funding opportunities for Live the Beat and ways to expand its reach. Future activities include training teaching assistants to better understand their role in the music classes, why we do certain activities, and how to build on sessions throughout the week. They can then empower children with special educational needs to share their learning and introduce

the games and songs to their peers to build confidence, language and leadership skills. I can't wait to see how this progresses!

Next year I will start five more care home intergenerational choirs, linking each one with an educational setting. Such intergenerational work is important for children who are vulnerable to difficult situations. I hope to invite the primary school children I work with and their families to visit the intergenerational care home where I lead the choir to share learning and interact socially. Ultimately, I want to develop and sell a resource package. Overall, it is an exciting time as I can see real impact from this work with all the young and older people I work with.

[1] Names have been changed for confidentiality reasons.

Amanda Wrigley is the founder and director of Live the Beat.
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<https://www.livethebeat.co.uk/>



Outdoor activities as part of a primary school music class.



Amanda leads a class of children and older residents in an intergenerational movement and music session.

Understanding young people's agency globally

Ruth Edmonds

In this article, Ruth explains what agency means and explores her thinking about 'ambiguous agency'. She focuses on how young people's exercise of agency in cross-cultural contexts can challenge accepted ideas about childhood and young people's behaviour. Ruth examines the implications for how practitioners work with and support young people. She calls for greater efforts to localise understandings of agency.

Introducing agency

What is agency?

Agency is an individual's capacity (perceived or actual) to make decisions and act on them.

The concept of agency and ideas about young people as agentic actors (those who exercise agency) are well-known within childhood and youth studies. Agency is exercised, not owned. It is not a characteristic a person 'has' but a process they use within particular social, cultural, economic, and political contexts. In international development, agency is the process through which individuals consider and choose between potential actions. It is how they make and transform these decisions into individual or collective actions and outcomes.

To exercise agency, young people need the ability to make decisions – individually or collectively – about their daily and future lives. How a young person exercises agency depends on various individual factors. These include their attitudes, knowledge, know-how, skills, gender, age, etc. However, agency depends on more than individual identities, capacities, and characteristics. It is affected by the social and cultural environment around young people and the influences that work to either expand or constrain their ability to exercise agency. Such influences include

relationships, interactions with organisations and institutions, one's own and others' cultural beliefs and experiences of poverty, and regional or national policies and laws.

Therefore, young people exercise their capacities to decide and act along a kind of scale. At one end of the scale are everyday decisions and actions taken within limiting contexts. At the other end is the ability to act within a broad range of options. Agency along this scale depends on structures, contexts, and relationships that can constrain or expand young people's choices.

Ambiguous agency

Agency is often seen as something that enables young people to exercise freedoms or realise their rights in ways that are in line with moral and social expectations for their behaviour. My colleague, Lorenzo Bordonoro, and I developed the notion of ambiguous agency. We wanted to highlight the difference between the ideas that international development organisations have about agency, and how young people want to express agency in different contexts.

The concept of ambiguous agency highlights how young people's expressions of agency go against the established and often Western ideas about childhood and what young people should do and where they should do it. Such expressions of agency are often thought to be not 'the right kind of agency'. They are seen as problematic or not seen as agency at all.

Implications for practice

Limiting how they interpret agency can affect how international development organisations act in response to young people's expressions of agency. Practitioners' activities might not match young people's realities. They might seek to rescue children and/or correct their behaviour. Such actions could unintentionally

increase young people's vulnerabilities and put them at risk of harm. For example, programmes that simply seek to remove a child from the street might not acknowledge the complexity of their street-connectedness.

In 2016, I conducted research with adolescent girls in Rwanda. There were big differences between their life goals and the organisation's programme goals for addressing issues connected with early pregnancy. The girls wanted to get pregnant only once they were married. This would gain and preserve their *agaciro* – their value and reputation among family and community members.

However, the organisation's goal was to delay pregnancy until a specific biological age, regardless of the girls' marital status. The question of age was not important to the girls. This mis-match between the programme's intentions and the girls' preferences risked the effectiveness of the programme outcomes and could have harmed the girls by interfering with their *agaciro*.

Localising agency

Engaging seriously and meaningfully with young people's ambiguous agency means supporting efforts to develop context-appropriate understandings of agency. Academics and practitioners need to make understandings of, and responses to, young people's agency, including their ambiguous agency, more locally relevant. We need new directions in research and practice to support such efforts.

Agency should not just be about generating and using young people's perspectives. It needs to involve understanding the local social and cultural contexts which underpin these perspectives and help us make sense of them. My research in Rwanda developed a culturally grounded understanding of the adolescent girls' identities, relationships, and actions, and how these influenced their decision-making and action in relation to their health experiences and goals.

Doing this helped to show girls' agency in a different light. Therefore, rather than relying on cultural preferences and assumptions from other contexts to understand agency, development organisations should cultivate interpretations of agency that are connected with the social and cultural elements of agency in the particular contexts in which they are working.

Developing and using such locally relevant understandings of agency helps practitioners align with young people's realities and work in ways that support their own versions of their 'best interests'. This helps ensure programme goals are locally impactful and avoid unintended negative consequences.

Developing locally grounded agency-related practice can be difficult. It is not always easy to recognise when our own interpretations and perspectives on the world are the product of deeply held cultural assumptions. More locally relevant agency-related practice requires reflection and scrutiny of all the cultural systems that impact how we make sense of young people's agency. This means focusing on the cultural systems of young people themselves, as well as those of the researcher, the policymaker, and the programme practitioner, all of whom have the power to make decisions and take action.

This article draws on the discussions published in the following articles.

[1] <https://bit.ly/eer24-1>

[2] <https://bit.ly/eer24-2>

[3] <https://bit.ly/eer24-3>

You can contact Ruth if you would like to access them. You can also watch a video of Ruth talking about children's agency here: <https://bit.ly/eer24-4>

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Colonialism and education in Afghanistan

Ian Kaplan and Mustafa Himmati

“While some countries have successfully negotiated the relationship between their local educational aims and practices with that of modern schooling, other countries have struggled to find this balance. The misalignment of the traditional educational systems and modern schooling, along with the dynamics of globalization, donor dependency, and local politics of power and identity, have made schooling a source of conflict. Afghanistan unfortunately—like many other fragile states—falls in the latter category”.¹

Context

Two-and-a-half years after the Taliban takeover in August 2021, the structure and details of Afghanistan’s education system are still emerging. This offers an opportunity to critically evaluate the previous two decades of Western influence on Afghanistan’s education system through the lens of post-colonialism and neo-colonialism. We use ‘neo-colonialism’ to mean current systems and processes rooted in colonial ideas and practices but enacted in modern postcolonial forms.

To understand the scale of Western influence, we first look at financial aid. From late 2001 to August 2021 (between the Taliban’s two periods of control), Afghanistan’s education system was almost entirely financed by Western donor countries. Only an estimated 12% was funded by the Afghan government.² The donor funding was accompanied by specific requirements regarding how the money should be spent. This meant that Western political and technical influence was **fundamental** in shaping Afghanistan’s education system.

