Berhan International Research Journal of Science and Humanities (BIRJSH), 2019, 3(1)

Journal homepage: www.dbu.edu.et *ISSN: 2414-2794*

Exclusion in The Name of Inclusion: The Trial and Error of Inclusive Education in Ethiopia

Asrat Adugna Jimma1*

[1] Debre-Berhan University, Debre Berhan, Ethiopia.

Abstract

This paper was aimed to analyze the trial and error of inclusive education in Ethiopia. It was planned to scrutinize whether the design and implementation of policy and law on inclusive education was supporting students with disabilities to attain 'effective education' in the 'general education system'.The broader assumption was that, the practice of inclusive educationin Ethiopia has been a *'Trojan horse'* to non-direct exclusion in the name of inclusion. In order to test the above hypothesis, the paper employed a method that was applicable exclusively in legal research which is the black-letter or doctrinal methodology in line with empirical approach. The particular concern of the empirical approach, in this regard, was to examine the legal and human rights implications of 'inclusion in education' on the lived experience of students with disabilities. The primary data were employed by interpreting the legal instruments and conducting an in-depth interview with the concerned stakeholders. The secondary data were obtained through a critical engagement with existing literature on the subject. A practical instance has been made, from personal observation, for the necessity of analyzing the subject of 'inclusive education' from a perspective that entails respect for the human rights of persons with disabilities. And, the following major findings were obtained. The lack of enforcing regulations and educational law, underprivileged infrastructure and access, and dearth of teachers' and parents' support were the major barriers to inclusive education. It concluded, therefore, in the Ethiopian experimental practice, design and implementation of policy and laws is currently in shoddier state to serve the purpose and advantages of inclusive education. Based on the findings obtained some recommendations were suggested such as the need for paraprofessional support, the institutionalization of Parent-Teacher Associations, establishment of resource centers and the need for a preparatory class before full inclusion.

Key words: human rights, inclusion in education, integrated education, persons with disabilities, right to education, special needs education.

* Corresponding author email: aajimma@dbu.edu.et or leasrataduga@gmail.com

Introduction

Education is the key for the full development of human potentialand sense of dignity and self-worth, strengthening of respect for human rights and human diversity (UDHR, 1948; ICESCR, 1966; CRC, 1989 and CRPD, 2006). What is more, as the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Committee on ESCR) affirms that education isa basic human right and a catalyst for the respect and enjoyment of other human rights (Committee on ESCR, 1999). As Plato puts it, and most scholars agree, it is only

through the help of education that an individual can fully achieve his/her personal development (Plato, 1955). It is, thus, an effective and efficient tool to human capability so as to enable individuals to develop their personality, talents and creativity, along with their mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential (Committee on CRC, 2001). For that basic reason countries of the world put their resources together to reassure that the right to education of all their citizens is guaranteed.

Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)recognizes the right of persons with disabilities to education. In order to implement and realize this right without discrimination but with basic equality, CRPD particularly, obliges states to ensure an *inclusive education* system at all levels (CRPD, 2006). As CRPD asserts in its General Comment No. 4 (2016), inclusion involves: a process of systemic reform embodying changes and modifications in content, teaching methods, approaches, structures and strategies in education to overcome barriers with a vision serving to provide all students of the relevant age range with an equitable and participatory learning experience and environment that best corresponds to their requirements and preferences (Committee on CRPD, 2016).

Given the importance of education, hence, the principle of inclusive education is the best mechanism to guarantee the right to education to all without discrimination, providing persons with disability (PWD) available, and accessible, acceptable and adaptable education.

Inclusive education is a philosophy whereby individuals with different abilities and needs learn together with the basic aim of leading life without the barriers of any*status quo* (Phasha, 2017). It can also be perceived as welcoming all students with and without disabilities, into the mainstream or general school to provide education for all and without discrimination (Tirussew, 2005; (Cologon, 2013). Thisnotion is now universally accepted; thuscountries are implementing an '*inclusive education policy*' so as to include every child in an inclusive learning environment where everyone enjoys the same opportunities and experiences (Sanjeev and Kumar, 1994). In other words, states are teaching students with different learning needs and capacities into the mainstream schools in the same way with other students. This practice is believed to have manifold advantages in bringing all children to school and ensure the right to education (UNESCO, 1994).

In the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE), inclusive education is also recognized as a fundamental approach to ensure the right to education. The right to education of PWD, in the country's education system, is recognized as a special need education. It is perceived as an education system that is open to all learners, regardless of any *status quo*such as gender, ethnic background, language, social status, disabilities and impairments (MoE, 2012).For that reason, the FDRE has introduced various policies and laws with the objective of ensuring an inclusive education system at all levels. As a standard rule, the Ethiopian school system now recognizes that students with disabilities (SWD) have the right to be enrolled at the local neighboring mainstream school (MoE, 2012). In the same vein, the country has also adopted various international conventions and acceded to various declarations and protocols to commit and ensure inclusive education implementation.

However, while the practice of inclusive education is proliferating throughout the country, the danger of 'exclusion in the name of inclusion' is being posed to SWD.As a result, though inclusive education system has been put into practice at all levels in some selected schools, the level of implementation is far from desired (Abebe, 2011; Mitiku et al., 2014; Tarekegn, 2014; Tefera et al. 2016; Franck, 2015; and Dagnew, 2013).

