INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP FOR INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS

The field of educational leadership and management have primarily focused its attention on type of leadership associated with school improvement and transformation (Adams, 2018; Hallinger & Lee, 2014; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008) and provided evidence that principals' leadership are important to students' success (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Robinson et al., 2008). However, significant attention was not paid to the achievement or inclusion of students with disabilities (DeMatthews, Billingsley, McLeskey & Sharma, 2020). Consequently, the past two decades has seen increased scrutiny on ways principals could establish effective inclusive schools for students with disabilities (Billingsley et al., 2019; Mayrowetz & Weinstein, 1999; Theoharis, 2007), and the challenges they encounter in developing inclusive schools (Rayner, 2008; Sebba & Ainscow, 1996).

Since the 1990s, inclusion for students with disabilities into mainstream classrooms has become an international agenda (UNESCO, 1994). The introduction of the Salamanca Statement on Principles, Policy and Practice in Special Needs Education highlighted the need to address equal educational opportunity and access for all students including those with students with disabilities (UNESCO, 1994). Inclusive education is seen as vital in assisting students with disabilities gain greater social acceptance, build self-confidence and establish social interaction among their able peers (Adams, Harris & Jones, 2017; Yasin et al., 2014). Yet, despite these emerging inclusion policies, developing countries still face challenges in making all classrooms inclusive (Adams, Harris & Jones, 2018).

The Salamanca Statement was a critical step in moving nations towards greater inclusion (UNESCO, 1994). It proclaimed schools should be designed to consider a wide range of student diversity and needs. Empirical evidences indicate developed and developing nations are progressing at different pace in their implementation of inclusive education (Toran et al., 2016; Schwab et al., 2015; Lee, 2010). While attempts are made to make schools more inclusive for students with disabilities, differences in context, culture and governance structures influences principals leadership practices (DeMatthews et al., 2020). Thus, school leadership, especially principals play a critical role in creating effective inclusive schools for students with disabilities around the world (DeMatthews et al., 2020).

However, principals struggle with accountability for students with disabilities (DeMatthews & Edwards, 2014). Research in developing countries such as India and Bangladesh indicate principals do not have sufficient knowledge and skills to lead inclusive schools (Mullick, Sharma & Deppeler, 2013; Sharma, Forlin, Deppeler & Yang, 2013). This could be attributed to principal preparation programs that does not adequately address special education. Principals have reported that their preparation programs did not prepare them with instructional knowledge in the area of special education (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003). Furthermore, they have limited professional development opportunities to upskill themselves in special education (DeMatthews & Edwards, 2014), this is even more apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic (Schiariti, 2020).

A framework by Hitt and Tucker (2016) provides a referral for inclusive leadership globally. Principals may create an inclusive school by establishing and conveying their vision, connecting with external communities and parties, creating a supportive learning organization, building professional capacity and facilitate high-quality learning experiences for their students. However, this framework must be responsive to each country's context. Research on inclusive leadership in relatively limited in developing countries (e.g Malaysia, India, Bangladesh, South Africa and Solomon Islands) as compared to developed countries (e.g United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand). It is important to acknowledge vast differences between countries (e.g. culture, policies, languages) and explore how principals develop or fail to develop effective inclusive schools for students with disabilities.

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