INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PRACTICE IN VANUATU

Youth-Led Action Research
Vanuatu, 2019
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INTRODUCTION

Youth-Led Action Research for Education

The Youth-Led Action Research (YAR) program was delivered by KoBLE in Vanuatu in partnership with the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE). During 2019, 20 diverse and marginalised youth from Port Vila and rural Efate were trained and participated in Youth-Led Action Research. The youth were mentored throughout the process by ASPBAE, KoBLE and local research capacity advisers to complete action research projects.

The YAR aimed to:
1. Enable community youth to analyse the factors preventing their greater access to and participation in literacy, basic and higher education, and basic skills programmes and other services in their communities; and
2. Define community actions that can be undertaken to address these.

As part of the YAR process, youth researchers, equipped by the outcomes of the research are expected to dialogue and engage with policy makers, school administrators, adult education providers and other stakeholders in their communities on ways to improve education and skills opportunities that address their identified learning needs and aspirations.

Generating the project

This report presents the YAR project investigating the practice of inclusive education in schools in Vanuatu. The research topic was identified by youth researchers and KoBLE research capacity advisors given the pertinence of inclusion and inclusive education in the sustainable development agenda.

Through participation in the action research process, youth gained hands on experience in research methods and were empowered to begin thinking about how to create change and advocate for their solutions.

The report details the project context, research process undertaken, analysis and key findings of data collected, and actionable recommendations for relevant stakeholders.
**Project Context: Inclusive Education in Vanuatu**

Vanuatu, as a small island developing state, has a total population of 272,459 (VNSO 2017) and ranks 141 out of 189 on the Human Development Index (UNDP 2017). The Primary Net Enrolment Ratio in 2018 was 91.7% and Secondary Net Enrolment Ratio was 42.4% (MoET 2018), demonstrating an alarming dropout rate from primary to secondary level. Literacy performance for both boys and girls is fairly poor with less than 25-35% at expected standard at year 6 (VESP 2018). The Education and Training sector is afforded the second highest allocation of the national budget – 22.3% in 2018 (USD 50.7 million).

The major education and training sector issues as determined by KoBLE in the 2019 Spotlight Report on Education are:

- Lack of financial resources – inability of families to meet the demands of school fees and other costs for school attendance.
- High drop out and push out rates for students at secondary level, and limited opportunities for continuing education and skill development.
- Limited number of inclusive education initiatives, resources and staffing to adequately provide for students with special needs.

**Policy context for inclusive education**

Inclusion is one of three core elements of the current 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, and in regards to education, target 4.5 directly addresses equal access to all levels of education and training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities. At the national level in Vanuatu, the National Sustainable Development Plan further reiterates the 2030 inclusive agenda by stating its education goal as: “An inclusive, equitable and quality education system with life-long learning for all” (Society pillar, Goal 2).

Vanuatu is a signatory to the Convention of the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD), the Pacific Regional Education Framework and the Pacific Framework for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Promoting and mainstreaming inclusive education is a key output of the Vanuatu Education and Training Sector Strategy (2019-2030), incorporating strategies that are child-centred and rights-based, and emphasising provision of appropriate materials, learning environments and teachers skilled in inclusive education. The Education and Training Sector has had an Inclusive Education policy in place since 2010, and a National Disability Inclusion Policy for the TVET sector since 2016.

Despite these policies and stated commitments, little progress has been made nationally to provide effective inclusive learning environments and opportunities. The Disability Inclusive Education briefing paper published by KoBLE in November 2019 highlighted the specific gaps between policy and practice. These are:

- Limited data collected on disability
- Ongoing negative attitudes and lack of understanding of disability
- A teaching force with limited training to support learning for children with disabilities
• Inadequate financial and material resources to effectively provide inclusion education
• Inadequate remuneration of trained teaching staff assigned to inclusive education roles

There is an absolute dearth of data to inform the inclusive education agenda, with statistics relying on the 2009 National Population Census in which it was recorded that 12% of the population was living with a disability.

The Barriers to Education research study found that the Vanuatu education system was not perceived as being inclusive of children with a disability, and having a disability was ranked as the fourth highest barrier to attendance at school.
ACTION RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research design

KoBLE and ASPBAE delivered a training on youth-led action research to 20 youth researchers who were selected from within KoBLE’s membership and networks. Youth represented a diverse cross section of the urban and peri-urban youth demographics including youth with disabilities, marginalised youth and youth of diverse gender and sexual orientation.