Development and humanitarian intervention in Afghanistan

Before focusing on education, it is worth examining development and humanitarian

interventions in Afghanistan more broadly. It is depressing, although not surprising, that more than 20 years of aid – and massive expenditure of human, financial, and material resources – has not had a more positive impact on Afghanistan and its people.

A neo-colonial narrative would suggest that any failure of impact rests with the Afghan government, its people and their inability, or unwillingness, to use the aid they have received in relevant and effective ways. However, this view fails to understand the problems countries face when trying to assimilate or integrate ideas and processes from other contexts. It also ignores the scope of neo-colonial Western influence on the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan during that period.

It therefore ignores donors’ complicity in governmental corruption and mismanagement. Finally, a neo-colonial narrative minimises donor countries’ own mismanagement and corruption of aid and the lack of transparency and accountability for their actions. This is particularly the case with the shallow transplantation of educational policies and processes that may be inappropriate to local context.

Western engagement with Afghanistan was (and remains) complex and multifaceted, with a mixture of positive and negative outcomes. However, we argue that the ways in which Western aid was planned and delivered are based on systems and processes with deep colonial roots. They include:

- a lack of respect for indigenous forms of thinking, working and governance;
- a lack of meaningful, inclusive and participatory engagement with Afghan communities;

- donor-driven interventions which often lacked local relevance and contextualisation;
- a lack of continuity of funding, programmes and people (e.g., the regular turnover of donor representatives and NGO workers hindered the building of trust and sustainability);
- interventions – projects and programmes – linked to short-term donor funding and political cycles;
- conflicting or competing interests and agendas (between donors, multilateral organisations and different Afghan government and civil society actors);
- an emphasis on quantity over quality and form over function in the way that aid was planned, delivered and measured.

Neo-colonial impact on education

The issues noted previously all negatively impacted the quality and relevance of education in Afghanistan, creating space for corruption and often disempowering local communities. Of course, these consequences were not intended by donors. But one of the more dangerous aspects of neo-colonialism is a profound lack of reflection. In this sense neo-colonialism works through a set of attitudes and structures that are often taken for granted as being universal, neutral, or harmless – regardless of intention.

Here is a specific example of how this works. Local/regional Islamic forms of education, such as madrassas and *Darul Uloom*, pre-date Western forms of education in Afghanistan. They are widely understood and accepted in Afghan communities. However, during the 20-year period we are looking at, there was very little attempt by Western donors to openly engage with these forms of Islamic education.

Islamic education in Afghanistan was typically seen as, at best, promoting poor quality rote-learning of an exclusively religious curriculum. At worst, it was seen as a system designed to indoctrinate students in ‘jihadist’ terrorism. This bias was largely based on assumptions and resulted in potential education opportunities being missed.

As with secular schools, Islamic education institutions, such as madrassas, vary in terms of quality, curriculum (which can include secular subjects) and pedagogy. They can be welcoming, positive spaces for the education of boys and girls.

A critical reflection on this 20-year period of heightened Western influence on Afghanistan’s education system does not mean the Taliban’s approach to education should be romanticised either. Exclusion, violence, and oppression are not exclusive to colonialism, nor limited to ‘Western’ nation-states or cultures.

Looking ahead

What we see in Afghanistan today is a hunger for quality education for boys and girls from local communities across the country. There are opportunities for such education through both secular and Islamic forms of education, based on genuine collaboration and sustained engagement with Afghan communities.

Currently opportunities for girls’ education in Afghanistan remain limited due to ongoing restrictions and a lack of clarity on how the Taliban education system will address issues of education access and quality more generally. This reflects poorly on their governance. These issues need to be addressed with greater urgency, to limit any further damage to a country that has suffered so much for so many years.

[1] <https://bit.ly/eer24-5>

[2] <https://bit.ly/eer24-17>

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Adaptation, inclusion, and the purpose of education

JRA Williams

“Climate change is here. It is terrifying. And it is just the beginning. The era of global warming has ended; the era of global boiling has arrived.” António Guterres, UN Secretary General, 27 July 2023.

The Climate Action Network¹ (CAN) is an astonishing global alliance of over 1,900 organisations, dedicated to ambitious and radical measures to confront the climate crisis. CAN UK is about to start a new group to work on action for climate empowerment and inclusion. This will develop positions to facilitate education, training, public awareness, public participation, public access to information, and international cooperation on climate issues. The aim is to add urgency to the recognition at the highest levels of the United Nations (UN) that achieving internationally agreed goals of mitigating, adapting and responding to climate breakdown requires more action.

Why hasn't education adapted?

Education does not have a good record of adapting to changing circumstances. In 1899, John Dewey declared it was ‘inconceivable’ that the industrial revolution should not transform education. Yet the inconceivable occurred, and 120 years later the system of education remains largely unaffected by the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century. It has not adapted significantly to the global changes that have characterised the information revolution of the twentieth century. Schooling became the norm in all industrialised, colonised, and later ‘developing’ societies. The model of classrooms with a teacher, display board, and pupils in rows facing them persists globally. The curricula have not changed much from class-bound, academic models. Control by societies’ elite is maintained by ensuring that academic criteria judge success or failure.

Whose interests are served by these pre-industrial revolution practices and methods



The Learning Tree: Index for Inclusion²

in education? We can identify the power brokers of the twentieth century: initially European colonialists, and then the business and industrial corporations who are their post-war successors. The interests of both were to preserve a system which maintains enormous privilege and benefit for an elite, while sustaining and profiting from the masses as cheap labour and consumers. An education system which prioritised the academic, rather than creating a meaningful critique of the social order, was one which would receive and benefit from the decisive support of the most powerful.

This situation has continued well into the twenty-first century. Formal independence gave new nation states flags, armies, and legislature, but control over fundamental aspects of life such as food, energy, and finance mostly remained with the colonial masters and markets in the global North. Local elites are now managers of this neocolonialism, and education systems have remained static in

the service of the status quo aligned with their interests. Now, with global heating and all the changes that it brings, there is an even more urgent need to adapt and transform education.

Schools are the problem

Education is rarely what happens in schools; they replicate established norms and instil discipline towards them. At best, schooling navigates individuals' passage through cultural, societal and legal norms, but does not question them. It demands compliance, not creativity, problem solving and critical thinking. It is backward looking and not equipped, as Dewey notes, to adapt.

Detach education from institutional frameworks and it becomes dynamic and intrinsically adaptive. It responds to changes in the environment and in response to the moment-to-moment decisions that stem from and stimulate learning and participation. Its organisation is defined by a purpose of developing the critical thinking, problem solving, and creativity needed to adapt to the future.

If institutions are to be maintained, schools, for example, must follow internationally accepted agreements that children have the right to an education which develops their personality, respect for others' rights, and the environment

As the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child outlines, education is directed towards the development of a child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, the natural environment, their parents, cultural identity, language and values, the national values of the country in which they are living and from which they may originate, and for civilisations different from their own.

What can we do?

Schooling often prevents the most valuable learning, but using inclusive values, improvement is possible. Inclusion in education is acting on an ongoing process of asking who is excluded from learning and participation, what are the barriers, and how can they be lowered. A powerful tool for developing this

model in schools is the Index for Inclusion.³ It provides an accessible guide for whole-school development to take a school community through a rights- and values-based, inclusive process of change. It connects the curriculum to learners' experience. It breaks down distinctions between practical, vocational, and academic education, and encourages local and global links to be made in all subject areas.

