JORSEN
nasen Helping Everyone Achieve
Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs · Volume ●● · Number ●● · 2017 ●●–●●
doi: 10.1111/1471-3802.12375

STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES ON BARRIERS AND FACILITATORS OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN THE SOLOMON ISLANDS

Umesh Sharma[1], *Tim Loreman*[2] *and Janine Simi*[1]
[1]*Monash University, Australia;* [2]*Concordia University of Edmonton, Canada*

Key words: Inclusive education, Solomon Islands, disability, stakeholder perspectives, qualitative research.

This paper reports perceived barriers and facilitators of disability-inclusive education, and outcomes of an effective system of inclusive education in the Solomon Islands. Data were gathered from a variety of stakeholder group participants (n = 10) and individual key informants (n = 2), ranging from parents of children with disabilities to government representatives. The results revealed a unique perspective on disability-inclusive education in this context, and provided insight into possible directions towards a more inclusive system.

Introduction

The Solomon Islands gained independence from Britain in 1978 and comprise of 147 inhabited islands out of a total of 962, forming 10 provinces and stretching 1448 km to the southeast of Papua New Guinea (Viriala, 2011).

While all topics related to education specific to the Solomon Islands appear to be under-researched, this is especially true of disability-inclusive education, and inclusive education more broadly. In 2001 Norwich remarked that 'it is rare to read or hear about inclusion nowadays without someone commenting that we are unclear about what it means' (Norwich, 2001, p. 4). Little has changed in this regard in the intervening 15 years. Indeed, it is now possible to pick and choose a definition of inclusive education from a wide array of options, many of which, frankly, defy logic and if scrutinised get caught up in tautologies and ideological dead-ends. A simple way of viewing inclusive education, the viewpoint taken in this study and consistent with Allan (2003) and others, is that it involves the removal of barriers to participation in the sort of education that others are able to access. Taking this view, schools and individuals must critically examine how they might increase participation for the diverse range of students who live in their local communities (Hodkinson and Vickerman, 2009). Disability-inclusive education, then, is concerned with increasing the regular school participation of children with disabilities, in this case in the Solomon Islands.

Due to the dearth of research in this area conducted in the Solomon Islands it is necessary to go beyond national boundaries and explore research conducted in the Pacific Islands region to establish a conceptual foundation for this study. With reference to the Asia-Pacific region Thompson, Walji and Webber (2011, p.101) note the '. . .scarcity of robust information about large and pressing issues such as the barriers that prevent people with disability and their organisations from participating in development and the barriers preventing development activities from becoming disability inclusive'. Much of the research that does exist is indeed troubling for supporters of inclusive education. It has been established that 90% of children with disabilities in the Pacific Region do not attend school at all, meaning that millions of children are getting little to no formal education whatsoever (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, 2009). It is even worse in the Solomon Islands where only 2% of children with disabilities have access to any form of education, inclusive or otherwise (Lau, 2014; Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development, 2012). This figure alone justifies the recent focus on inclusive education in many Pacific Islands nations, and various UNESCO and bilateral national projects have been initiated. Viriala (2011, p.85) notes that in the Solomon Islands '. . .most people with disability still do not know their rights. Lack of knowledge of human rights results in people with disability being abused and lack of access to education remains a major problem for people with disability'. This sentiment is supported by Kasim (2011, p.80) who suggests that 'although disability rights and development approaches have been accepted widely in Asia and Pacific, the condition of people with disability in this region (Sharma, Loreman and Macanawai, 2016) has not improved very much'.

Competing cultural views and practices are shaping the implementation of inclusive education in the Pacific Region. McDonald and Tufue-Dolgoy (2013), with reference to Samoa, suggest that while Samoa has an inclusive

cultural context, it has ironically had difficulty implementing the Western conceptualisation of inclusive education. It is perhaps a disconnect between the traditional local culture and the adopted (imposed) European system of medicalisation and formal education that is at fault here. The traditional village lifestyle, still in existence throughout the Pacific Islands, may be at odds with traditional European educational structures and methods. In the past disability was not a recognisable term of distinction. Now, with the adoption of the medical model of disability, some families are made to feel shame. This has resulted in a confused approach to addressing disability. On one hand, shame and anger exist, often meaning that parents feel too ashamed to send their child with a disability to school, or do not see the value in it. On the other hand, many community practices outside of schools continue to remain very inclusive (McDonald and Tufue-Dolgoy, 2013). Miles, Lene and Merumeru (2014), also in Samoa, noted the importance of balancing the international rights-based perspective of inclusive education with the reality of the local cultural contexts in the region. Le Fanu (2012), with reference to Papua New Guinea, observed that new disability-inclusive school curriculum implemented in that country was developed from a Western educational perspective. Many educators were either unwilling or unable to implement it, being at odds as it was with local culture.