As mentioned above, though the FDRE has ratified various international instruments and adopted national laws and policies, the realization thereof requires scrupulous commitments. Moreover; a closer examination of the implementation of the laws and policies on inclusive education shows that there isstill profound challenges persist. As a result, if Ethiopia has to ensure the right to education of PWD, there is an urgent need to strengthen the structures and environment enabling inclusion in education.

The aim of this paper is to scrutinize the trial and error of inclusive education in Ethiopia. It is highly hoped that this study would benefit concerned stakeholders on the profound challenges persist in connection with the barriers to implement inclusive education and provide recommendations for the identified problems. It also helps the government in giving awareness and empirical information, for the general public regarding inclusive educationcreation.

The paper, first, revisited and discussed the notion of inclusive education in Ethiopia from a historical perspective. Then, it explores the applicable laws and policies that are currently in place to implement

inclusive education. Further, it instigates analyzing its several questions that may include: what is the level of the trial and error of inclusive education? What are the main barriers to implementation of inclusive education? How does the practice of inclusion in education affecting the right to education, and other human rights? What coping mechanisms do SWD apply to realize their right to education? What legal and practical measures should be done to implement inclusive education? Accordingly, it identified and discussed the main barriers to implement inclusive education. It tried to demonstrate how the lack of standard rules and regulations and policies, the poor infrastructure and the low level of awareness among the teachers, parents and the society is resulting in exclusion in the name of inclusion. Finally, it suggests an alternative solution that would improve Ethiopia's commitments and obligations under international law to provide education for all and without discrimination inthe implementation of inclusive education.

Ethiopia's Inclusive Education: A Historical Perspective

Ethiopia is a federal country with nine regional states and two self-administrative cities (the city of Dire Dawa was incorporated later by a proclamation) (FDRE, 1995; Proclamation No. 416, 2004). As per article 51 (3) of the FDRE constitution, it is the power of the federal government to establish and implement national standards and basic policy criteria for education. That is to say, the federal government has the obligation to make national educational laws and policies. Thus, in line with the power and obligation thereof, the federal government, has enacted several laws and policies in relation to inclusive education. Yet, the matter of the fact is that, the notion of inclusive education actually preceded the formal adoption of the concept through law and policy and hence was not an alien concept in Ethiopia at all (Pankhurst, 1990).

In Ethiopia, the practice of inclusion of PWD in schools began with the introduction of religious education (Tamrat, 1972). Ethiopia has a very long history of church and mosque education systems. Hence, inclusive education was started in the country long before the introduction of western concept of education where people with disabilities had a convincing role in taking part of scholastic voyage. In this regard, the accounts of the 16th century Portuguese traveler, Francisco Alvarez, is an evidence where he had observed the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the ranks of the Ethiopian priesthood (Alvarez cited in Temesgen, 2014)

What is more, there has been significant progress towards inclusion of children with disability in schools in medieval Ethiopia (Pankhurst, 1990). In religious institutions, there existed a tradition of inclusion of SWD where the institutions have played a very important role in attracting more and more persons with disabilities and producing highly qualified professionals (Gebrekidan, 2013). The presence of highly qualified visually and physically impaired teachers at mosques and churches who teach Holy Koran and Bible is an indication that inclusion was an ordinary practice (Pankhurst, 1990). However, it was mostly blind students who used to attend such schools. Individuals with other kinds of disabilities, for instance persons with hearing and intellectual disabilities were not part of the education system as a result of the oral method of teachings in those schools (Alemu, 1991).

Despite this background, the concern of inclusion of PWD, has not been given a due attention with the introduction of modern education. Rather, few efforts have been made to treat SWD in separate educational institutions by the missionary-supported special schools. On top of that, for the first timea separate modern boarding school for the blind was establishedin 1925, in western part of the country with the coming of Presbyterian missionaries of North America to Ethiopia (Alemu, 1991). Further, in 1950s a special school of the deaf was established by the American and other missionaries and then in the 1960s the establishment of *Sebeta* School for the blind followed. Later, specialized schools for the blind expanded and other similar schools opened in various parts of the country. For instance, *Shashemene* School for the blind in Oromia Regional State, *WolaitaSodo* in the Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples' Regional State (SNNPR) and *Gondar Kidane Mihret* in the Amhara Regional State are some to mention. By the same token, specialized schools for deaf students in SNNPR, *Hosanna, Shinshicho, Aleta Wondo*, and in Tigray Regional State were established (Yigzaw, 2016). Currently, there are special need education departments that train inclusive education experts at university level. However, the government's commitment towards the education of PWD was inadequate and its involvement in the area came in much later time.

In that regard, as discussed below, the major development was seen in 1994 where the government introduced the Education and Training Policy (ETP) for the first time in the country's modern history (MoE, 1994). It is this policy that obliged the need for special units and classes to be established for SWD in the mainstream

schools. In accordance to the policy, so many special classes and units within ordinary schools were established for the SWD.

The FDFRE government has also taken several other measures to accomplish what is stipulated in the ETP. As a stride towards successful inclusive education, the country has included inclusive education in Ethiopia's teacher training curriculum in special education needs degree programs (MoE, 2012). Thus, it can be discerned that these ideas are evident in Ethiopia's special needs education strategy, which calls for the deployment of special needs teachers to school clusters and links to be developed between special and mainstream schools.