Ultimately, education happens anyway, anywhere, and continuously, especially outside school. EENET's excellent home learning poster⁴ and activity guide⁵ – developed during the COVID-19 pandemic – shows how learning opportunities can be developed using family and neighbourhood resources in almost any context, for everyone. This illustrates true educational inclusion.

For people in the global South the most critical challenge is adapting to climate breakdown now and in the future. Education is vital for this, and inclusive values ensure that everybody, especially the most marginalised and vulnerable, are engaged in the learning as both informants and recipients. People taking part in describing and discussing their situation and exploring responses will ensure the richness and effectiveness of adaptation action.

Action for Climate Empowerment under the UN climate agreements makes climate action accessible to all. The Climate Action Network is open for new members to add to its formidable strength in promoting climate justice and ensure that all are fully included.

Change is upon us. We need to adapt, develop and use our unique capacities to think critically, problem solve and create, or we will perish.

[1] <https://climatenetwork.org/>

[2] <https://index-for-inclusion.org/en/>

[3] <https://bit.ly/eer24-7>

[4] <https://bit.ly/eenethl4>

[5] <https://bit.ly/eenethl5>

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Sign language interpreter as advocacy champion in Nigeria

Yemisi Layade

In this article, Yemisi recalls her own education journey. She reflects on how her early work experience shaped her contributions to the development of inclusive communities in Nigeria.

An introduction to teaching

When I finished secondary school, my father encouraged me to become a nurse. I failed to do this and instead, at the age of 17, began to teach in an international school. I had no formal training and learned to teach on the job.

The school was an inclusive school, in particular for hearing impaired children as the owner's daughters were deaf. I quickly became friends with the owner and learned to sign to communicate with her two girls. The owner was impressed with my progress in the language and asked me to teach a class of deaf students.

The sign language used in Nigeria is based on American Sign Language. Once you have the alphabet and numbers you can start to communicate. The students became my teachers, using spelling to help me learn signs for words and phrases. Again, I learned sign language on the job.

Being a television presenter

I enjoyed learning sign language, so decided to study linguistics at university in Ekiti State. I also wanted to improve the situation for deaf students in my country. My lecturer recommended me to the state broadcasting company, and after four years of asking, I was given my own show teaching sign language. This was an opportunity to teach people sign language, even though I was not paid.

I wanted to get sign language out there and put deaf people on the map. In Nigeria many people still think that deafness is a myth, so I wanted to raise awareness. The programme

was broadcast weekly. I developed lessons that progressed from learning finger spelling to more complex signs.

Graduates in Nigeria do a year of National Service. I was posted to Uyo, the capital city of Akwa Ibom State. Once there, I approached the Akwa Ibom Broadcasting Company and was taken on to do the same thing as I had done in Ekiti as part of my national service.

Developing networks

Deaf people who saw me on television began to ask for assistance to develop a spotlight on deaf communities in other states. I attended deaf community meetings and began interpreting for them at events like church services (town hall meetings, capacity building seminars and so on).

As part of my National Service, I also volunteered for an NGO helping enable young people to access support and funding for business development after completing education and training. Afterwards, I took up a post on their monitoring and evaluation team.

I suggested to the charity head that our events should be more inclusive. Although the organisation worked with all young people – such as street-connected youth, youth with disabilities, young men and young women – I felt that it was important to have sign language interpretation. The argument for not using interpreters was the expense.

Smaller organisations often struggle to pay for interpreters while larger organisations do not always see the value of paying for interpretation. I offered to interpret at events as part of my role, which continued when I became a full-time staff member. I was happy doing it, but it was hard. Normally a 4-5-hour event would have multiple interpreters so they can take breaks, but I had to interpret on my

own. (Though the situation is now much better as the organisation now has various paid interpreters and even have a deaf employee on their team).

Inclusive monitoring and evaluation

Many organisations struggle to include people with disabilities in their monitoring and evaluation (M&E). M&E focuses on targets set by donors, often leaving little room for change or adaptation to the local context. This includes sorting data by disability. As such, it is often difficult to focus on specific groups of people, and funding/space does not always enable creativity. I developed my reporting to include a greater disability focus anyway, which was noted by the donor and hopefully changed their perspective.

I decided to take my learning to more organisations. I attended an event academy to learn more about event management so I could help different organisations develop more inclusive approaches. Since the pandemic, I have partnered with organisations to teach their staff sign language, deliver inclusion training and run events such as dances and spelling competitions. 'Deaf Can Dance' and 'Deaf Spelling Bee' are great events, for example. I work as an interpreter, inclusion advocate, event manager and in marketing.

I decided to learn more about policy and inclusive cultures and where my work fits in the bigger picture of inclusion. I would like to work towards improving access to education and training for deaf learners. To improve opportunities, it is important to understand inclusive cultures and policies, so I am completing a master's in inclusive education, as education does not happen in a vacuum. It is important to understand the contexts within which education and indeed society takes place.

I aim to change the ways in which deaf children are viewed – promoting opportunities for them to dance, ride bikes, and go to school. Deaf people can read, and they can spell even if you can't understand their writing because they write how they sign. We need to rethink how we understand literacy. We need to provide education in a way that fits learners' needs and adapts to their skills. It is important that they are given the voice to decide their futures and the educational pathways that will lead them there. I would like to support the development of an association of deaf young people – indeed all young people – to help them get to be who they are.

Yemisi is currently a master's student at Manchester Metropolitan University. She can be contacted via the EENET office.



Sign Language in the community - Image by Gloria Katabazi/EENET/NAD

Power and personnel in education programmes

Ingrid Lewis

Globally, thousands of inclusive education projects are supported by a diverse range of donors and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Often, a national NGO implements the project with financial, technical and/or managerial input from a partner international NGO (INGO). Alternatively, national offices in low-income countries manage projects with head office supervision (usually from high-income countries). In this article I reflect on 25 years of working inside INGOs and as a consultant, focusing on the power dynamics that contradict a movement for inclusive education.

Power in NGOs

You may have seen or experienced inequality and 'glass ceiling' issues within a development NGO. For instance, senior management positions are dominated by men, or national staff are unable to secure senior international posts because of impossible international work experience requirements. There are also many hidden, unacknowledged power issues linked to entrenched behaviours that privilege some and disadvantage others.

Case story: I compiled the following case story to illustrate behaviours I have experienced. A donor invites an INGO to bid for a new education funding stream. There is a 6-week application deadline. The INGO staff at the head office review the donor's information, check for alignment with their five-year strategic plan, prepare initial proposal ideas, and write instructions for their national partner in Country X. This takes two weeks.

Before submitting a proposal, the INGO staff must edit it and have it approved by two senior managers. They always allocate two weeks for this since head office staff

are very busy. Unfortunately, one senior manager has annual leave booked, so they will need to approve the final proposal sooner. This means everything must be finished within 5 weeks. Using their agreed timeline, the INGO sends instructions to their national partner, giving them one week to provide detailed inputs for the proposal. The national partner is running a workshop that week. Two staff withdraw from the workshop to help develop the proposal and a finance manager cancels her leave to help write the budget. Three other staff work late nights after the workshop and all weekend. A meeting with a Ministry of Education official regarding an existing project is postponed. During this week, the national partner's office experiences four hours of power cuts daily.