Lau (2014) conducted an exploratory study with respect to barriers to inclusive education in the Solomon Islands. She involved 10 local participants in three focus group discussion (FGD) sessions, identifying three major themes in her data: negative community attitudes; teacher and school unpreparedness, and; a lack of national commitment towards inclusion. Each of these barriers could conceivably stem from a superficial application of a foreign education paradigm, as might be deduced from the work of McDonald and Tufue-Dolgoy (2013) and Miles, Lene, and Merumeru (2014). Lau's research was included in a broader study (see Sharma, Forlin, Sprunt, et al., 2016). This detailed literature review informs this study, offering a broad framework of themes that emerged from the literature regarding inclusive education in the Pacific Region. This study, based on a prior study exploring international literature, involved a structured literature review producing 105 documents that were subsequently narrowed down to a total of 40 based on quality and relevance. The following themes emerged:

1. Policy
2. Staff professional development and teacher education
3. Curriculum
4. Culture
5. School and classroom practice
6. Collaboration and shared responsibility
7. Participation
8. Student achievement
9. Post-school options

While our prior study noted what was important in the literature, it did not focus solely on the Solomon Islands and neither did it involve a structured approach to ascertaining the views of people involve in education in the Solomon Islands today. The objectives of this study are to explore perceived barriers and facilitators of inclusive education, and outcomes of an effective system of inclusive education in that country.

Inclusive education in the Solomon Islands

The push to include students with disabilities in regular schools gained significant momentum in 1994 when Ministers of Education from 92 countries signed the Salamanca Statement in Spain (UNESCO, 1994). The countries of the Pacific region, including Solomon Islands, did not sign the statement. It does not mean that the countries of the Pacific did not endorse the idea of inclusive education. Most countries of the region work in partnership with the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) and the policies of most of the countries are guided by the policy framework either adopted or developed by the PIFS Loreman and Macanawai (2016). The secretariat has developed a number of regional frameworks to guide the educational policies. One amongst them, Pacific Education Development Framework (PEDF) relates to the education of all children including those with a disability. Most countries in the region, including Solomon Islands are also in the process of developing their national policies on inclusive education. Solomon Islands has recently developed a draft policy on inclusive education which is under consideration for endorsement by the National Parliament. It is hoped that when the Policy is implemented it will improve the educational status of a large number of children with disabilities who currently remain outside the education system. According to a MEHRD report released in 2012 only 2% of children with disabilities were attending any kind of school in the country. The reasons for poor educational status of children with disabilities are many and include parental fears, lack of resources within schools to provide appropriate education to children with a disability, inadequately prepared teachers and school leaders and lack of infrastructure in schools (MEHRD Report, 2013; UNICEF Report, 2012). In 2014, the Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development set up a National Resource Learning Centre in the capital city of Honiara to support teachers and schools with implementing inclusive education. The resource centre provides support in the form of training and materials to schools in implementing inclusive education (Sharma, Simi and Forlin, 2015).

Method

Given that research on inclusive education in the Solomon islands is sparse and adequate '... theory is not available to explain a process' (Creswell, 2007, p. 66) it was decided to situate this study within the paradigm of grounded theory research where the researcher uses responses from varied participants to create a general explanation of a process, action or interaction (Creswell, 2007). Methods included individual participant interviews

and FGD. FGD were considered appropriate for the study as they are believed to provide a 'deeper' understanding of social phenomena than would be obtained from purely quantitative or survey methods (Silverman, 2000). FGD are also appropriate where little is already known about the issue under investigation (e.g. inclusive education in Solomon Islands) or in situations where detailed insights are required from study participants on sensitive topics. Interview and FGD question guides were initially developed by members of the research team, and then revised and re-written in collaboration with participants from the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat and Pacific Disability Forum. Interview guides and FGD guides were then trialed and discussed with members representing these groups at a workshop held in Nadi, Fiji, in August 2013, and were subsequently revised again. This final stage of revisions occurred to ensure the processes were accessible to associate investigators and potential participants with disabilities.

Data were collected by two associate investigators, recruited by the Pacific Disability Forum. One investigator was a member of a disabled persons non-government organisation, and the other person had an education-sector background. The associate investigators received training in qualitative research methods during a workshop in Fiji in August 2013, along with subsequent coaching via Skype or in person on methods and recruitment of participants. The associate investigators were supported by the lead researcher.

