



Vidyottama Sanatana
International Journal of Hindu Science and Religious Studies

Vol. 1 No. 1 May 2017

Character Education Across Cultures: How Uganda Develops Students Desired Characters In Inclusive Perspective

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Received: October 11, 2016	Accepted: April 18, 2017	Published: May 31, 2017
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Abstract

The second goal of the UN Millennium Development calls for universal primary education by 2015. Is this goal too ambitious? How much have/are the educational systems doing around the world to achieve this goal? Is the political will there? Is education really inclusive? These questions and many more are much of moral questions. Inclusive education that is concerned with all learners, with a focus on those who have traditionally been excluded from educational opportunities such as learners with special needs and disabilities, children from ethnic and linguistic minorities could be one of the many ways of achieving the second UN Millennium Development goal, hence showing how different cultures responds to the different needs of learners. This paper engages a debate on whether the education system is actually inclusive or not and entails norms of the land. The paper focuses mainly on the inclusion of children and/or people with disabilities; the challenges children and/or people with disabilities face; and lastly the role that distance education could play towards achieving inclusive education.

Keywords: *Character Education, Character in an Inclusive Setting, and Uganda*

I. Introduction

Since As per estimates available, over 650 million people are said to be living with permanent and substantial function limitations caused by physical, cognitive and sensory impairments which limit most of them from

participating in most mainstream activities. The majority of these people are said to be found or coming from developing countries like Uganda and of course Indonesia. It's projected by the World Bank that this number is likely to increase because of two reasons, that is:

increased ageing people and violent conflicts both of which are potential avenues in creating more and more disabilities.

The Dakar Framework for Action adopted a World Declaration on Education for All (EFA) in 2000, which established the goal to provide every girl and boy with primary school education by 2015. It also clearly identified Inclusive Education (IE) as a key strategy for the development of EFA. The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action endorsed by 92 governments and 25 international organizations at the World Conference on Special Needs Education, June 1994 in Salamanca, Spain proclaims that every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities, and learning needs and that “those with special education needs must have access to regular schools which should accommodate them with a child-centered pedagogy capable of meeting those needs.” The Salamanca Statement also asserts that educational systems that take into account the wide diversity of children’s characteristics and needs “are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system.

Based on this brief introduction, in this presentation we shall basically look at the case of Uganda (how it has managed to build desired students’ character through the management of inclusive education. However, in the first place we need to know about Uganda with its history on inclusive education, is it one of the provinces of Indonesia? Or is it one of the countries of Southeast Asia or where should we look for it on the World Map?

II. Results and Discussion

2.1 Historical Values and Character Education for Persons Living with Disabilities in Uganda

Uganda is a landlocked country in the Eastern part of Africa bordered with countries like: Tanzania (TZ) to the South, Rwanda to the Southwest, Sudan to the North, Kenya to the East and Democratic Republic of Congo to the West with a population estimate of 32 million people. People living with disabilities in Uganda just like other countries in the world experience extreme conditions of poverty, low education or have limited opportunities for accessing education, poor health services, and lack of suitable housing and employment opportunities. All this is due to the fact that in most cases persons living with disabilities are not aware of their rights and potentials.

In regard to this, education for the PLWDs began as far as the early 1952. Initially it was referred to as Special Needs Education and this was mainly provided in special schools and units. It was started as a result of the efforts of Sir Andrew Cohen (the then colonial Governor of Uganda) who had a visually impaired relative. Through his efforts the Royal Commonwealth Society for the blind (RCSB), now called Sight Savers International, set aside a fund to promote education and welfare services for persons with visual impairment in the country. This led to establishment of organizations for PLWDs, and special schools and units.

The reasons for the beginning of education for persons living with disabilities in Uganda include:

1. provide educational facilities for children and adults with disabilities based on the learning needs;
2. facilitate the development of persons with

- disabilities mentally, socially, emotionally and physically to the highest level possible;
3. provide educational programmes that will prevent the increase of disability and the development of secondary impairments;
 4. enhance the learning of children and youths with disabilities by using varied and relevant methods and materials, and adjusting the learning and home environment;
 5. enable persons with disabilities to develop their potentials to the fullest capacity possible;
 6. create awareness among families and communities on the needs and potentials of children adults with disabilities;
 7. facilitate exceptionally talented and gifted children and adults to develop their talents.