The national partner team is unhappy. They feel exhausted and complain to each other, but no one complains to the INGO. The team does not meet the deadline. They get an email from the INGO grant manager reminding them how important this proposal is, and that they must send their input immediately. The team submits their input a day late. Feedback from the INGO staff arrives 3 days later. It says the national partner did not send enough information and needs to provide more data by the next morning.

Your reflections

Is the case study an extreme story or something you have experienced? From which perspective have you experienced it? Reflect on the story. What power dynamics does it illustrate and how do they perpetuate inequality between different actors in development programmes? How might this undermine efforts to develop inclusive education programmes and systems? I explore some of my thoughts in the following table.

Time for change

In this story	What needs to change
A top donor sets unreasonable deadlines and no one challenges them.	Donors need realistic application processes, recognising the impact proposal development can have on NGOs. NGOs must stand up for their staff and partners against unreasonable deadlines. How can we move towards inclusive education if the funding process exhausts and demoralises the implementers?
An INGO team recognises their own busy-ness but forgets that national partner teams are also busy.	Everyone is busy. If a timeline is fixed, consider changing the tasks (can the proposal be redefined or reduced?) or split the burden more fairly (can the international team do the background research?).
The national partner team carries the burden of condensing the timeline.	Workloads may be affected when a colleague is on leave. Any extra burden needs to be shared fairly, and through consultation.
The national partner team feels unable to complain to the INGO team about unreasonable expectations and their impact on existing work and staff wellbeing.	Everyone should have an equal voice. If we are working on inclusive education, we need to live and breathe inclusivity. That includes empowering everyone to say “stop, this task/ timeline is not viable and it’s going to hurt us or interrupt existing work”. Such messages must be taken seriously and never interpreted as excuses.
The INGO team is unaware of, or doesn’t appreciate the value of, the ongoing work that is being interrupted by this proposal process.	Existing work is often interrupted by the pressure to research and write the next big proposal. The proposal-winning process often seems more important than the subsequent project implementation. We need to address this and make sure donors recognise their role in this problem.
The INGO team seems not to recognise or respect the challenging circumstances in which their national partner works.	Maybe the INGO team genuinely does not understand or has not experienced the difficulty of working in the national context, with regular power cuts. Maybe they assume the national team is used to these conditions and should be able to “get on with it”. Either way, greater empathy and respect are needed.

What can we do?

The situation will never change if we just accept the status quo! In an inclusive classroom we empower learners to tell their teachers what they need to do to improve practice and outcomes. So why not...

- Speak to donors when they issue unrealistic calls for proposals.
- Explain how unreasonable deadlines impact proposal development, project implementation and worker wellbeing.
- List your expectations for managers, head offices, INGO partners and donors. Be

inspired by the learners in an inclusive class who prepare ‘rules for our teacher’.

- Work together to challenge donors and/or INGO partners who are not meeting your expectations.

It is difficult to make that first step to question the status quo, but it is needed if we are to move towards an inclusive system that promotes inclusive education.

Ingrid is the Managing Director of the Enabling Education Network. She can be contacted at info@eenet.org.uk.

Reflections of a disabled education consultant

Helen Pinnock

In this article, Helen talks about her experiences of working as a disabled education consultant within an aid sector built on the postcolonial effort to support and influence the development of countries receiving overseas development aid.

When working on education aid projects I am often the only disabled person in the room. This means I anxiously move between a disabled and non-disabled perspective. Why would I be anxious? I have a stronger voice than many disabled people within development and humanitarian programmes, because being white, British, and perceived as an expert gives me extra power. In this article I reflect on the often conflicting power dynamics.

Highlighting a disability perspective

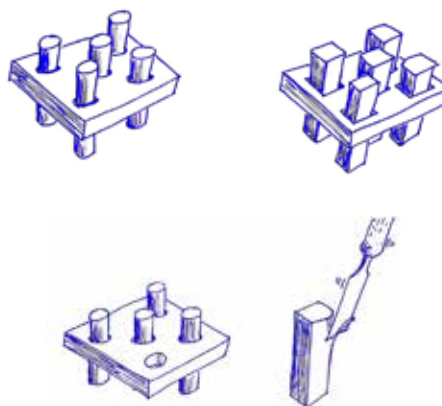
I have 'invisible disability' – my impairments can be hidden, although it hurts my health to do so. To build a career and voice I'm often required to appear non-disabled. In each situation, I ask myself if openly speaking as a disabled person would help or hinder. Will people stop listening? Will my criticisms upset people so much that they won't invite me back? I try to speak in a way that reflects a listener's assumptions without erasing the reality of disabled people.

I do this because I believe a disabled perspective is essential for education projects funded through aid. Disabled people know the harm caused by education systems that promote dominant norms instead of supporting the diversity of learners. We have been damaged by the inflexible corners of those systems and experienced the waste of resources this causes.

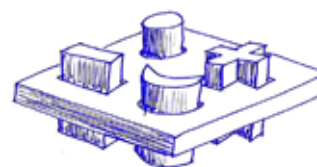
How schools harm learners

I wanted to become a scientist like my father, but when I came to revise for exams, I didn't know most of the textbook content. I realised

too late that the problem was not my lack of ability but the seating in class. Science was taught in a laboratory-style classroom with tall stools at test benches. It was built in the 1940s when female anatomy was not important in science and the design did not consider children with musculoskeletal illness.



Learners expected to fit the education system.



Inclusive education adapts to fit the needs of the learner.

I spent most of my science lessons trying not to fall off the stool. If I had fallen, I would have been disciplined for not paying attention. So, I paid attention – to sitting upright. I remembered how this hurt, especially when menstruating, but I didn't remember much of the curriculum.

Daily experience of such wasted learning time taught me how schools can harm learners and undermine learning outcomes, even when teachers are well-trained. My needs were often invisible because educators were not required to think about which factors could harm each child's learning. Many nondisabled children in my school also did badly because of this.

What does this mean for policy and practice?

Such waste of potential and money makes it easy to see why United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 requires quality education to be inclusive and equitable, if countries are to build a full human resource base for their economies. The only way forward is for education systems to see and welcome the diversity of all learners, even when resources are limited. The Radical Inclusion Policy recently adopted by the government in Sierra Leone is a strong example of how to do this.¹

Consequently, education aid programmes need to prioritise the lived reality of all learners – especially those who are marginalised. They need to seek insights from people who have been, and still are, invisible in education. Making such priorities fit with budgets, the political context, and all the other pressures should be at the centre of education projects. So what is stopping this focus on ‘lived reality’ from happening in education programmes?

Colonial legacies hinder education

Having been routinely harmed by my own education system, I started to question when aspects of that system were uncritically exported through aid. For example, aid programmes still expect foreign experts to produce training materials in English rather than investing in translation or supporting local experts to develop materials in the languages used by teachers.

It’s no surprise that programmes prioritising training and teaching in local languages have good outcomes. For example, the Girls’ Education 3 Project in Nigeria recently exceeded literacy and numeracy targets.² But it does surprise me that implementers and donors ever support English-dominant projects when their learning outcomes have often been disappointing. (See Save the Children report for details.)³ Why do such programmes continue to be designed and funded?