The above mentioned and several other policies were put in place to enable SWD to attend mainstream schools while staying with their families. These policy programs, more importantly, allow the students to attend mainstream neighborhood schools with less financial hardships and address the stigma and attitude of the society.

So far, with the trial and error of implementing the inclusive education policy, there are pockets of successful inclusive education attempts with children having visual impairment and mental disabilities in Ethiopia in some governmental and non-governmental primary schools. In this regard, the best example is the German Church School, in Addis Ababa, which provides a model of full inclusion of vision-impaired students in mainstream classes (Tarekegn, 2014). This school is now considered as the best model school that enables blind students to engage in extracurricular activities. The school also gives some amounts of stipends through fostership so as to enable its students to stay in school while living with their parents. Moreover, in order to encourage and provide a professional support the school sends its special needs experts to the family of SWD (Franck, 2015). Similarly, MulugetaGedle School at Sebetaand AtseZere-yakob elementary school in Debre Berhantowns in Oromia and Amhara regional states respectively have come a long way in bringing together all the stakeholders for the success of inclusive education. JegnochMetasebiya Primary School in Harar Town, from Harari regional state, is also known for such successful results (Hankebo. 2018).

However, as it is considered below, many interviewees both at federal and regional levels of the country, acknowledged that there are more schools in the country to put into practice inclusive education system, although there is still a huge practical gap in providing access to all children and actualizing inclusive education. The

challenge is more intricate when it comes to persons with intellectual disabilities or multiple disabilities, persons who are deaf-blind, and persons with autism (Abebe, 2011; Solomon, 2013 and Tamiru, 2015). Therefore, the next part of the paper presents the assessment of the trial and errors of implementing inclusive education by examining the legal and policy framework, infrastructures and access in the country and the support mechanism by teachers and parents.

Applicable Inclusive Education Law and Policy

The right to education is both a fundamental right and an instrumental right by itself (Mazrui, 2002). As an instrumental right, it is the primary vehicle by which people with disability can economically and socially lift themselves out of poverty and obtain the means to participate fully in their communities. Moreover, the importance of education is not just practical as it enables one to wander freely and widely for it is one of the joys and rewards of human existence (Committee on ESCR, 1999). Thus, education is both a human right in itself and also an indispensable means of realizing other human rights.

In light of that, article 26 of the UDHR recognizes the right to education of all human beings, and demands that it shall be free and compulsory. It also stipulates that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights and that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in the declaration without any discrimination (UDHR, 1948). PWD, therefore, have the same rights as all others including the right to education. Following the UDHR, another binding treaty, the convention against discrimination, was introduced by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in order to make education available for all without discrimination and on the basis of equality of opportunity (UNESCO, 1966).As a result, under these instruments states are obliged to avoid all forms of discriminations in education on the bases of disability.Later, on the same year the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) set forth similar stipulations demanding state parties to ensure the right to education to all without discrimination (ICESCR, 1966). Likewise, the regional instrument, the African Charter on Human and Peoples Right (ACHPR), recognize the importance of education (ACHPR, 1981). In a more pertinent way, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) also make a declaration to states parties on the rights to education

urging states to make all efforts for the realization of the right (CRC, 1989 and ACRWC, 1990).

More importantly the CRPD, under article 24, explicitly guarantees the right to education of PWD and obliges state parties that the education of PWD has to be in a manner that guarantee inclusive education (CRPD, 2006). Besides enunciating what is already incorporated in other instruments, it particularly, obliges states to make accessible an inclusive quality and free primary education on equal basis with others in the community and also make available secondary education for PWD. In this regard, it urges states to take all appropriate measures in order to ensure that SWD who face stigma and discrimination shall have an opportunity to receive protection with their education on the bases of their unique ability and demand. Moreover, the CRPD obliges states to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against SWD in order to ensure to them equal rights with others in the field of education.

In recognition of this essence of the right to education, the Ethiopian government has put in place constitutions (i.e. both federal and regional), international human rights instruments, other various national laws, policies, programs and strategic action plans. Yet, in contrast to the above instruments, the constitution of FDRE does not comprehensively provide for the right to compulsory primary education. It rather provides that every child has the right '*neither to be required nor permitted to perform work which may be hazardous to his/her education*' (FDRE, 1995).

Having what has been said above, legally speaking, being the mother of all laws of the nation, the constitutionunder article 9 (4) has an inherent mechanism of incorporating international human rights instruments that are ratified by Ethiopia into the national legal framework and hence makes it part of the law of the land. In doing so, international human rights covenants ratified by Ethiopia, including ICESCR, CRC, ACRWC, and CRPD are now considered as part of the law of the land. Moreover, the constitution, under article 13 (2), provides that the fundamental rights and freedoms specified under chapter three shall be interpreted in a manner conforming to the principles of the Universal Declaration, International Covenants on Human Rights and international instruments that Ethiopia adopted (FDRE, 1995). In light of this, the Federal Supreme Court, Cassation Division has taken a giant exemplary step by ruling a milestone decision concerning the rights of the child (Federal Supreme Court, 2009). In essence, the decision all acknowledge and made

clear that in the adjudication of human rights cases the fundamental principles incorporated under international human rights instruments shall be duly considered. The important part of this decision is that it used as a precedent to all other similar cases that demand the reference of those international human rights instruments Ethiopia has adopted including the CRPD. In view of that, in Ethiopia the right to education of PWD is legally given as equal protection as in most countries of the world.