These reasons led to establishment of schools for persons living with disabilities and those with special needs. Among these schools were:

1. Madera school for the blind: this was set up as a result of the joint efforts of the then Teso District Education Committee, the Ministry Education and the Uganda Foundation for the blind.
2. Education for persons with hearing impairments was started in 1958, when the Uganda Society for the Deaf was set up. In the same year lip reading lessons at Aghan khan. Today there are two (2) special schools for the deaf, one secondary unit at Ngora and primary school units in different parts of the country.
3. Victoria Nile Primary School in Jinja was established by Asians for children with mental retardation, however, the services ended after the expulsion of Asians in August 1972 by the then Government of Field Marshall. H.E. H. Idd Amin Dada. This led to reestablishment in 1983 of an association known as Uganda Association for the Mentally Handicapped (UAMH).

Since its establishment, it has established many units in the different parts of the country. These Units are all government aided.

4. Uganda Spastic Society in Mengo. In 1968 parents of children with cerebral palsy formed this school. This school also began to enroll children with physical impairments.

With the establishment of the school for persons with physical impairments, this marked the beginning of Inclusive Education indirectly. More units were and are still being set up in regular schools in different parts of the country in joint efforts with the ministry of education and sports, and individuals who are committed to the empowerment of persons with disabilities.

2.2 Character Development in an Inclusive Setting: A Ugandan Situation

In order to develop education for learners with learning difficulties, including learners living with disabilities, an agreement between the Governments of Uganda and Denmark was signed in 1991 and expired 2002, covering two separate, but mutually related programmes. However, the Ugandan government has and is still working hard to improve students' access to education, teacher support, school facilities, and the education curriculum. In 1997 the Ugandan government introduced free Universal Primary Education (UPE). This increased school enrolment to six million students in 1999. However, the demand for more teachers and better schools has grown as school enrolment increases, putting a great strain on the education system. There is also a continuing challenge with enabling girls to attend school.

Uganda is committed to integrating children with disabilities into the mainstream, however the challenges of the education system provides even greater hurdles for children with special needs.

2.3 Institutionalising Character Education Values for the Disabled: Uganda National Institute of Special Education:

To make sure that every thing moves on well. The Uganda National Institute of Special Needs Education was established in 1994. The purpose of this institute is to train teachers and other professionals in the area of special needs education at Diploma, Degree and Postgraduate levels through in-service and distance education programmes, research, innovation and dissemination of skills focusing on diversity. The activities at the institution were and are still considered integrated part of the Ministry of Education and Sports under technical and administrative leadership of a Commissioner.

At district level, education of learners with special educational needs has become the responsibility of the District Education Officer. Three special trained teachers were appointed as Assistant Inspectors of Schools to plan and administer the services related to special needs education in the districts, and upgrade teachers, communities, local leaders, and parents on matters concerning learners' individual needs and inclusive education. To ensure that all learners with special needs are given relevant as well as quality education in inclusive schools, all schools in Uganda are grouped in clusters of 15-20 schools. Each of the clusters has a Special Needs Education Co-coordinator. A teacher in each school is assigned the responsibility of taking charge of learners with special educational needs.

Because of this, secondary education has grown between 15 and 20 percent in the last ten years; however the challenge now exists to enable all of the pupils educated at primary level to attend secondary school. In 2007 the government began a programme of Universal Secondary Education but it will be a long time before this is available to everyone as more new schools need to be built and at present the programme only covers the first year of

secondary schooling. The growth of post-secondary education has been slower as only several thousand students attend tertiary institutions. Makerere University is Uganda's leading institution for higher learning.

2.4 Present Day Character Challenges

As a result of Universal Primary Education, which was introduced in 1997, and a greater awareness regarding inclusive education:

1. a large number of learners were enrolled in primary and secondary schools including learners experiencing barriers to learning.
2. Today, the increased number of learners in schools required enlarged resources, which is difficult for the country to provide.
3. The number of special trained teachers to serve as special/resource teachers is not sufficient to cover the actual need. Teachers trained in special needs education will require time to find the best ways of how to support teachers who must support learners with special needs.
4. Appropriate time for both teachers and learners must be allocated for necessary support, keeping in mind that the special teachers are often also assigned other duties in addition to education of learners with special educational needs.
5. Many children who are physically, emotionally or sexually abused do not only suffer emotionally or have physical damage. Such abuse may force them to miss school, and eventually "drop out" of the system. These learners need extra care and support from teachers.
6. Many teachers are still not able sufficiently to assist learners in an inclusive school due to limited in-service training and supervision on how to develop a child-friendly class that can accommodate the diversity among learners.

However, to develop students' character through management of inclusive education (IE),

teachers are expected to follow the Ugandan constitution which states that:

1. The State shall promote free and compulsory basic education.
2. The State shall take appropriate measures to afford every citizen's equal opportunity to attain the highest educational standard possible.
3. Individuals, religious bodies and other non-governmental organisations shall be free to found and operate educational institutions if they comply with the general educational policy of the country and maintain national standards.