Who is heard?

Maybe part of the problem is that to be heard in aid, and to have a say in design and funding, you need to reflect the donor’s perspective –

and that favours being white, speaking English as a first language, and being economically middle-class. What if you are all those things, but don’t have experience of disability or other exclusion? How easy will it be for you to recognise, let alone resist, colonial dynamics in your own work or the programmes you’re involved with? Will you be able to challenge the exclusive nature of an education system if a very similar system was good for you?

If you do bring a disability perspective to the table, what education experience do you bring with it? Often, education programmes for disabled learners are designed by decision-makers who are not educators, while educators often design programmes that ignore disability and inclusion.

What is my role?

The well-known mantra of the disability rights movement – ‘Nothing about us without us’ – doesn’t mean ‘Be kind and let us take part’. It means, ‘You need us because we know what you’re doing won’t work, and we know why!’.

So, what should be the role of a white, British, disabled consultant within international education development programmes? We don’t need to speak about our disability in every situation. We mustn’t assume our experience of disability is universal. But we should provide frameworks to bring in the voices of disabled people in each context we work in. We can use our power to include voices who should be heard, and be ready to step back and provide support.

[1] <https://bit.ly/eer24-8>

[2] The final project review is here: <https://bit.ly/eer24-9>

[3] <https://bit.ly/eer24-10>

Helen has been an EENET consultant for ten years. Prior to this she worked on education with Save the Children. She can be contacted via the EENET office.

Gaza: Education under occupation and war

Dr Mohammed Alruzzi

This article draws on an episode of EENET's podcast, Inclusive Education: Unheard Stories in which we interviewed Mohammed. He reflects on his own education in Gaza and how Israel's illegal occupation, oppressive colonial policies, blockade of the territory, and now relentless bombardment have affected the education system.

My education

I was born in Gaza as a refugee in a camp. I went to an UNWRA school. This was an important part of my learning journey. I grew up during a critical time in Palestinian history, during the first uprising or Intifada. Palestinian children were key political participants in that period. I recall Israeli soldiers coming to search the schools. They tried to arrest children and prevent them from protesting for freedom. It was common to close schools for extended periods during the Intifada.

After completing high school, I tried to study occupational therapy at a West Bank university because there were no occupational therapists in Gaza in 2003. I wasn't allowed to travel 15 miles from Gaza to the West Bank. Israeli authorities refused many students' movement between the two Palestinian territories. State-restricted mobility later impacted my opportunities to do research too.

State oppression of the education system

The current oppression in Gaza is not new; it has been integral to our lives for decades. The systematic destruction of education infrastructure and targeting of schools by Israel is also not new, but the latest intensity is unprecedented.

My PhD focused on education and labour in Palestine with special focus on Gaza, looking at three different generations: those growing up during the first Intifada (1987-1993), during

the period of peacebuilding (1993-2000), and during the second Intifada (2000-2005). I analysed changes in perception of work and education over these periods and explored how Israeli policies make education more difficult for Palestinians.

Many policies impacted mobility or sought to prevent schools and universities from working. We know that when the school year is interrupted there is a risk of many children not returning. It is therefore no coincidence that schools were kept closed for months during the first Intifada.

To counter that, Palestinians organised learning spaces in their homes to help neighbouring children continue their education, but these spaces were also banned. Israeli policies and conditional international funding have consistently dictated curriculum content, as a further level of control over our education and opportunities. During the first Intifada, the Israeli military administration controlled how teachers were selected.

Education has been central for Palestinians throughout all these periods as something we can carry with us wherever we go – remembering that many in Gaza have been refugees for most of their lives and for multiple generations.

Investment in education increased in the peacebuilding era. Palestinian learners and their families began to feel more optimistic about realising the right to self-determination and having their own state, which would need skilled citizens.

This was a noticeable change when compared, for instance, with the period after the 1967 war and Israeli occupation. Israeli policy had been to deskill Palestinians to meet Israel's labour market needs during that period and there

were no universities in occupied Palestinian territories. Higher education overseas was the only option, but free movement for education purposes was limited for Palestinians.

Each political milestone in the history of Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories is characterised by different forms of control, surveillance, and censorship affecting education.

Education and international law

Given the genocide happening in Gaza, it feels like a luxury to think about education and reopening schools when we can't achieve the basic right to survival. Yet we want to maintain education. We want schools to be safe and inclusive places that provide children with a sense of regularity and routine and spaces to play and learn.

In previous wars in Gaza, schools were targeted, and Israeli authorities were not held accountable for these violations. Now, despite schools and UN facilities infrastructure being used as shelters for the displaced, they are regularly bombed. The results are devastating, and still there is no accountability.

What can be done to protect education and learners in a context where an occupying power seems able to violate international law with impunity? Much more should be done by the international community and civil society to question Israeli actions that violate international law and that ignore UN and Security Council resolutions.

Palestine and Israel are signatories to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Both submit periodic reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in Geneva. Israel avoids discussing occupied Palestinian territories and violations of education rights there. The Committee has a role to remind Israeli authorities that, as the occupying power under international law, they are responsible for protecting Palestinian children and providing for their education. Israel denies this responsibility but prevents Palestinian authorities from exercising the sovereignty needed to design, resource and

manage their own education system. Education for Palestinians is left in limbo.

Rebuilding education

The current dismantling of education in Gaza has reached new levels. Educational institutions are vital for rebuilding after war, so the current scale of destruction suggests Israel does not want Gazans to return to any sort of normality. It is now difficult for people to organise community education initiatives like they might have done before or use the virtual learning methods developed during COVID-19 or in other wars such as Ukraine. Gaza faces ongoing telecommunications blackouts and while there are youth groups in the refugee camps, working under these conditions is challenging.

Educational and community spaces offer a starting point for rebuilding. We need international organisations to speak out as loudly as possible about the importance of education and the need to protect Gaza's schools.

In 2020/2021 I was involved in research that looked at what we mean by protection in a context like Gaza, where we cannot really protect our children. What do we mean by protection if children cannot go to school safely? What do we mean by protection if their future is not protected? Protecting the future is something rarely discussed when talking about child protection, but it is vital for ensuring that children have hope and aspirations.

Palestinians live as refugees, in both Gaza and the West Bank, and across neighbouring countries. As we contemplate rebuilding Gaza's education system, I hope for a future where education for Palestinian learners brings dispersed communities together – if not physically, then at least through shared educational cultures and curricula.

Dr. Mohammed Alruzzi co-founded Gaza Children's Cinema and is now a Lecturer in Childhood Studies at the University of Bristol, UK.

Supporting equal international relationships

Su Lyn Corcoran

In this article, Su reflects on working within a system that ultimately does not trust the partner organisations with which she collaborates on educational research and practice-based projects.

Spending overseas development aid

Given the cost-of-living crisis and rising levels of homelessness in the UK, the government has faced criticism in the mass media for its commitment to overseas development aid (ODA). However, the media has rarely mentioned the fact that much of the money intended for ODA never even leaves the UK.