The FDRE government also adopted various policies to implement inclusive education and realize its commitments and obligations under international law. In that regard, the first significant policy is the ETP of 1994 which was introduced by the then Transitional Government of Ethiopia with the aim of eradicating problems related to education such as, limited access and inequitable distribution of schools, inefficiency and lack of quality education. Its other objective is to enable both the handicapped and the gifted to learn in accordance with their potential and needs (MoE, 1994).

The other important policy document is the Ministry of Education's Special Needs Education Program Strategy of 2006 (MoE, 2006). This strategy focused on the special needs education and it aimed to implement the aforementioned educational policy and Ethiopia's obligation under the international human rights regime. This strategy details what key actors like Regional and City Administration Educational Bureaus, *woreda* Educational Offices, Technicaland Vocational Education Training Centers, Teachers Education Institutions and Higher Educational Institutions need to do to implement inclusive education. Among others, these institutions are obliged to take measures to establish resource centers in each school and higher educational institution with the necessary materials (MoE, 2012). The extent to which the objectives are accomplished is doubtful for there is still a big gap between what was stated in the document and the actual practice. For that reason, following the adoption of the CRPD, this strategy document was revised by another strategy document (i.e. the 2012 special needs inclusive education strategy).

The government also introduced five Education Sector Development Programs (ESDPs) starting with the first (ESDP-I) in 1997 with a desire to improve the provision of quality of education. Of relevance are, at least, ESDP I and II were successful in improving access to education and in their efforts to increase the enrollment rate for primary education. Nevertheless, these two

programs received strong criticism for disregarding the need for a special attention to PWD. Consequently, taking a lesson from the previous programs the ESDPs V have recognized the right to education of PWD with special emphasis to inclusive education (MoE, 2015). Furthermore, the FDRE government adopted a Master Plan for Special Needs Education/Inclusive Education in Ethiopia 2016-2025 to guide provision of special needs education. This master plan aims to ensure access and quality education and also to give more visibility to inclusive and special needs education by strengthening the structures and environment enabling inclusion.

On the whole, the FDRE government has introduced various laws and policy documents so as to ensure the right to education of PWD. However, a lot remains to be done when it comes to tackling the practical difficulties in trying to implement inclusive education. In contrast to what the policies are stating the practice on ground have not been in line with the expectations and SWD have not been receiving an inclusive education compatible with their potentials and needs. The main reason, as discussed below, is lack of the main stakeholders' support, poor infrastructure and access, and technical implementation guiding and educational law that addresses the special needs of SWD.

Barriers to The Implementation of Inclusive Education in Ethiopia

The right to education can only be fully guaranteed and implemented if it is open to all learners, regardless of any learning difficulties and impairments. This includes identifying barriers that hinder the implementation of learning and removing them from schools and adjusting the learning environment to accommodate individuals with different abilities and needs (UNESCO, 1994). As the social model of disability indicates, disability is a social construct where the environment appears to be the major determinant of individual functioning (Oliver, 1990; Smart, 2005). Comparably, therefore, disability can be conceptualized in terms of activity limitations and participation restrictions in and around a given environment. In order to reverse this by curbing the challenges and ensure equity and fairness, the FDRE government has adopted constitutions (i.e. both federal and regional), international human rights instruments, various national laws, educational policies, programs and strategic action plans. However, although there are legal and policy frameworks, as discussed above, the implementation is disappointingly minimal.

The adoption of international instruments and policies by itself is not an end, unless

supported with an appropriate means of implementation. In the same way, there are innumerable challenges for the implementation of inclusive education in Ethiopia. The main barriers, this paper identified, include: dearth of commitment of the stakeholders, disability unfriendly teaching methods, inconvenient school environment, negative attitude about diversity and inadequate teaching aid resources etc. Yet, for convenience of analysis the major barriers can be categorized as follows: (i) problems relating to enforcing regulations and educational law (ii) problems relating to infrastructure and access and (iii) problems relating to teachers and parents support.

Lack of Enforcing Regulations and Educational Law

As the CRPD stipulated, under Article 4, the education of SWDrequire a well and detailed enforcing regulation and educational law (CRPD, 2006). The introduction of enforcing legislation, in this regard, is a key element to substantiate the right to inclusive education. Indeed, having SWD at schools does not necessarily mean that they are being educated. Rather, to make sure that the students receive appropriate education in the mainstream schools and implement the obligations that are imposed on the government, the need for having an enforcing regulations and educational law is crucial. With this in mind, in its General Comment No. 4, the Committee on CRPD, in reference to article 24 of the CRPD, emphasizes that the absence of detailed regulations in the mainstream schools appear to be one of the biggest challenges for the full implementation of inclusive education (Committee on CRPD, 2016).

Conventionally, it is evident that in developing nations, like Ethiopia, the practice of inclusive education is characterized by lack of adequate educational law and policy. A similar account reveals that, althoughthere has been a significant improvement in the perception of inclusive education over the past decade, the lack of regulation and educational law that obliges provision of education for SWDremained a huge challenge (MoE, 2015).