Based on the above therefore, it's believed that education is a basic human right and fundamental to breaking the cycle of poverty and ensuring sustainable human development. By providing ALL children with quality primary education, government aims to give individuals the opportunity and skills to lift themselves out of poverty.

To fulfill the constitution objectives on education for all and to create a favourable environment for the implementation of IE every stakeholder more so teachers are encouraged to:

1. Exchange information about the ways they ensure inclusive education at their schools & with their partner schools, they are encouraged e.g. to use this as one area of interest for a reciprocal visit
2. Get involved with the Global Campaign for Education to raise awareness among the learners and the wider school community and to take action to campaign for Education for All
3. Get one or two classes to do research into reasons why children worldwide and in Uganda miss out of school
4. Create a piece of drama, creative writing or art to explore further what you have found out

5. Hold assemblies or discussions where they can share their findings with the whole school
6. Organise a Walk to School week so that pupils can empathize with their counterparts in one's partner school

2.5 New trends in education

The Government is constantly adopting its educational structure and content to promote quality learning for all learners independent of special learning needs. The overall structure of education and related services for learners with learning difficulties, which was introduced in the early nineties, is still the backbone in the education of all learners.

Through the Ministry of Education, the government has introduced a number of changes to ensure that education of learners with special learning needs is an integrated part of the ministry's structure both at central and decentralized level. The district-based Teachers Development and Management System Centres, which did not exist when the structure for special needs education was developed in the early nineties, play an important role in implementing inclusive education. These centres have been established in all districts of Uganda. Most of the Centre Coordinating Tutors have received training in special needs education and inclusion. They are expected to provide supervisory support to teachers in schools in their areas, organize in-service training, develop educational materials, and upgrade Teacher Training Centers.

An inclusive education system must provide a flexible curriculum responsive to differences among learners. The Ministry of Education has acknowledged this and launched a department at National Curriculum Development Centre consisting of a panel of 18 specialists in education of learners with special learning needs. The panel adopts and

modifies the primary school curriculum to suit diverse learning needs and educational strategies.

The Ministry's effort to ensure equal opportunities for all learners has also been demonstrated by the introduction of a department at the National Examinations Board to cater for examination of learners with diverse needs.

As of recent, the Government has introduced free universal primary and secondary education. This means no tuition fees, although parents may have to pay fees for food, materials, etc. Free education is of great importance for learners with learning difficulties including learners with disabilities. Traditionally, these children have been the last children in the families to get school tuition and fees.

To provide education for learners with diverse educational needs the Government has strengthened the budget lines at central and district levels. To do so the Government collaborates with a number of development partners and non-governmental organizations. The key role of many special trained teachers will be to manage learning programmes within an inclusive school. Based on this, the Ministry of Education in 2001/2002 decided that Uganda National Institute of Special Education should merge with Kyambogo University with status of faculty.

Since then, teaching of learners with learning difficulties has been mainstreamed into the curriculum for Teacher Training Colleges to ensure that all graduating teachers have basic knowledge about teaching the diversity of children in an inclusive class. Further, in order to obtain higher standards in existing special schools, to ensure quality education for learners who require intensive levels of support and to promote the possible use of special schools as resource centers to support inclusive education the Ministry of Education has developed guidelines for requirements and minimum

standards indicators for these schools. The Government has considered that education for all in inclusive schools requires changes and the whole system has to be adjusted to accommodate all learners. This can be witnessed in the government efforts to:

1. Develop an inclusive education system which will provide for the needs of all learners with sustained resources, like: financial and committed human resources.
2. Recognize the present lack of resources given to the education sector in general and education of learners with special needs in particular. There is still a great lack of learning environment that is free from physical and psychological barriers. Further there is a lack of educational materials and sufficient number of teachers available with training in education of learners with barriers to learning, development and participation.
3. Carry out required assessment, individually adjusted teaching, training and equipment required. Where by it is intended to help learners with severe learning needs to be taught in a special manner.

III. Conclusion

It is crucial for the Ministry of Education to further develop a support system which can provide continuous and competent guidance to teachers, learners and parents in order to ensure that quality education takes place. The Ministry should also pursue the goal of great importance to many of its citizens when developing mechanisms to ensure that systems and the curricula are continuously transformed to address the needs of all learners in an inclusive way. In the inclusive school system all learners benefit equally. At the same time it is of vital importance for the continuous success of this system that the necessary resources are made available.

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