Data collection

Key informant interviews. Key informant interviews were held with two representatives from the Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development in the Solomon Islands directly responsible for the education of children with disabilities. The interview guide included questions on: views on inclusive education; the national policy on inclusive education and its implementation; factors that would make inclusive education successful in that country; areas that one would expect to see changes at various levels: central government, district/provincial level, community level, school level, classroom level, family/household level, individual level; factors outside of the education system that affect whether a child accesses education; signs that would indicate the provision of quality education for children with disability; and challenges for implementing inclusive education.

Focus group discussions. Focus group discussions were employed as a means of producing data via group interaction and dialogue around education of children with disabilities. Participants included representation from parents (n = 2) of children with disabilities nominated by disabled peoples organisations, primary teachers (n = 2), secondary teachers (n = 2), service providers (n = 2) and representatives of disabled persons organisations (n = 2). Each of the participants had either lived or had other significant experiences with people with disabilities. FGDs were held with each category of participant, with teachers being combined into a group of four, representatives of disabled persons organisations and service providers being combined into a group of four, and the parents forming a group of two. It was considered important to interview different groups of stakeholders as each group brought about a slightly different perspective about the same phenomenon. Their diverse views allowed to develop a holistic framework of inclusive education from those who receive educational services to those who are responsible for providing inclusive education. To ensure all participants were clear about the concepts being discussed, the associate investigators provided the following explanation: Inclusive education is the process of enabling all people to access education, including people with disabilities.

The first half of the group discussion consisted of questions initiated by the associate investigators, covering areas including: views on current education opportunities for children with disability; views on inclusive education; factors that would enable successful inclusive education; markers of successful education of children with disability and factors outside of the education system that are required to enable successful education of children with disability. The second part of the session involved participants individually recording responses to a scenario and set of questions. Hand-outs were provided with blank space for participants to write their responses. Where required, participants were able to verbally provide their responses and these were noted by the associate investigator. The scenario was described as follows: Imagine you are planning on making education in your area inclusive of children with disabilities. You want this plan to succeed. This statement was followed by four questions on the handout (with slight variations to reflect the different participants in each FGD group). Examples of questions are as follows:

1. What factors will contribute to the success?
2. How will we know it is successful?
3. How would you know if your child with disabilities was successfully included in school and in your community? (Question for parents only)
4. Thinking about a child's access to services that your organisation provides – as it relates to enabling children with disabilities to access education – what would be useful to monitor and measure? (Question for service providers and teachers only).

Participants were given approximately 20 minutes to complete their individual responses on the forms. The participants were then invited to share with the group the most important ideas that came to mind during their individual work. These points were then discussed by the group.

Analysis. Responses from individual interviews, questionnaires and FGDs were analysed using HyperRESEARCH qualitative data analysis software. In grounded theory research analysis typically involves a process of counting and coding, where the researcher interprets participant responses and groups them into thematic units (Miles and Huberman, 1994). In this study themes were retained if the data they contained could be triangulated. Triangulation, as noted by Lincoln and Guba, (1985, p. 305) is a '. . .mode of improving the probability that findings and interpretations will be found credible'. Denzin (1978) argued that there are four different 'modes' from which triangulation may arise. These include the use of multiple and different sources, investigators, methods and theories. In the case of this study triangulation came not only from the involvement of multiple and varied stakeholder participant groups, but also from multiple investigators using multiple investigative tools such as interviews, questionnaires and focus groups. To ensure a measure of reliability with respect to the coding process exploratory coding was first conducted by one researcher, then confirmed by a second researcher who coded the data independently. The third researcher assisted in adjudicating and discussing the small differences that occurred between the independent coding of the other two researchers.

Table 1: References in the data to each theme found in the data

Themes and sub-themes	No. of references in the data
Barriers to inclusive education	
Fear of discrimination	7
Personal traits of children with disabilities	12
Geography	5
Lack of government support	13
Facilitators of inclusive education	
Awareness programs	23
Collaboration between stakeholders	13
Infrastructure and resource provision	46
Teacher education	23
Family support	16
Fostering positive attitudes	22
Differentiating instruction	8
Outcomes of an inclusive system	
Inclusive life post-school	12
Quality education for all	17
More children with disabilities in school	16

Results and discussion

A total of 14 themes were identified, however, as these themes were diverse in content they were grouped into four major themes, with the 14 themes being designated as sub-themes and being distributed as appropriate. Table 1 shows how the identified themes and sub-themes were grouped. It also shows the number of references made in the data to each of the sub-themes. This provides a basic overview of the attention each sub-theme received from participants, although it does not necessarily address the value and/or importance of the individual remarks made. While it is not our intent to use numbers to prove the value of the themes, it is notable that issues of infrastructure, resourcing and training received significant attention, along with fostering positive attitudes and the possibly related notion of providing awareness programmes.