Youth selected topics for research projects as well as research sites, and then formed groups to address the research topics. Questionnaires and other research tools were developed and logistics organised, with the support of KoBLE and the Youth Research Capacity Adviser. Each team conducted a pilot phase to test the research instrument and refine as necessary before taking to the field.

For Project 2: Inclusive Education Practice in Vanuatu, the research team was led by youth with disabilities who were interested to investigate the following key questions:

- What are the barriers for children with disabilities in formal education?
- What policies, programs and resources exist to support inclusive education initiatives?

The first question critiqued the current state of inclusive education practice in terms of provision of facilities, resources and teaching staff within schools to support children with disabilities to learn effectively. It also explored the experiences of children and adults with disabilities in education to determine the impact of current practice on their educational attainment. The lived experience of the researchers themselves was critical to the design of interview questions and interpretation of findings.

The second question investigated the enabling factors for inclusive education in Vanuatu, drawing on a range of actors and experiences to provide education to people with disabilities. The purpose of this inquiry was to highlight good practice that may have the potential for replication and scale up to achieve national inclusive education and inclusive development goals.

Sample and sampling strategy

It was decided that the study would investigate inclusive education practice via a range of perspectives to understand different stakeholders’ experiences. There were therefore four main participant categories:

1. People with disability who have attended formal education
2. Parents and caregivers of children/youth with disabilities
3. Schools including teachers and principals
4. Education stakeholders including government, community-based and development organisations
The research team selected research participants using a purposive sampling strategy given the time and resource constraints of the project. All research participants reside in the Port Vila urban area, and were selected based on known contacts of the research team or via snowball sampling through participants.

**Overview of the research participants**

In total, the team interviewed 28 individuals:
- Four school principals of Port Vila public schools (listed in Annex 3).
- Five inclusive education teachers (three working in public schools, one in a community school and one at a university). These teachers are responsible for inclusive education delivery within their school and normally work on their own in a designated inclusive education classroom.
- Five parents and caregivers of children or youth with disabilities (both in school and not in school).
- Eight students with disabilities, ages ranging from 6-34 years old, who have been students in the formal education system.
- Six education stakeholder representatives, comprising government, donor and non-government agencies (refer to Annex 3).

**Data collection and analysis techniques**

The research was conducted in late 2019, and data analysis was undertaken by the research team in 2020.

The research team designed a series of structured interview questions for each research participant group (refer to Annex 1). Data was recorded in note form and later transcribed and translated into English via computer. The raw data was organised according to participant category for ease of comparison and analysis.

A checklist was also designed to assess the inclusivity of school facilities (refer to Annex 2).

Preliminary analysis of the data was undertaken with the support of the research capacity adviser. KoBLE then facilitated a thematic analysis process engaging the research team to discuss and agree on key findings and recommendations as highlighted in this report.

**Limitations**

This research project was designed as a practical exercise to build the capacity of youth researchers through the KoBLE Youth-led Action Research Program. With this in mind, the robustness of the research design was constrained by time and resources, and therefore the resulting data, findings and recommendations are best considered as discussion points to stimulate further research into inclusive education policy and practice in Vanuatu.
KEY FINDINGS

What are the barriers for children with disabilities in formal education?

KEY BARRIERS
- Attitudes and commitment of parents and carers to support their child’s education
- Schools are not well equipped to support students with disabilities:
  - Lack of appropriate teaching materials to cater for diverse disabilities
  - Teachers in general don’t receive sufficient training in inclusive education strategies, and inclusive education teachers have limited support and materials with which to teach
  - Accessibility issues for children with disabilities to enter classrooms and facilities

The study found that the majority of participants could clearly identify the barriers for children with disabilities to access and attain quality education. Barriers could generally be divided into two categories: at the home and community level, and at the school level.

Barriers at the home and community level

Of the five parents and carers of children with disabilities interviewed, only two had children enrolled in educational institutions or programs – one of these being a private school and the other a life skills program offered by a local NGO. Children of the other parents had been enrolled in public schools previously, but had to drop out, for reasons such as: the child had problems communicating in the language of instruction and/or parents were unable to pay fees. Only one parent stated that their child has never attended school because there is no one to take them there, possibly indicating a lack of motivation and family support for that child’s education. One of the teachers interviewed also spoke about poor parental commitment.