A study by the Addis Ababa City Administration Education Bureau and Handicap International, indicates that schools do not have such enforcing regulations and educational law (AACAEB and HI, 2012). Similarly, interview data from the SNNPR *KembataTembaro* zone and Benshangul/Gumuz National Regional Stateshows that in the schools that are currently providing inclusive education, there is no such specific regulation or

guideline that obliges sign language to be the medium of instruction for students with hearing impairment, or about the support in learning and school attendance and guidance counselling, or about teacher's qualifications or the minimum benefits that the SWD should receive.

It must also be stressed that, lacking such detail and clear regulations, have direct impact on the minimum or maximum particular financing, the assessment and grading policy, the minimum educational benefits and support SWD may claim as a right. From personal observation, for the worst, in most schools in Addis Ababa city and Debre Berhan town, there is no disability resource center where students may get some support of any kind as of right. For the students it makes it shoddier to demand additional support in the absence of such regulation or guideline in the schools. As a result, there is no uniformity in the implementation of inclusive education from one school to the other and it is unthinkable for the students to demand their rights in the absence ofenforcing regulations and educational law. In general, the issue of lack of regulation in schools both at the federal and regional levels remains a huge challenge. To counter this, as indicated above, the government needs to enact enforcing regulation which is designed to help students, teachers and parents in their effort to implement inclusive education.

In short, it must be noted that an education law with several initiatives to guarantee in the law a legally enforceable right to inclusive educationfor SWD is important to curb exclusionary practices in the name of inclusion. Thus, in order to implement the right, in a better way, all schools should prepare specific and detailed enforcing regulation. By doing so, the schools will be able to address the needs of the students and promote the practice of inclusion in education.

Underprivileged Infrastructure and Access: Multiple Victimization

The other major barrier against the effective implementation of inclusive education, in Ethiopia, is the poor infrastructure and access to schools. The Committee on CRPD makes it clear, under General Comment No. 4, that poor infrastructure and inaccessibility is one of the fundamental problem for the realization of the right to education of PWD (Committee on CRPD, 2016).The absence of accessible schools, skilled teachers, textbooks, and other education inputs both at federal and regional level plays its part in excluding more SWD out of the benefits of inclusive education. At large, transportation on the way to and from school and lower

educational budgets continue to hamper the implementation of inclusive education (ACPF, 2011; Hussey, 2016)

To enhance the proper enforcement and realization of inclusive education, the need to have accessible inclusive schools and classrooms is a pre-condition. Yet, the schools that are currently providing inclusive education, like most other schools in the country, are not designed to foster inclusionand the Universal Design for Learning approach.They are poorly staffed, the class rooms are overcrowded, under-resourced, the books are homogeneous for all having long passages, and generally reflect the multiple victimization that exists.

The CRPD obliges state parties to commit to the prompt introduction of Universal Design. Yet, for many schools were built for students without disabilities, SWD are required to fit the school system that is designed for students without disabilities. As a common error, for instance, there are no toilets with convenient standards for SWD in almost all schools. As a result, students are forced to use them while lying or putting their hand on a bathroom seat or on the floor in an undignified and unhealthy way. The toilets are also built very far from the class rooms as a result of which students are forced to find someone to take them that far. This has also a major impact on the proper implementation of inclusive education. In addition to the problems of facilities, the schools also have shortage of materials in co-curricular activities that in effect restricts students with physical disabilities from involving in their favorite co-curricular activities or it made them lose their interest to participate.

The following instances in Addis Ababa city and Debre Berhantown are provided to give a briefs glimpse into the mainstream school settings that SWD experience. Personal observation of some of the schools shows that most of the school facilities such as toilets, class rooms and library were not convenient for physically disabled students in the schools. Furthermore, these schools do not meet the minimum standards and like many of the buildings, the classrooms are not easily accessible for students with physical impairment.

In addition, the interview results with GezachewBirhanu from The Federation of Ethiopian National Association of PWD (FENAPW), revealed that, many SWD are forced to drop-out from school or suffer from the unfavorable environment. The government should, therefore, renovate most of the school facilities by dismantling the barriers and make the physical

environment more accessible for inclusive learning-friendly environment.

In addition to the poor infrastructure in many mainstream schools in most parts of the country, access itself is challenging, as students must travel on foot very long distance to the schools, some even without any assistance. Although in rural parts of the country access is expected to be worse, the reality in the capital and nearby cities indicate that schools are not physically accessible (Tefera et al., 2016). For instance, in the capital city, Addis Ababa, and in Debre Berhan town there are few schools that are implementing full inclusive education. Hence, very significant number of children with disabilities is out of reach of schools only because of the physical inaccessibility of and the non-availability of schools in sufficient number. Here, in both places and other similar areas the number of schools is insignificant compared with that of children with disability.

Therefore, one of the best strategies to increase the enrollment rate of SWD is building more inclusive schools close to the residences and create educational access. This would minimize the time for travel to and from schools, and significantly diminish the barriers allowing them to attend their neighborhood school. Otherwise, simply integrating SWD with students without disabilities only result in exclusion.