Barriers to inclusive education

Four barriers to inclusive education were identified in the data. These included fear of discrimination; personal traits of children with disabilities; geography, and; lack of government support.

Fear of discrimination. Of interest is that teachers and parents did not identify fear of discrimination as being a barrier to inclusive education in the FGDs, but rather this theme came out of the Key Informant interviews and from Disabled People Orgnisation (DPO) representatives and service providers. It was noted that '. . .parents themselves must be convinced to send their children with disabilities to schools, otherwise the opposite may happen because they lack confidence in schools and teachers and therefore do not want to send their child with disability to school' [Key Informant]. The problem, it seems, extends beyond issues with schools because '. . .negative attitudes and behaviour of the community also does not allow children with disabilities to attend schools, thus leading to discrimination against these children within the community environment' [Key Informant]. Parents were seen as being partly to blame for this, albeit because they love their children, with the DPO FGD saying that 'parents' tendency to overprotect and love their children leaves them vulnerable and lacks social skills to interact with others'. A significant amount of research suggests that most parents of children with disabilities, experience difficulties coming to terms with their child's abilities (Loreman, McGhie-Richmond, Barber, et al., 2009; Oelfusen and Richardson, 2006; Smith, Oliver and Innocenti, 2001; Trute, Hiebert-Murphy and Levine, 2007). Based on this literature Loreman, McGhie-Richmond, Barber, et al. (2009, p.25) noted that 'having a child with an exceptionality may impact parents' feelings of confidence in managing and comprehending, as well as finding meaning in their lives'. We have known for some time that children with disabilities who are included in their local school also spend more time in their local community (McDonnell, Hardman, Hightower, et al., 1991), and it would seem are better accepted. In this case improved community attitudes

might go hand in hand with improved access to local schools. Clearly such an improvement is needed.

Personal traits of children with disabilities. Another sub-theme relates to the characteristics of children with disabilities. A sympathetic view was taken by participants who noted that many of these characteristics resulted from the discrimination children with disabilities experienced. They noted that children with disabilities might not go to school because they had low self-esteem, or that 'one factor would be their vulnerability to be exploited, can restrict them from going to school. I mean, children with disabilities have their own fears, and because of these fears, they may not want to go to school'. A secondary teacher said that '..children with disabilities are ashamed of their disabilities that are not going to school'. The parent FGD went as far as delineating what sorts of conditions that could or even should make children candidates for exclusion. Although these views were expressed in a caring way, it is perhaps difficult not to conclude that there is some 'blaming of the victim' here. The discrimination they face in the first instance results in feelings of shame, a characteristic that keeps children away from school.

Geography. The unique geography of the Solomon Islands was also seen as a barrier to inclusive education. The DPOs discussions considered that 'the geographical location of schools is a challenge. Consider children with physical disabilities crossing rivers and from the hills coming down to the coast to attend school'. Rural areas, where children sometimes arrived at school by canoe, were seen as being the most difficult regions in which to facilitate school access. Another consideration was some of the smaller outlying islands, sparsely populated, and with little in terms of regular access to the sorts of basic services readily available in the capital city of Honiara. According to participants children without disabilities in these areas frequently did not attend school, let alone those who might require extra support. Inclusive education in rural and remote areas is a challenge worldwide. Hollitt (2012, p.13) conducted a literature review to better understand the topic and concluded that

> *Research across knowledge disciplines and related to IE in regional and remote areas is underdeveloped. This is the case internationally, as well as in specific national contexts, including Australia. The bulk of literature that is available is largely characterized by positivist, objectivist knowledge of IE. This knowledge recognizes legitimate IE practitioners as specialized, learning difference as occurring solely within learners with disabilities, and IE as the contemporary substitute name for special education and mainstreaming. Subsequently, the available literature implies that regional and remote IE is bound to failure or inadequacy due to lack of measurable resources for SWD. At best, this literature skirts around 'that which is missing' from IE in marginalized, minority and regional and remote settings.*

If we accept Holitt's perspective, the problem can be envisaged as not necessarily one of getting children with disabilities in remote areas to schools that continue to exist more or less as they have in the past, but rather one of how education might be re-envisioned and changed so as to permit access to all.

