



**Learning About Inclusive Education in the Global Context: Voices from the Field**  
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Inclusive education is a global movement aimed at ensuring that all children, regardless of their abilities or disabilities [developmental capacities](#), have the right to be educated together in the same schools and classrooms. This approach is not only about providing equal access to education but also about transforming school communities and systems to accommodate the diverse needs of all students. Analysis into the effectiveness of national approaches to implementation challenges the extent to which this inclusive approach is appropriate, in terms of support provided to children with special educational needs. The voices of Philippa Gordon-Gould from Suffolk, Mamotjoka, Joyce Morai from Lesotho, and Zun Wai Oo from Myanmar provide insights into the challenges and opportunities of implementing inclusive education in different parts of the world.

**Inclusive Education at the Crossroads**

This virtual event invites three co-authors of a book entitled *Inclusive Education at the Crossroads: Exploring Effective Special Needs Provision in Global Contexts* to share their experiences and opinions on inclusive education in the global context. Inclusive education is a global movement aimed at ensuring that all children, regardless of their abilities or disabilities, have the right to be educated together in the same schools and classrooms. This approach is not only about providing equal access to education but also about transforming school communities and systems to accommodate the diverse needs of all students. Analysis into the effectiveness of national approaches to implementation challenges the extent to which this inclusive approach is appropriate, in terms of support provided to children with special educational needs.

**Defining Family/Caregivers**

The language we use in inclusive environments is important. The Division of International Special Education and Services (DISES) aims to pay respect to those who support youth with disabilities, and therefore, we recommend that educators and leaders working in the area of special education use the term family/caregivers when referring to those in the immediate lives of children with disability. Families/caregivers are defined as the people in the child's close circle who are there to support students through their educational, career, and personal development (Jez, Osborne, & Hauth, 2022). We recognize that families/caregivers are often not biological parents, or even related by blood. Family/caregivers can include extended family, foster caregivers, those with educational rights, mentors, and others who have established kinship ties. We value diversity within the circle of support available to youth with disabilities.

**Panelist Biographies**

The virtual session hosted the voices of Philippa Gordon-Gould from Suffolk, Mamotjoka, Joyce Morai from Lesotho, and Zun Wai Oo from Myanmar to provide insights into the challenges and opportunities of implementing inclusive education in different parts of the world. **Zun Wai Oo** (Hiroshima, Japan) is a doctoral student specializing in the field of inclusive education at Hiroshima University. She was previously an assistant lecturer at Sagaing University of Education in Myanmar. Her research focuses on inclusive education, with a particular interest in including students with intellectual disabilities in general education schools. **Mamotjoka Morai** (Hiroshima, Japan) is a doctoral student in inclusive education at Hiroshima University in Japan and a teacher at St. Paul School for the Deaf in Lesotho. Her research interests include deaf education, diversity, equity, and inclusion in schools, and early childhood education for children with special educational needs. **Philippa Gordon-Gould** (England) collaborated with Professor Garry Hornby (Emeritus Professor at the University of Plymouth) to research and write their recent book *Inclusive Education at the Crossroads: Exploring Effective Special Needs Provision in Global Contexts*. Philippa has had experience as a teacher and special educational needs coordinator in a range of schools from primary to secondary throughout the East of England over the last 15 years and also drawn on previous teaching experience in Europe and the USA.

### Summary

**Philippa Gordon-Gould (England)** has experience in the teaching profession and has authored a book on inclusive education ([link to the book](#)). She started her career as a mature student motivated by her own children with special needs. Philippa explained that England has had a series of legislative developments over the decades, culminating with the Children and Families Act of 2014, which coordinated educational services with social care and health care. Although the legislation is in place, the actual implementation faces significant challenges. Since the economic downturn in 2008, subsequent budget cuts have severely impacted resources and staffing in schools. Many schools still rely on removing children from classes for short interventions, and there is a lack of consistent, high-quality special needs provision within mainstream education. Yet, she shared the increased awareness among families/caregivers about their children's rights has raised expectations; however, schools often struggle to provide the resources due to financial constraints. This has sometimes led to adversarial relationships between families and school staff.

**Mamotjoka Morai (Lesotho)** is a doctoral student specializing in special education, with a background in teaching deaf and hard-of-hearing students in Lesotho, a country in southern Africa. Lesotho has a limited number of special schools, and inclusive education practices are still developing. Special schools mainly serve primary-level students, and there is a lack of resources and trained teachers for inclusive education at higher levels. There are significant challenges in assessing and appropriately placing students with special needs. Often, teachers without adequate training perform these assessments. Inclusive education is more about physical integration than actual inclusion, with students sometimes segregated within the same classroom. Teachers face difficulties in providing effective education due to a lack of training and resources. Mamotjoka also shared that Lesotho has policies aimed at inclusive education, but there is a gap between policy and practice. Many students with disabilities do not progress to higher education, and there is a lack of statistical data on their educational outcomes.