Dearth of Teachers' and Parents' Support: The Real Dilemma

The real dilemma that is hampering the implementation of inclusive education in Ethiopia is the lack of awareness among the general public in general and of the teachers' and parents' attitude in particular. In a country where disability is still perceived by many as a 'curse' from God, implementation of inclusive education is a challenging task (Miles, 1995). No doubt that the societal beliefs about people with disabilities have a strong impact on inclusion. In most parts of Ethiopia persons with disabilities are exposed to discrimination and stigma as a result of their disability status (Mitiku W*et al*, 2014). The main reason is the wrong belief on the parts of the society that disability is perceived as a person's immorality or curse (Franck, 2015). Even the institutions that supposed to defend the rights of PWD are seen being the violators and that shows how the misconception is deeply entrenched in the society, including the educated. The best instance in this regard is the decision made by Amhara Regional State Justice professional training and legal research institute that prohibited visually impaired people from being judges (Addisfortune, 2016).

The CRPD, stipulates that SWD are entitled to the support they require to facilitate their effective education and enable them to fulfil their potential on an equal basis with others. In ordinary circumstances, parents are the most trustworthy for the good upbringing and education of their children. Yet, when it comes to parents of children with disability, it is worrisome, where parents' support is very minimal with regard to education (Gebretensay, 2007). It is witnessed that many parents give less value for the education of their children with disabilities thinking that it has no hope for the success of the children. The attitudinal barrier mainly is attached to the negative perception of parents on inclusive education where they think that their children will be a burden to teachers and negatively impact other children's learning (Hankebo, 2018).

In addition, the same could be said on the support of teachers, which is as essential as the parents, shaping the attitude of the students towards inclusive education. With no doubt, the commitment and willingness of teachers towards inclusive education has direct impact on the success of their students (Lewis and Bagree, 2013). Conversely, the lack of knowledge in inclusive techniques, weak pedagogical skill and the absence of career structure to support the commitment to implement activities of teachers remained to be a barrier for the full implementation of inclusive education (MoE, 2015).

In the opinion of many interviewees both at the federal and regional levels of the educational institutions contacted in this study, revealed that, due to lack of knowledge in inclusive techniques, weak pedagogical skill about inclusive education, teachers are not able to assist or guide their children in their education and they could not take part in the proper implementation of inclusive education in the schools.

In the class room where deaf or blind students learn, the sitting arrangement is expected to be U-shaped in order to enable them effectively communicate. Otherwise, the classroom arrangement employed in these overcrowded rooms prevents them from interacting. As a result, the support of teachers in these situations is paramount. Yet, most teachers are not qualified in inclusive techniques where they don't know sign language and/or braille and even those who know, do not know how to teach mathematics, science and other subjects. And, this results in the exclusion of many of deaf/blind students from achieving good results in the national and regional exams. For instance, in one of the schools in Addis Ababa named Yekatit 12, that teaches SWD with others, out of the 13 deaf students that

took the eighth-grade regional exam in 2016, only two students were succeeded into the next grade (The Reporter, 2016).

In this regard, it is important to note that the CRPD obliges states to take all appropriate measures to employ administrative, teaching and non-teaching staff with the skills to work effectively in inclusive education environments and qualified in sign language and/or Braille, orientation and mobility skills (CRPD, 2006). Yet, in practice Ministry of Education allocates most teachers without taking in to consideration the existing school situation. As a result, there are so many students who have never learned brail or sign language or have never learned mathematics or science because the schools did not have teachers. Sadly, it is possible to find grade eight students who cannot do basic writing or reading using braille. Mostly, the students depend on their voice recorder where they record the lectures of teachers and study the recordings. In view ofAbebe Molla, former education department director at the Ethiopian National Association for the Blind, statement, this is an act of exclusion and a clear violation of their right to get proper education.

This worry is deeply felt by the Debre Berhan University Disability center director, YillikalHassabbie who pointed out that it is possible to find SWD at the university level whose academic performance is far below the expected standard. Having discussed some of the main barriers that are affecting the implementation of inclusive education, while conducting the interview, he argued that the limited knowledge about the benefit of inclusive education among the main stakeholders is hampering the full realization of the right. According to him this is the failure of the government as it didn't take appropriate measures to employ teachers, including teachers with disabilities, who are qualified in sign language and/or braille, and to train professionals and staff who work at all levels of education.

Another vital obstacle worth mentioning is, the level of awareness on inclusive education is still very low. The result obtained from semi-structured interview with various stakeholders and also from the document analysis showed that there is no formal discussion programs with students, teachers and parents regarding the benefit of inclusive education. This resulted the lack of knowledge among the stakeholders about inclusive education and hindered them from participating in their children's education. Generally, the schools should be able to arrange periodical awareness creating programs, as it is required by

article 8 of the CRPD, for teachers, students and also parents regarding the benefits of inclusive education and should evaluate its implementation and progress from time to time.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The FDRE is currently implementing inclusive education in some selected governmental and non-governmental schools so as to endure its commitments and obligations under international law to provide education for all and without discrimination. No doubt that inclusive education has multi-fold benefits, such as promoting participatory learning experience and creating inclusive learning environment. The government is discharging its obligation of recognizing the right to education of persons with disabilities by acknowledging it in its national laws, educational policies, programs and strategic action plans. Yet, an inquiry and examination into the implementation of the inclusive education in Ethiopia reveals that the practice is at the shudder stage and achieving inclusive education, as enshrined under its treaty obligations, has remained elusive. There exists a huge gap between the legal and policy framework and the reality on the ground in providing access to all children and actualizing inclusive education. As discussed above, there is a practice of integration of SWD to fit the world of the non-disabled children rather than inclusiveness. And they are required to attend mainstream schools without reasonable accommodations and support. This paper reveals that the trial and error of inclusive education, in Ethiopia, poses various challenges to ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms of persons with disabilities. Thus, the trial is indeed an act of exclusion in the name of inclusive education.