Lack of government support. The final sub-theme with respect to barriers related to lack of government support for inclusive education. Most of the FGDs and Key Informants' comments on government support, typically saying that there was a lack or absence of policy, and also that in instances where such policy existed it was inadequately promoted and resourced. There are, in fact, regional policies in place in the Solomon Islands that support inclusive education. The Solomon Islands participates in the Pacific Education Development Framework that provides guidance with respect to the work of national ministries. It is intended to coordinate activities in the participating nations in a number of areas in education, including the education of children with disabilities (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, 2009). There was also a National Education Action Plan 2010–2012 in the Solomon Islands that had improving equal access to all levels of education for girls and boys as well as for students and people with special education needs as a goal (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, 2012). While policy is admittedly sparse in this area, it is perhaps not entirely a lack of policy that the Solomon Islands is suffering from, but rather that such policy that does exist is poorly communicated and suffers from a low-profile in the education community. Solomon Islands is currently developing a policy specifically oriented towards inclusive education. It would be necessary that efforts are made to ensure that the schools and educators as well as community at large are made aware of the new policy and its intent to support inclusive education in Solomon Islands.

Facilitators of inclusive education

Awareness programmes. The main distinguishing factor between a barrier to inclusive education and what might be viewed as the polar opposite, a facilitator of inclusive education, typically came down to the tone of participant statements. Statements in the barriers theme were typically framed negatively and were viewed as harmful, whereas facilitators were framed in a positive way even where it was acknowledged that much more work needed to be done in each of the sub-theme areas. For example, disability awareness programmes were viewed as being facilitators of inclusive education even though study participants frequently acknowledged that more extensive programs were required. Such programmes, however, must be carefully constructed if they are not to fail.

Disability simulation activities, once so popular in teacher education classrooms, may reinforce stereotypes and present participants with a view of people with disabilities as being deficient (Griffin, Peters and Smith, 2007). Disability awareness activities must go beyond tokenistic activities such as a day spent in a wheelchair. They must involve people with disabilities, and offer an opportunity for mutual exchanges and understandings. They must be authentic experiences (Lalvani and Broderick, 2013).

Collaboration between stakeholders. Collaboration between stakeholders is well documented as being an essential element in making inclusive education work (Deppeler, Loreman and Sharma, 2005; Liasidou and Antoniou, 2013). In the Solomon Islands stakeholders were seen as extending into local community institutions. According to one of the service providers (Key Informant interview):

> *Communities have to change their mindset on service provision. Currently most communities depend on service providers. But it shouldn't be like this. Communities and service providers must work together for betterment of community members. Churches must also be involved because church set morals for empowerment of children with disabilities. The practicalities of respect must be shown to children with disabilities. People with disabilities must be included in consultations and decision-making.*

The centrality of the Church in the lives of many Solomon Islanders makes the participation of this institution critical to the success of not only inclusive education, but improving conditions for people with disabilities in general. Furthermore, various government Ministries were seen as needing to work together. A key informant said that 'disability will [need to] draw support from various government ministries like the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Aid Coordination, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Provincial government, all working together to support it'. Collaboration is a culturally important idea in the Pacific Islands; is central to traditional life throughout the region (McDonald and Tufue-Dolgoy, 2013), and specifically also in the Solomon Islands. This natural way of interacting, then, is certainly one area in which Pacific Island nations approach inclusive education from a position of strength.

Infrastructure and resource provision. The various government Ministries were also seen as critical on the provision of adequate infrastructure and resourcing to support inclusive education. The Solomon Islands is not a wealthy nation and is the recipient of a large amount of foreign aid from Australia, of which approximately $24 million per year is spent on education (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia, 2015). Education infrastructure and resources, then, are not what they might be in more affluent countries. One key informant '. . .noted that current schools also lack infrastructures like ramps, proper toilets and other learning materials that will support children with disabilities in the education system. That means, mainstream/regular schools need to prepare themselves before we can start allowing access to schools for those with disabilities'. This view was echoed by all stakeholders. While access to schools and resources were seen as essential to the success of inclusive education, they were also seen as very much lacking. Table 1 above shows that this sub-theme had by far the highest number of references in the data, perhaps demonstrating the fundamental importance of this issue in the minds of participants.

Teacher education and fostering positive attitudes. Teacher education for inclusive education research forms a very large subset of overall research in the area of inclusive education. It is seen as being a vital determinant in the development of teachers who not only have the appropriate knowledge and skill set required, but also have positive attitudes towards classroom diversity (Loreman, Sharma and Forlin, 2013; Sharma, Simi, and Forlin, 2015). It was remarked that 'untrained teachers will find it difficult to assist children with disabilities. This is especially with teachers in training'. Some of the challenges that come with a lack of training, thus providing a good argument for the provision of good teacher education, were outlined. One of the Key Informants commented that:

> *The implementation part of the concept is the area that poses a real challenge. For example, teachers need training in sign language in order to teach a deaf child in the class. Furthermore, teachers' perception of the concept is also a challenge. Teachers felt that it may be time consuming for them, having to give their attention to both children with and without disabilities in the classroom.*

Some participants spoke of training as a means of improving teacher confidence and attitudes, noting that 'we would expect to see positive attitude within the individual towards those with disabilities. Also those individuals are expected to be more tolerant, accepting and caring to those with disabilities. There will be a change in their behaviour'.