Through my work with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and academic research, I have noticed that restrictions on how ODA is spent privilege the donor country. Restrictions also make equal partnerships between individual collaborators hard to maintain.

Here's an example: motorbikes requested for project outreach workers, so they could reach remote rural destinations, had to be purchased from UK suppliers. When the bikes needed repair, the parts were not available locally, and it was so expensive to order them that the bikes became unusable. Such restrictions and conditions requiring purchases from the donor country are not unusual.

There are often restrictions on who can apply for ODA funds. Organisations registered in the UK may be the only ones eligible, so community-based organisations in countries receiving ODA must partner with international NGOs and academic institutions or have UK-based head offices. Ultimately, this means a percentage of the ODA money stays in the UK to pay UK staff wages.

Funding for research

When funding is directed towards research in countries receiving ODA, researchers in

UK universities usually lead the projects in partnership with universities and organisations in other countries. The overseas university can occasionally lead the project, but the UK-based university must have a key role. Some funders dictate minimum time allocations for the lead UK researchers, ensuring that a significant amount of money stays in the UK.

Universities calculate a standardised amount for a researcher's time, to cover both wages and 'estate charges', so the wage costs for a UK research team far exceed the money allocated to overseas research partners. After covering the UK costs, there may be limited funding left to pay for collaborators' time in the country of focus.

Administration costs

When budgeting, the UK research funding system applies algorithms to calculate the overhead costs universities should add to their daily rates. Conversely, non-governmental and community-based organisations – perceived as charities in receipt of charitable giving – must continually justify why they should be allowed to use funding to pay core costs. They are often criticised or prevented from adding these costs to funding bids or limited to overheads of just 7% of the total budget.

Therefore, many small organisations feel obliged to show that they operate with little or no charitable donations being used for core costs, so as not to alienate the public. While their position is understandable, it can undermine organisations campaigning to convince funders that admin and management work is time-consuming and essential for effective projects and must be paid for.

Here's a simple example: you can't have a project without a contract between the funder and recipient, but someone in the recipient organisation has to read, check, comment

on and sign that contract. If the funder won't pay for the time taken to do this, how is the organisation supposed to find another donor willing to pay for that time? And, more importantly, why do the lighting bills in a university matter more than the wage bills in a charity?

Challenges to equal partnerships

Timelines

The typically short timeframe for ODA applications is a significant problem. Institutions push academics to pursue as many funding bids as possible, leading to many project plans being quickly thrown together to meet tight bidding deadlines. This hinders collaborative partnerships.

For example, during an initial meeting with colleagues at an African university we asked what they thought the project should look like. They were surprised because, in their experience, the UK partner would usually develop the idea and budget in advance and then invite collaboration, rather than working as a team to develop the submission.

Such approaches are inevitable, given the short lead-in times for many funding calls. But if the project is not developed in collaboration with our partners, how can we be sure it is appropriate to the context and that members of the project team are equally invested in the project and feel valued?

Digital divide

Once a project has begun, other challenges to equal partnership emerge. First come the inevitable problems with technology and connectivity. Partners need to stay in touch regularly, but available bandwidth is often insufficient for online platforms like Microsoft Teams. In some areas, connectivity and meetings are affected by rain and (un)scheduled power cuts.

The climate crisis requires us to reduce the amount of international travel by UK project partners, and collaborators need the autonomy to deliver projects without us being regularly on site. Therefore, we must connect digitally, and funders expect good communication between

partners. Yet they also often restrict capital costs such as new laptops, smartphones, and the infrastructure for good WiFi connections.

Due diligence

When ODA designated research funding is awarded to a UK university, they must then check the trustworthiness of their partners overseas. I worked with a partner organisation a few years ago that had a UK bank account, and we paid them through that. I am now working with them again and their UK bank account no longer exists, so they are no longer deemed automatically trustworthy. The partner must complete a 12-page form detailing their financial and official particulars.

Why should holding a UK bank account mean they were more trustworthy in the past? Their work has not changed and their staff have not changed. My relationship with them has lasted ten years yet they must now complete a comprehensive due diligence check that was not needed before.

Time for change

In this article I've provided a snapshot of the issues that have arisen in the projects and partnerships I've worked on. Other researchers will recount other challenges. When there are systems in place that create an administrative hierarchy, the horizontal ways of working that we try to develop with our partners are affected.

If funders and research institutions genuinely want to enable equal partnerships and support the capacity of researchers and practitioners in countries of the global south, then policies and procedures need reform, and we, as researchers and practitioners, should be able to demand change and not just accept 'this is how it has to be done'.

Su Corcoran is a research associate at Manchester Metropolitan University and Research advisor for EENET. She can be contacted via the EENET office.

Decolonising the curriculum in Nigeria

Nnenna C. Amaonyeaso

Nnenna is a teacher in a primary school that chooses to use curricula and teaching materials from other countries. In this article, Nnenna explores the impact of using these resources on her students' understanding of themselves and their culture.

A question from a student

A student asked me during a third-grade class, "Why do we have to learn about pounds when we live in Nigeria and use the naira?" Their question caught me off guard and made me pause mid-sentence. For a moment, I was lost for words, unsure how to respond.

"Why foreign?" The question echoed in my mind all day and in the coming days. I was just as curious as the student. Why do we teach students in the lower primary about British pounds using foreign textbooks and currencies? Surely, it would be more beneficial to teach them about the currency they use daily, and gradually introduce other currencies as they mature and gain a deeper understanding of how money works.

Reflections on Nigeria's educational system

Historically, the power dynamics that underpin our educational system have been a huge challenge. Inequalities based on gender, socioeconomic background, geographical location, teaching methods, and materials have always affected access to quality education in Nigeria. These factors can be traced back to the colonial era, and in the last couple of years there have been calls to decolonise Nigeria's educational system.

Decolonisation is a process that involves confronting and deconstructing the deeply rooted power structures that sustain colonial ideologies and marginalise indigenous knowledge systems. Several times in my teaching career, I encountered situations

that made me realise the significant impact of knowledge, power, and ownership on our nation's educational structure. Decolonising the curriculum involves more than just incorporating indigenous knowledge systems, languages, and cultural practices into the learning process. It is a transformative process that questions existing notions of knowledge and prioritises perspectives in our educational institutions.

Students challenged literature

In another third-grade class, I taught literature using 'The Adventures of Tom Sawyer', an American text by Mark Twain. I realised that students found it difficult to connect with the story's background. The context, terminology, 19th-century setting, and culture felt foreign to them. They asked why some of the vocabulary in the book was unfamiliar, and why we were still obligated to use foreign books even after independence. One student answered by highlighting the superiority of the West. They described its richer knowledge as the reason for the continued use of foreign books. This struck another chord.

Balancing local voices with global citizenship

Although I would normally advocate for the use of world literature in our schools to help students develop an understanding of what it means to be a global citizen, the context of this book felt foreign to my still very young students. To address this gap, I immediately drew parallels between Tom Sawyer's adventures and experiences familiar to my students.

We explored themes of friendship, freedom, and resilience as depicted in the novel in ways that resonated with their own lives and experiences. I helped them to relate Tom Sawyer's story to their own lives, which had a significant impact on their understanding of the literature.