To do away with the practice of exclusion in the name of inclusion, there is a need to accommodate SWD by adapting the schools to their needs instead of expecting the students to adapt themselves to the underprivileged school infrastructure. The result obtained from the personal observation, interview and document analysis indicates that the schools that are providing special and inclusive education in the country, there are practical problems with regard to infrastructure, educational law, and teachers and parents support. Therefore, in addition to introducing a better educational law and policy that well address the above identified problems and improving the infrastructure of the schools and raising the awareness of the general public, the following recommendations are made so as to bridge the gaps by correcting

the errors and fully implement the inclusive education.

The Need for Paraprofessional Support

If the policy of inclusive education has to be implemented fully, the role of paraprofessionals, who works with the teachers and students to determine the necessity of support based on a given activity, must be reconsidered. The support they could provide can be so immense in creating an inclusive learning-friendly environment.

By and large, to improve the commitment and willingness of the teachers in the mainstream classes and implement the principles and practice of inclusion, they need to be assisted by the paraprofessionals. It is remarkable that, in class rooms where there is an average of 50 - 60 students, the type and circumstance of all the special services SWD need appears to be unmanageable without the assistance of paraprofessionals. As an initial step, there must be at least one inclusive education specialist for each ten SWD to provide a professional support in the school compound. The nature of assistance and support the paraprofessionals provide may vary depending on the specific circumstances but it may include team-teaching or shared teaching. In some particular cases it may be a consultative role where the paraprofessionals consult teachers, parents and the students themselves. This is especially very significant because, as discussed above, the support of teachers is very insignificant. The effective support that paraprofessionals provide is so important and can maximize the full development of human potential, consistent with the aim of inclusive education. Thus, unless paraprofessionals, like social workers/learning specialists, are put in mainstream class room to assist the teachers and students, the whole effort of implementing inclusive education could be undermined. Given the fact that most teachers lack the knowledge and skill which inclusive education requires, in this context, simply placing a student in a mainstream classroom, without the necessary adjustments in the education system does not qualify as inclusive education. It is rather mere integration, which does not automatically guarantee the transition from segregation to inclusion.

The Institutionalization of Parent-Teacher Associations

As explained above, the role of parents and teachers is so crucial to facilitate the implementation of inclusive education in the schools where the implementation is far from anticipated. It is irrefutable that the burden of the education of SWD significantly falls on parents and teachers. The involvement of parents in the school

affairs, therefore, shall be institutionalized by the establishment of Parent-Teacher Associations. With this association, parents and teachers could together address some of the barriers to implement inclusive education in close consultations with the school officials, the *woreda* or sub-city education bureaus and the Ministry of Education. Moreover, in terms of resources, they could discuss the possibility of their role in the teaching learning process to ensure access and quality education for the SWD. In consequence, if the implementation of inclusive education has to succeed, the role of parents must be recognized and parent-teachers associations shall be established.

Establishment of Resource Centers

In Ethiopia, most schools where inclusive education is being implemented are under resourced and poorly equipped. In order to improve this startling status, the government has to establish a resource center for disability where SWD get assistance and support. And the center has to be managed with a skilled inclusive education specialist to bring a significant change and to ensure that students are indeed included and not simply integrated. Thus, it would serve as an alternative towards avoiding all the barriers and exclusionary policies and practices.

The Need for A Preparatory Class Before Full Inclusion

It is believed that including children with disability in early childhood education can better prepare them for mainstream primary schools. And establishing a preparatory school in every inclusive schools create a platform for SWD to learn reading, writing, life skills and mobility training, after which they are included in the classroom with their peers. For instance, it is difficult to teach all students with various kinds of disabilities in one inclusive environment entirely for they may not have uniformly similar educational needs. It, thus, eases the practical difficulties in trying to teach everybody together. It also enables some of them to consider the alternative approach where it would prepare them through gradual transitions from special unit classes into mainstream classes so that theyeffectively enjoy the rights they bestow.

Acknowledgments

I am indebted to those who commented on the former version of the draft paper. I am also grateful to the following people (I have established a contact with a number of them during my participation in the national training on the rights of PWD, held in Adama, Ethiopia, in 2018); Gezachew Birhanu (The Federation of Ethiopian National Association of Persons with

Disability), Mohammed Abedela (Benshangul/Gumuz National Regional State Education Bureau), SelamawitTessema (National Association for Ethiopian Women with Disability), Sindu Tesfaye (Ethiopian Centre for Disability Development (ECDD)), Abebe Molla (Ethiopian National Association for the Blind former education department director),Yillikal Hassabbie (Debre Berhan University disability services center coordinator), and Yohannes Ersano (SNNPR kembata tembaro zone education department)

Refernce

AACAEB and HI. (2012). *Addis Ababa City Administration Education Bureau and Handicap International, primary school Guide to inclusive education. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia* (Unpublished)

Abebe, H. (2011). *The right to education of children with intellectual disability and its implementation in Addis Ababa*. LL.M. thesis. Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia (Unpublished)

ACPF. (2011). Children with Disabilities in Ethiopia: The Hidden Reality. Addis Ababa: The African Child Policy Forum.