Differentiating instruction. Better teacher education, if of a high quality, would also enable teachers to employ differentiated instructional techniques in classrooms. A key informant noted that 'I think teachers need training to enable them to become inclusive teachers. At the same time they can be able to adapt their classrooms and teaching curriculum and resources to cater for the learning needs of those with disabilities'. In some ways the task of improving teacher education for inclusion might be easier in the Solomon Islands than in other parts

of the world, mainly because of the lack of diversity and choice that exists in this area. The Solomon Islands boasts only a single teacher education institution, the Solomon Islands National University. This institution supports the idea of disability-inclusive education in both its teaching and emerging research agenda. Where positive changes are implemented in a single yet universal national institution, there can be greater assurance that all new teachers will be graduating with the skills, knowledge and attitudes required to be successful inclusive teachers. This of course is a long-term project, involving the influence of newly graduated teachers and in-service teacher education for those already in the field.

Family support. The topic of support for families received attention from participants. A key informant explained that parents often do not trust schools to adequately look after their children with disabilities. 'Parents lack confidence of schools and teachers to provide teaching, care and support for their children with disabilities in schools'. The parent FGD very much supported this perspective. Others saw this as a lack of commitment on the part of the parents, saying that 'I see as being a hindrance. . .is parent's commitment. Parents lack the commitment to bring their children with disabilities to schools'. This view, expressed many times in the data, is indeed problematic and points to the need for family support as opposed to blaming if inclusive education is to be facilitated in the Solomon Islands.

Outcomes of an inclusive system

More children with disabilities in school. The most immediate outcomes of an inclusive system were seen as being the presence of more children with disabilities being present in schools, a matter of basic access, and then building on that to provide quality education for all children. One sign of an inclusive education system would be that 'all children with disabilities have access to education at all levels of education system in the country both in urban and in the rural areas' and to have 'many children with disabilities attending school and awarded scholarships to go further to university and the end result employed' [DPO FGD]. This, then, would essentially reflect access to the opportunities that children without disabilities or other forms of disadvantage in the Solomon Islands are able to enjoy. One Key Informant began by talking about access, but finished with comments of the necessity of collecting data to measure progress, along with the provision of quality education.

> *We can only know that we are providing quality education for children with disabilities in the Solomon Islands, when we see that schools are now starting to open their doors to these children. Teachers are prepared to welcome them into their classrooms. Schools have provided adequate infrastructure like toilets, ramps and other teaching and learning resources. At the moment, my observation tells me that, we lack information on these things. There is limited information and data on children with disabilities participation in regular schools. Schools and teachers are still ill prepared for inclusive ed. On that note, we cannot provide quality education for children with disabilities yet in the country.*

Quality education for all. With respect to quality, parents said that two important measures would be that children with disabilities learn basic literacy and that they learn to get along with others from various ethnic groups socially. Not surprisingly, teachers had a lot to say about quality. They wanted to see motivated, happy and confident students, developing independence and pro-social skills. Meaningful participation and high academic achievement or significant improvement were viewed as outcomes of effective inclusive education.

Inclusive life post-school. The final outcome was participation in an inclusive life in the community following school completion. Consistent with the literature which tells us that those who are included can spend more time as contributing members of their local community after school (Ryndak, Alper, Hughes, et al., 2012; Ryndak, Ward, Alper, et al., 2010; and to some extent Wagner, Newman, Cameto, et al., 2006) participants described various activities which would be markers of the success of inclusion post-school. These included the opportunity for university-level study, vocational skills resulting in employment in local industries, and more holistic outcomes such as enhanced spirituality, social success and good health.

Limitations

As this topic has implications for the national system of education in the Solomon Islands it is important that future studies focus on gathering data from a wider pool of respondents. This would probably be best achieved through quantitative survey research involving a large national data sample, the basis for survey questions being the themes identified in this study.