Reflecting on this incident, I was impressed that the students could recognise and critically engage with diverse perspectives and challenge dominant narratives in their learning. However, once again I felt that the schools overlooked the Nigerian child as an identity and the need for instruction to have cultural relevance.

The students were becoming increasingly aware of being positioned as other and unimportant in the curriculum. I began to ask myself why Nigerian students in the early and lower primary years learn about subjects that are not part of their national, cultural, and social contexts. And why do some schools believe Nigerian books and resources are not rich enough for use in their classrooms?

Time to decolonise the curriculum

I have come to realise that the Eurocentric pedagogical approaches used in Nigerian schools, which centre on cultures and ideologies from the West, foster narrow perspectives and impact students' cultural growth, academic involvement, and overall educational achievements. They also foster a narrow perspective, leaving some of these students feeling confused.

Bringing elements of foreign cultures into formal education can enrich students' learning experiences and foster global knowledge. However, it is crucial to approach this integration thoughtfully to avoid undermining indigenous beliefs or practices and damaging students' identity and self-worth.

Teaching and learning approaches should acknowledge and validate students' cultural backgrounds, foster inclusivity, respect cultural diversity, and promote a sense of pride and belonging. When children do not see themselves in the textbooks and literature they study in school, they feel othered and inferior.

The legacy of colonial power dynamics has shaped educational content and delivery in Nigerian schools. Educational institutions that use foreign curricula and resources unintentionally promote inequality and colonial cultural hegemonies. Thus, schools must

reconsider their use of foreign-designed curricula and resources and adopt more culturally sensitive methods that promote indigenous knowledge and experiences while empowering students to develop a sense of belonging and identity.

Failure to incorporate students' cultures and identities into their learning can lead to feelings of disconnection, confusion, and inadequacy. This feeling of inadequacy can exacerbate issues such as the current average Nigerian's perception of limited opportunities for personal and professional growth in Nigeria, leading many students to pursue education in foreign countries. This contributes to the brain drain as skilled workers choose to work abroad instead of contributing to the nation's progress.

Addressing diversity in education is crucial for fostering tolerance and cultural sensitivity, as well as the strategic necessity to retain a sense of pride and adequacy for the Nigerian child, as a future Nigerian.

A call to action

There is, therefore, an urgent need for decolonisation in Nigeria to promote cultural inclusivity, empower diverse perspectives, and foster equitable learning environments. Decolonisation reaches far beyond making changes to textbooks or syllabi. It involves a profound transformation of education that places a high priority on the identity and value of the Nigerian child.

This is a plea for educators, schools, and policymakers to join forces. We must foster learning settings that acknowledge and celebrate global knowledge while aggressively promoting a local sense of belonging, pride, and empowerment among all students.

Nnenna is a primary school teacher in Nigeria. She can be contacted via the EENET office.

Reflections on perceptions and privilege

It has taken me years to get to where I am today regarding my thinking around aid and development. In this article, I explore the factors that have influenced my perceptions and reflect on my efforts to change them, as well as the sometimes confusing perceptions people have of me.

The narratives we grow up with

Like many young people in the UK in the 1980s and 1990s, I was fed a narrative of stereotyped media representations of other countries. Movements like LiveAid and BandAid used music events and sales to raise money. They portrayed aid recipients as people who needed to be rescued from climate crises, poverty, failed political experiments, and, most often, themselves. In reality, the people affected by these crises needed saving from those of us in countries that believed in their own power and maintained colonial processes of power internationally.

As a student, I dreamed of living, working, and travelling overseas. I fell in love with the idea of exploring new (to me) geographies, foods, and cultures. I had easy access to books about people living in poverty, international adoptions, loving children's homes, and tales of people heading overseas to build organisations that rescue the lost. Much of this we now call volunteerism, development tourism, or white saviourism.

Tales of the deserving orphan, the street child who made good, or the lost-then-found child appear consistently over generations. Western readers see a romanticised idea of rescue, whether they read the Waterbabies and David Copperfield, written in the 1800s, Anne of Green Gables from the early 1900s, or modern books like Harry Potter.

Perhaps not surprisingly, as a teenager I imagined myself as the heroine in my own

'giving back' adventure. This became more complicated once I understood the reality of being overseas.

The impact of working in other countries

As an early career teacher from a working-class background, I lacked the funds to travel widely, but the world always needs teachers, so I took up short-term teaching posts in different countries.

At home in the UK, I often struggled to feel like I fit in socially. I was overwhelmed by situations my friends enjoyed and struggled to build relationships. I didn't feel 'normal'. (I now know I have a learning disability.) Being in other countries was refreshing because I was already different. I was watched just for being different. I did not necessarily live up to the stereotype of an 'expat', but the general expectation that I would be different was liberating. I had to think less about being the me trying to fit in at home, and just be me in a new place.

Working overseas, rather than just travelling, provided opportunities to be part of a community and better understand life in a new country. It showed me the importance of understanding political, cultural, and social determinants of inequality and education sector development. I wanted to understand the inequalities I saw and question the simplified approach to community service undertaken by the students and communities associated with the international schools I worked in. There was little consideration of the structural and social changes required for long-term positive change, and many small projects provided great photo opportunities but little impact.

Is my critical self-reflection enough?

My experiences of working in other countries, and later on non-governmental organisation education projects, shaped and influenced my career and my perceptions. They helped me

recognise the opportunities I have enjoyed because of where I was born. I understand the freedoms associated with my passport, and the access it has given me to education and training. I am painfully aware of my privileges as an overseas teacher when I was paid much more for doing the same job as my colleagues from the country where the school was based.

Sometimes, though, I feel confused about how to influence other people's perceptions of me. For example, in a recent project, colleagues from two African countries were due to work on an assignment in a third African country. When one consultant could not go, I stepped in to replace them. My role was explained as an assistant, dealing with paperwork, resource preparation, and reporting, but I found everyone deferred to me. Project colleagues took scissors out of my hands to stop me doing the 'menial' tasks. My African colleague was the lead consultant and much more experienced than me. Yet my nationality or skin colour seemed to prevent others from seeing him as the more senior team member. Why? And what could I have done differently?

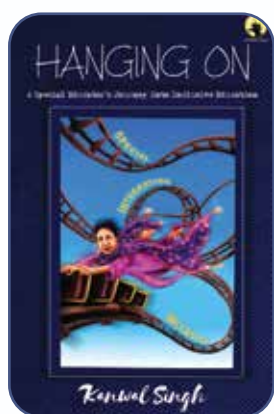
Although I am a teacher and researcher with experience in schools and higher education, I recognise that I am not an expert. My position enables me to learn from colleagues from diverse community and international contexts. I get to see connections between contexts, but my colleagues who work in these contexts are more 'expert' than I am. I therefore often call myself a facilitator rather than an expert.

While my comparative understanding can help me look at contexts through a different lens, I cannot truly understand, for example, what it means to be homeless, black, male, from a minority language community in a particular part of a country. I can study the policy contexts, bring my experience of trauma-informed approaches to research and practice to a project, and share my understanding of treating teachers as learners and students as teachers. I know what it means to feel like I don't belong. But these experiences do not equip me to tell people in another country how to develop their resources and programmes. Rather, my role is to give up control and facilitate reflection so I can help colleagues co-design new ways forward.