**Zun Wai Oo (Myanmar)** is a doctoral student in Hiroshima, Japan, originally from Myanmar in Asia. She has experience as a high school teacher and an assistant lecturer. Myanmar is a highly diverse country with 135 officially recognized ethnic groups and over 100 languages. The recent political coup and the COVID-19 pandemic have severely disrupted educational progress. The country's ethnic and linguistic diversity presents significant challenges for inclusive education. There are efforts to recruit native-speaking teachers and promote inclusive practices,

but progress is slow. The political coup has created a highly unstable environment, making it difficult to implement consistent educational policies. Both the military government and opposition groups are running competing education systems, complicating the situation further. Inclusive education efforts often focus on students with disabilities, but there is a lack of standardized assessments and proper training for teachers to support these students effectively.

### **Current Barriers to Inclusive Education**

Philippa Gordon-Gould described how the reduced funding for schools is a major challenge in England. Many schools are struggling to provide adequate support and training for inclusive education. There is a noticeable gap in specialized training for teachers on inclusive education and many educators feel unprepared to handle the diverse needs of students with disabilities. There is evidence that as families become more aware of what could be available and when expectations are not met, the home-school relationship is negatively impacted. Some educators have found it challenging to foster cooperative relationships between families and schools. There is also a shortage of special needs support and schools have had to rely on short-term, withdrawal or pull-out interventions rather than embedding support within the classroom. This approach can hinder the inclusion of students with special needs in mainstream education. In sum, Philippa was concerned that in England, the implementation of inclusive education is hampered by resource disparities between urban and rural areas and the aftermath of economic crises.

Mamotjoka Morai shared that in Lesotho, there are issues with assessment and placement of students with special needs, as well as limited training for teachers. Many teachers in Lesotho lack the necessary training to effectively include students with disabilities. This shortfall in professional development limits their ability to provide appropriate support. There is a significant shortage of resources, including learning materials and assistive technologies. The physical infrastructure of schools is also often not conducive to inclusive education, with inadequate facilities for students with disabilities. Teachers face difficulties in conducting accurate assessments and making appropriate placements for students with special needs. This often results in inadequate support and inappropriate educational settings for these students. Morai also shared that while Lesotho has policies promoting inclusive education, the implementation is inconsistent. There is a disconnect between policy statements and actual classroom practices, leading to ineffective inclusion.

Zun Wai Oo (Myanmar) shared that Myanmar faces challenges related to ethnic diversity and language barriers, compounded by the recent political coup and the COVID-19 pandemic. Myanmar's vast ethnic diversity and multitude of languages present significant challenges for inclusive education. There is a lack of teachers who are proficient in the languages spoken by minority groups, making it difficult to provide effective instruction. Political instability and conflict deteriorated this situation and have severely disrupted the educational system. This instability has created an environment where implementing and sustaining inclusive education practices is extremely difficult. There is a significant gap in the availability of standardized assessments for students with disabilities. This hinders the ability to accurately identify and support students' needs. Many teachers lack the training and skills necessary to support inclusive education effectively. The absence of professional development programs focused on inclusive practices further exacerbates this issue.

### **Resources to Explore**

Philippa Gordon-Gould (England) emphasized the need for more financial resources to support inclusive education. This includes funding for additional teaching assistants and

specialized training for teachers. Mamotjoka Morai called for investment in school infrastructure to make it more accessible and inclusive, including the provision of assistive technologies and learning materials. Zun Wai Oo requested resources to bridge the gap between inclusive education policies and their implementation, ensuring that schools have the necessary support to put policies into practice effectively. She also underscored the importance of seeking resources to stabilize the political situation, which is crucial for the consistent implementation of educational programs.

All three panelists highlighted the importance of standardized assessment. Philippa highlighted a call for improved and standardized early assessment tools to identify and support students with special needs as early as possible. Mamotjoka Morai (Lesotho) called for the development and distribution of reliable assessment tools to accurately identify students' needs and place them in appropriate educational settings. Zun Wai Oo (Myanmar) called for the development of standardized assessment tools tailored to the diverse linguistic and cultural context of Myanmar to better identify and support students with disabilities.

Teacher training and professional development is another topic highlighted by all three panelists. Philippa shared that England would benefit from ongoing professional development for teachers, particularly in special education needs, to ensure they are well-equipped to handle diverse classroom environments. Mamotjoka shared that enhanced teacher training programs focused on inclusive education practices and strategies for both pre-service and in-service teachers would be beneficial. Zun Wai Oo emphasized the need for programs to train teachers who speak the native languages of minority groups, ensuring that all students receive instruction in a language they understand.

Finally, all three panelists underscored the importance of improving collaborations, including the family-school collaboration, and leveraging partnerships with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international organizations, etc. This may include providing resources to foster better communication and collaboration between families and schools to help align expectations and support mechanisms.

### **Recording**

A recording of *Learning About Inclusive Education in the Global Context: Voices from the Field* can be accessed on the [DISES Youtube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ij2O4StokDQ) page or <https://youtu.be/Ij2O4StokDQ>.

### **References**

- Gordon-Gould, P., & Hornby, G. (2023). *Inclusive education at the crossroads: exploring effective special needs provision in global contexts*. Routledge.
- Jez, R. J., Osborne, K. M., & Hauth, C. M. (2022). Educators coming together to empower learners, families, and teachers to develop culturally sustainable transition planning tool during COVID-19. In Meda, L. & Chitiyo, J. (Eds.), *Inclusive Pedagogical Practices Amidst a Global Pandemic: Issues and Perspectives Around the Globe* (pp. 241-262). Springer.