Conclusion

This study revealed participant views on perceived barriers and facilitators of inclusive education, and the outcomes of an effective system of inclusive education in the Solomon Islands. The main barriers identified by the participants included the attitudinal, policy and geographical barriers. Addressing the barriers through a holistic policy framework may be a way to move forward in the country. The new policy on inclusive education in Solomon Islands should not only address how schools will be resourced to provide inclusive education, but it should clearly outline how attitudinal barriers will be addressed to make the system more inclusive of all learners. In the views of participants there is clearly

room for significant improvement with respect to inclusive education in the Solomon Islands, but given the scarcity of research much more needs to be done to make data-driven decisions with respect to system change. Of particular note were the high number of references to the provision of infrastructure and resources, most of which amounted to the provision of simple physical access to schools for children with disabilities. It seems that the western notion of schooling, and inclusive education, is highly problematic in the Solomon Islands context. This cultural disconnect, noted in other research in the region (Le Fanu, 2012; McDonald and Tufue-Dolgoy, 2013; Miles, Lene, and Merumeru, 2014) is potentially responsible for many of the difficulties faced and must be challenged directly. Perhaps a new way forward can be found. One participant made a comment that resonates. 'The concept of education – in our communities at the moment we try to understand the traditional concept of education and the western concept of education. Traditional education would be community supporting the family of a child with disability to be part of the community'. This study might provide a foundation for future work specific to the context of the Solomon Islands, providing as it does some areas of focus with respect to the issues.

Acknowledgements

This research has been funded by the Australian Government, through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's Australian Development Research Awards Scheme (ADRAS), under an award titled 'Developing and testing indicators for the education of children with disability in the Pacific'. The views expressed herein are those of the author(s) and not necessarily those of the Commonwealth of Australia. The Commonwealth of Australia accepts no responsibility for any loss, damage or injury resulting from reliance on any of the information or views contained in this publication. The assistance and advice of members of the ADRAS research team who provided documents and support is gratefully acknowledged. The 'Developing and testing indicators for the education of children with disability in the Pacific' research project has been undertaken in partnership by Monash University, The CBM – Nossal Institute Partnership for Disability Inclusive Development, Pacifc Disability Forum and Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat.

Address for correspondence
Umesh Sharma,
Monash University,
Clayton, VIC,
Australia.
Email: umesh.sharma@monash.edu.

References

Allan, J. (2003) 'Productive pedagogies and the challenge of inclusion.' *British Journal Of Special Education*, 30 (4), pp. 175–9. doi:10.1111/j.0952-3383.2003.00307.x.

Creswell, J. W. (2007) *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches* (2nd edn). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Denzin, N. K. (1978) *Sociological Methods*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia (2015) Overview of Australia's aid program to the Solomon Islands. <http://dfat.gov.au/geo/solomon-islands/development- assistance/Pages/development-assistance-in-solomon-islands.aspx> (accessed 19 March 2015).

Deppeler, J., Loreman, T. & Sharma, U. (2005) 'Improving inclusive practices in secondary schools: moving from specialist support to supporting learning communities.' *Australasian Journal Of Special Education*, 29 (2), pp. 117–27.

Griffin, P., Peters, M. L. & Smith, R. M. (2007) 'Ableism curriculum design.' In M. Adams, L. Bell & P. Griffin (eds), *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice*, pp. 335–58. Abbingdon, UK: Routledge.

Hodkinson, A. & Vickerman, P. (2009) *Key Issues in Special Educational Needs and Inclusion*. London, UK: Sage.

Hollitt, J. A. (2012) Practitioners, learning difference and regional and remote inclusive education settings: A focused analysis of the research and policy literature. Paper presented at the Australian Association For Research In Education Annual Conference, Sydney, Australia.

Kasim, E. (2011) 'Challenges, opportunities and the achievement of disability rights in Asia Pacific and Indonesia.' In P. Thomas (ed), *Implementing Disability Inclusive Development in the Pacific and Asia*, pp. 81–2. Canberra, Australia: The Development Studies Network.

Lalvani, P. & Broderick, A. A. (2013) 'Institutionalized ableism and the misguided "Disability Awareness Day": transformative pedagogies for teacher education.' *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 46 (4), pp. 468–83.

Lau, S. (2014) Barriers to inclusive education in the Solomon Islands as perceived by teachers and parents (Unpublished master's thesis). Melbourne, Australia: Monash University.

Le Fanu, G. (2012) 'The inclusion of inclusive education in international development: lessons from Papua New Guinea.' *International Journal of Educational Development*, 33, pp. 139–48.

Liasidou, A. & Antoniou, A. (2013) 'A special teacher for a special child? (Re)considering the role of the special education teacher within the context of an inclusive education reform agenda.' *European Journal Of Special Needs Education*, 28 (4), pp. 494–506.

Lincoln, Y. S. & Guba, E. G. (1985) *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Loreman, T., McGhie-Richmond, D., Barber, J. & Lupart, J. (2009) 'Parent perspectives on inclusive education in rural Alberta, Canada.' *Exceptionality Education International*, 19 (2), pp. 21–36.