Frustratingly, there remain too many situations in which 'being the white person in the room' is still seen as more important than investing the time and resources that enable us to listen to local voices and act on what they say. Language is a big part of this problem as well as dynamics of power – both colonial legacies that continue to determine the hierarchies in transnational relationships. We need to find ways forward that privilege the voices of colleagues working with and within the communities we support from overseas.

Editor's note: The author of this piece wishes to remain anonymous. However, their story is not unique.

Hanging On. A Special Educator's Journey into Inclusive Education by Kanwal Singh



This short book is fun, easy to read, and packed with helpful illustrations. It offers a reflective, self-critical, and clearly explained review of the changes needed to move from special to inclusive education – from the perspective of an educator who has been on this journey.

You can order copies from Amazon India for 299INR (approx. \$4USD) plus postage. Visit: <https://tiny.one/ye5exwz7>

If you are not able to buy online, contact EENET and we can help you get a copy.

Deadlines vs wellbeing

Regular readers will notice this edition of Enabling Education Review (EER) is arriving about six months later than usual. In this article, we share some reasons for the delay and reflect on why we prioritise wellbeing over publication deadlines.

Multiple challenges

EER is primarily edited and designed by three team members. When they face challenges, the production process is inevitably delayed. Challenges faced by EENET's wider team and the authors also impact the editorial team's progress. Some of these challenges faced in recent months include:

- COVID-19 illness and other serious illness;
- the pernicious impact of long-COVID;
- supporting sick relatives;
- caring for elderly relatives;
- bereavements;
- the impact of having family members living under siege during the genocidal war in Gaza.

Our team is not unique. Every team in every development/humanitarian organisation and education institution regularly faces diverse personal and health challenges.

Pulled in opposite directions

Wellbeing coaches abound these days, especially online. They constantly tell us to 'set boundaries' to ensure we look after ourselves first. We are advised to see work as something that enables us to live the lives we want, not as our sole purpose for living.

Unfortunately, many of us work in sectors where external crises and more powerful actors pull us in the opposite direction! Donors, senior managers, boards of directors, clients and other decision-makers often have ambitious and inflexible expectations and choose deadlines that block our attempts to 'set

boundaries' and look after ourselves. There is mounting pressure to do more, faster, and with less money across the education and NGO sectors – fundamentally at odds with worker wellbeing.

Embracing diversity

EENET's team is diverse. We have volunteers and consultants of different ages and genders in different countries, with and without disabilities. We are a supportive place for neurodiverse team members. Like an inclusive classroom, EENET adapts to ensure that each team member is supported to do their work in the most effective and comfortable way.

Wellbeing and inclusivity are our priority

If our team members are struggling with personal or health challenges, or need support with disability and neurodiversity requirements, we believe we should prioritise that even if it means we need to rethink some deadlines.

Why wouldn't we? The alternative would be to push people to work until they drop, or ignore their inclusion needs and contradict everything we stand for. Luckily, publishing EER is a project we have full control over – we can determine what we do and when we do it. So, when our team faces challenges, we simply adjust the EER publishing timeline and reduce the pressure.

Of course, we're not always in full control of timelines when working with clients and donors. It's our hope that other organisations increasingly recognise the well-being impact that deadlines and other pressures in the sector have on workers. It is important to do more to welcome and promote flexibility for the sake of well-being.

About EENET

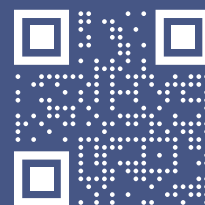
The Enabling Education Network (EENET) is a global information-sharing network. Established in 1997, we encourage and support critical thinking and innovation on issues of inclusion, equity and rights in all levels and types of education.

We help education stakeholders to document and share their experiences of making education more inclusive. Our website contains over 800 articles, reports, posters, guidance documents and videos. Each year we publish at least one edition of Enabling Education Review – often on a specific topic, like this edition which focuses on knowledge, power and ownership. We also still prioritise the free dissemination of printed materials to stakeholders who are not able to access information electronically via the internet.

EENET's work is funded through small grants and donations. We also carry out consultancy work for other organisations, to help fund our information-sharing activities.

Please find out
more on
our website:

www.eenet.org.uk



Home Learning Materials

www.eenet.org.uk/inclusive-home-learning

EENET and NAD have developed easy-read and visual home learning guidance for families:

- An A2 home learning poster, available in twelve languages.
- An activity booklet, featuring a collection of easy-to-use, low or no-cost home learning activities for learners of varied ages and abilities.
- A booklet of home learning activities adapted to the needs of very young learners.



Browse the project pages on the website to choose from a selection of fun learning activities that children with and without disabilities and their families can do at home, at any time.

Useful publications

Research

Racism, power and truth. Experiences of people of colour in development (BOND, 2021)

Organisations need to understand how racism manifests in their cultures, policies and work to take the first steps to becoming actively anti-racist. BOND's report explores the experiences of people of colour working for UK international development organisations, both those based in the UK and overseas.

<https://bit.ly/eer24-11>

Resources

Anti-racism and decolonising. A framework for organisations (BOND, 2023)

This framework maps out how racism cuts across all areas of our organisations and shows the necessity of an anti-racist and holistic approach to decolonising our organisations to create a fairer, more equitable and racially just sector.

<https://bit.ly/eer24-12>

Rejuvenate

'Rejuvenate' is a project that recognises the value that children and young people can bring when they are given the space and support to do so. It hosts a 'living archive' of projects, resources, organisations and people. This offers resources for projects and practitioners working at the intersection between child/youth-led work and social change work.

<https://rejuvenate.global/>

Inclusive Language Guide (Oxfam, 2023)

Language has the power to reinforce or deconstruct systems of power that maintain poverty, inequality and suffering. This guide supports people who have to communicate in English to think about how the way they write can subvert or inadvertently reinforce intersecting forms of inequality.

<https://bit.ly/eer24-16>

Books to buy

Learning Disobedience: Decolonizing Development Studies (Murrey, A and Daley, P, 2023)

The authors show how educators, activists and students are cultivating anti-racist decolonial practices, leading with a radical call to eradicate development studies, and counterbalancing this with new projects to decolonize development. Paperback and Kindle e-book versions available.

White Saviorism in International Development: Theories, Practices and Lived Experiences (Khan, T, Dickson, K, Sondarjee, M, 2023)

This collection from practitioners and academics unveils the implicit and explicit forms of White Saviorism in international development. It contains theoretical chapters, testimonies, stories and lived experiences from 19 contributors. Paperback and e-pub versions available (\$7.99 USD).

<https://bit.ly/eer24-13>

Podcasts

Inclusive Education: Unheard Stories

EENET's podcast series features education and development stakeholders living and working in contexts where learners and their communities experience exclusion, marginalisation and oppression. Podcast guests highlight the challenges learners face with accessing and participating in an inclusive, quality education. They discuss teachers and teaching, policy, attitudes, resources and funding, and much more. Episodes are available on SoundCloud (audio) and YouTube (video).

<https://bit.ly/eer24-14>

Videos

Children can do a lot (Rejuvenate)

This short animated video seeks to get people thinking about preconceived ideas of what children can and cannot do.

<https://bit.ly/eer24-15>