

Abstract

Early Childhood and Education Development (ECED) programs in Nepal are recognised as the foundation of holistic development for young children, including their physical, cognitive, social and emotional growth. In the Nepalese context, a significant number of ECED programs are designed to support children with their holistic development and successful transition to school. As such, inclusion of children living with disability (ClwD) in these ECED programs would appear to be an important early intervention strategy for this already marginalised group. However, while inclusion of these children in ECED programs is viewed as desirable, in reality, the practice in Nepal is still not widespread. As a consequence, a vast majority of ClwD are unable to access early childhood education through ECED programs.

This research explored the factors for the lack of inclusion of ClwD in the ECED programs in Nepal, with the aim of constructing a stakeholder informed framework that would serve as a foundation for increasing enrolment of ClwD in ECED programs. In order to achieve the aim, the research drew on a heuristic qualitative design. The framework, termed as *Nepal Inclusive Education Framework* for ECED is the outcome of my knowledge and interpretation of key stakeholders' perspectives as well as available international and national literature on the inclusion of ClwD in education specifically in ECED. This research is underpinned by interpretive epistemology and constructivist ontology. Initially, the Framework was developed by drawing on extensive review of the literature and my knowledge of contextual conditions. It then employed individual interviews, focus group discussions with key stakeholders and document reviews to investigate the robustness and relevance of the framework from research participants' perspectives. Varied contexts influenced stakeholders' perspectives including my perspectives. Through the research it became evident that

several contextual and organisational factors interacted to create multiple barriers to the successful inclusion of ClwD in ECED programs in Nepal.

Contextual factors included spirituality, caste, ethnicity, language, economic status and geographic location. Organisational factors included policy, attitudes, teacher efficacy, resources, coordination and communication processes and parental and community engagement. The factors and their interaction form the Nepal ECED Inclusive Education Framework, which was the ultimate outcome of the research. The framework is my original contribution to knowledge in this area. This research identified that the interacting effects of contextual factors vary for each individual child living with disability, while organisational factors have universal effects due to the interacting nature of these factors. In addition, the research identified that the interaction of contextual factors and organisational factors as such, are complex and challenging. The illumination of the complexity is an opportunity to develop strategies to resolve the current barriers to inclusion in Nepal. This action is critical to ensuring increased numbers of young ClwD access early intervention and education programs that support their holistic development and offer access to opportunities that education affords others in Nepal.