Loreman, T., Sharma, U. & Forlin, C. (2013) 'Do pre-service teachers feel ready to teach in inclusive classrooms: a four country study of teaching efficacy.' *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 38 (1), pp. article 3. <http://ro.ecu.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1988&context=ajte>

McDonald, L. & Tufue-Dolgoy, R. (2013) 'Moving forwards, sideways or backwards? Inclusive education in Samoa.' *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, 60 (3), pp. 270–84.

McDonnell, J., Hardman, M., Hightower, J. & Kiefer-O'Donnell, R. (1991) 'Variables associated with in-school and after-school integration of secondary students with severe disabilities.' *Education & Training in Mental Retardation*, 26 (3), pp. 243–52.

Miles, M. B. & Huberman, A. M. (1994) *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook* (2nd edn). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Miles, S., Lene, D. & Merumeru, L. (2014) 'Making sense of inclusive education in the Pacific region: networking as a way forward.' *Childhood*, 21 (3), pp. 339–53.

Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development (2012) Performance Assessment Framework Report 2008-2010. <https://http://www.spc.int/prism/images/EducationDigests/SOLOMON> (aacessed 4th June 2015).

Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development (2013) National Education Action Plan (NEAP, 2013 – 2015). Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development (MEHRD). Honiara: Solomon Islands.

Norwich, B. (2001) 'Inclusion: evidence or value based policy and practice?' *The Psychology of Education Review*, 25 (1), pp. 3–7.

Oelfusen, N. & Richardson, P. (2006) 'Sense of coherence and parenting stress in mothers and fathers of preschool children with developmental disability.' *Journal of Intellectual & Developmental Disability*, 31 (1), pp. 1–12.

Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (2009) *The Pacific Education Development Framework*. Suva, Fiji: PIFS.

Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (2012) *Pacific Regional MDG's Tracking Report*. Fiji: PIFS.

Ryndak, D. L., Alper, S., Hughes, C. & McDonnell, J. (2012) 'Documenting impact of educational contexts on long-term outcomes for students with significant disabilities.' *Education And Training In Autism And Developmental Disabilities*, 47 (2), pp. 127–38.

Ryndak, D., Ward, T., Alper, S., Storch, J. F. & Montgomery, J. W. (2010) 'Long-term outcomes of services in inclusive and self-contained settings for siblings with comparable significant disabilities.' *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities*, 45 (1), pp. 38–53.

Sharma, U., Forlin, C., Sprunt, B. & Merumeru, L. (2016) 'Identifying disability-inclusive education indicators currently employed to monitor and evaluate education in the Pacific Island Countries.' *Cogent Education*, 3, pp. 1170754. doi:10.1080/2331186X.2016.1170754.

Sharma, U., Loreman, T. & Macanawai, S. (2016) 'Factors contributing to the implementation of inclusive education in Pacific Island countries.' *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 20 (4), pp. 397–412. doi:10.1080/13603116.2015.1081636.

Sharma, U., Simi, J. & Forlin, C. (2015) 'Preparedness of pre-service teachers for inclusive education in the Solomon Islands.' *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 40 (5), pp. 103–16.

Silverman, D. (2000) *Doing Qualitative Research*. London: Sage Publications.

Smith, T. B., Oliver, M. N. & Innocenti, M. S. (2001) 'Parenting stress in families of children with disabilities.' *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 71 (2), pp. 257–61.

Thompson, K., Walji, F. & Webber, J. (2011) 'Strengthening research on disability inclusive development in the Asia Pacific region: report of the Research Roundtable.' In P. Thomas (ed), *Implementing Disability Inclusive Development in the Pacific and Asia*, pp. 101–2. Canberra, Australia: The Development Studies Network.

Trute, B., Hiebert-Murphy, D. & Levine, K. (2007) 'Parental appraisal of the family impact of childhood developmental disability: times of sadness and times of joy.' *Journal of Intellectual & Develop-mental Disability*, 32 (1), pp. 1–9.

UNESCO (1994) *The Salamanca Declaration and Framework for Action*. Paris: UNESCO.

UNICEF Report (2012) Pacific children with disabilities. A report for UNICEF Pacific's 2010 mid – term review. UNICEF Pacific. <www.unicef.org/pacificislands/Children_with_disabilities_final_report.pdf> (accessed 4th June 2015).

Viriala, J. (2011) 'Progress for people with disabilities in the Solomon Islands.' In P. Thomas (ed), *Implementing Disability Inclusive Development in the Pacific and Asia*, pp. 85–6. Canberra, Australia: The Development Studies Network.

Wagner, M., Newman, L., Cameto, R., Levine, P. & Garza, N. (2006) *An Overview of Findings from the Wave 2 of the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2*. Menlo Park, CA: SRI International.