Addisfortune. (2016). 'House of Federation Rules out Discrimination'

Alemu, A. (1991). *Orientations and mobility: Instruction for visually impaired children*. MA thesis. University of Jyvaskyla (Unpublished)

Cologon, K. (2013). Inclusion in education: towards equality for students with disability. www.cda.org.au/_literature_159457/Issues_Paper_on_Inclusion_-_PDF (accessed on 10 April 2018)

Committee on CRPD. (2016). Concluding observations on the initial report of Ethiopia.

CRPD. (2006). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

FDRE. (1995). The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Federal NegaritGazzeta, 1st Year, No.1., 21st August, Addis Ababa.

Federal Supreme Court. (2009). *Federal Supreme Court Cassation Division, Vol. 8*. Etsegenet Eshetu Vs. SelamawitNeguse. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Franck, B. (2015). Inclusive Education and Children with Disabilities in Ethiopia.

Gebrekidan, F. (2013). From orality to literacy: A cursory glimpse into the history of blind education in Ethiopia. *Foundation Singer-Polignac*.

Gebretensay, M. (2007). *Attitude of Parents on the Inclusion of Children with Mental Retardation: The Case of Two Centers in Addis Ababa*. MA thesis. Addis Ababa University (Unpublished).

Hankebo, T. A. (2018). Inclusive Education as an Approach to Reduce Inequitable Access to Education: Exploring the practices of JegnochMetasebiya Primary School in Harar Town, Ethiopia. *Journal of Teacher Education and Educators*. **7(**2). 123-138.

Hussey, R. (2016). *Inclusive Education for Students with Visual, Hearing and Physical Disabilities: Barriers and Experiences in Gondar, Northern Ethiopia*. MA thesis. University of Sheffield (Unpublished).

Lewis, I. and Bagree, S. (2013). Teachers for All : Inclusive Teaching for Children with Disabilities.

Mazrui, A. (2002). Who killed Democracy in Africa? Clues of the Past, Concerns of the Future. *Development Policy Management Network Bulletin* 15.

Miles, M. (1995). Disability in an Eastern Religious Context: Historical Perspectives. *Disability and Society* 10: 1 49-69.

Mitiku, W., Alemu, Y. and Mengsitu, S. (2014). Challenges and Opportunities to Implement Inclusive Education. *Asian Journal of Humanity, Art and Literature* 1: 118-135.

MoE. (1994). The Education and Training Policy. Transitional government of Ethiopia. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

MoE. (2006). Special Needs Education Program Strategy: Emphasizing Inclusive Education to Meet the UPE and EFA Goals. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/upload/Et

hiopia/Ethiopia_Education_Plan_August_2005.pdf (accessed on 18 April 2018)

MoE. (2012). Special needs education program strategy: Emphasizing inclusive education to meet the UPE and EFA Goals. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

MoE. (2016). A master plan for special needs /inclusive education in Ethiopia 2016-2025.

Oliver, M. (1990). The Individual and Social Models of Disability.

Pankhurst, R. (1990). The social history of Ethiopia. *Institute of Ethiopian Studies*.

Phasha, N. (ed.). (2017). Inclusive education in African contexts.

Plato, (1955). The Republic (trans). The white friars Press Ltd.

Sanjeev and Kumar, (1994). Inclusive education in India. Indian, Patna University.

Smart, J. (2005). The promise of the international classification of functioning, disability and health. Rehabilitation Education 19: 191-199.

Solomon, M. (2013). *Benefits and Experiences of Inclusive Education Programme for Physically Disabled Pupils at Public Primary School in Bishoftu Town, South-East Ethiopia*. Msw Dissertation. Indira Gandhi National Open University (Unpublished).

Tamiru, S. (2015). *Perception of School Community towards Inclusive Education of Deaf Students: The Case of Afeteysa Primary and Secondary School in Dire-Dawa*. MA thesis. Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia (Unpublished)

Tamrat, T. (1972), Church and state in Ethiopia, 1270-1527. Oxford.

Tarekegn, A. (2014). *The Practices and Challenges of Implementing Inclusive Education in Addis Ababa: The Case of German Church School*. MA thesis. Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia (Unpublished)

Tefera, B., Admas, F. and Mulatie, M. (2016). Education of Children with Special Needs in Ethiopia: Analysis of the Rhetoric of "Education For All" and the Reality on the Ground.

Zelalem, T. (2014). The Journey of Special Needs Education in Ethiopia: An overview. *Journal of Education and Practice* 5: 27 83-85.

Tirussew, T. (2005). DisablityIn Ethiopia: Issues, Insights and implementation. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

UNESCO. (1994). Salamanca World Conference on Special Needs Education: Framework for Action Statement.

Yigzaw, S. G. (2016). A History of Deaf Education in Ethiopia. *National Technical Institute for the Deaf.*