There was also the acknowledgement by some participants that there are children with disabilities of school age in the community, not attending nor receiving an education. Researchers understand that attitudinal barriers, and existing stigma and discrimination against people with disabilities are leading causes.

Barriers at the school level

The study revealed a number of factors that support the claim that schools are not well equipped to support students with disabilities. By far, the most significant issue expressed by teachers is that they lack the capacity and training to support learning for children with disabilities due to the breadth of different disabilities that exist. Inclusive education strategies need to provide for the full spectrum: physical disability, intellectual disability and other forms of impairment that affect a child’s social interaction, communication or behaviour. It is understood that students with disabilities generally required more intensive
teaching support, which many schools cannot provide. One participant stated that their school cannot adequately accommodate special needs and therefore has to cap the number of disability-identified enrolments they can accept.

Some teachers suggested that lack of identification and diagnosis of a child’s specific disability means that the learning needs are not understood and therefore they are not receiving the tailored support required to attain a quality education. This issue indicates a lack of integration between the social, education and health sectors to support inclusion.

At schools where students with disabilities are enrolled (and there is no specific inclusive education strategy except that all children mix together) their teachers noted that high enrolment figures in general makes it difficult for them to spend time just with students with disabilities. These students often don’t have the opportunity to express themselves and participate effectively, therefore causing them to fall behind and putting them at risk of dropping out.

Parents also felt that teachers at the schools their children attended didn’t have the appropriate training to support their learning. One parent who has a child with a visual impairment mentioned that the teaching materials and lighting in classrooms made it difficult for their child to read.

Accessibility of school classrooms and facilities is also a major barrier as identified by the majority of parents, school representatives and students with physical disabilities. When children do not have the basic level of physical infrastructure they require to attend an institution, they are discouraged due to being physically unable to attend and enjoy school life. For example, improper and unclear signage can be confusing for students with visual impairment and mobility devices trying to navigate school facilities, and wash rooms without adequate supports (such as railing) and too high sink and toilet heights are impractical for people with disabilities.

The Inclusive School Facilities Checklist completed at six public schools demonstrated that the majority of schools participating in the research do not have fully disability accessible facilities such as ramps, adequate lighting at entrances and exits, adequate height of door handles and width of doors, and wash room facilities such as railing, and sinks and toilets at adequate height. This highlights a fundamental flaw in the facility design of educational institutions that prevents children from attending at all, regardless of teaching strategies and resources made available.

**What policies, programs and resources exist to support inclusive education initiatives?**

**Inclusive education policy and governmental services**

The Ministry of Education and Training is responsible for the coordination and monitoring of the Inclusive Education policy (2011-2020), which ultimately mandates schools to accept students with disabilities. However, research participants stated that the policy does not provide guidance to schools on how to become more inclusive, that is, specific strategies
and actions they should take. In recent years, however, the Vanuatu Education Support Program has been engaging pilot schools to implement inclusive education initiatives, providing them with technical support and training. The financial resourcing of those initiatives does not appear to come from the Government, leaving schools to fundraise or use their limited resources to implement.

Several participants suggested that the current inclusive education policy is not specific enough to the Vanuatu context, and was developed based on foreign initiatives and principles.

The Curriculum Development Unit has disseminated resources including videos and books to teachers to assist them to identify different disabilities. They have also provided training to principals, inspectors and zone curriculum advisors to monitor inclusive education, and there is a push for accredited training institutions to provide disability-specific courses.

Teacher training

There are a few efforts to improve teacher training in inclusive education, however the impact of this training in schools has not been measured, as far as the research team is aware. The study findings provide anecdotal evidence to suggest that they have been ineffective towards mainstreaming inclusive education in the formal education sector, however they have been useful to upskilling a very small number of educators specialising in this area. Efforts include:

- The pre-service teacher training provided by the Vanuatu Institute of Teacher Education includes specific units on inclusive education.
- The Certificate III in Education Support offered by APTC, which at a very general level builds skills to address the learning needs of students with disabilities. One of the participating schools required all teachers to take this course.
- Self-motivated study and international exchange opportunities, identified by teachers themselves.

School-based initiatives

Through the research, we learnt about a small number schools and educational institutions that have some form of disability inclusive education, and the majority of these are school-led initiatives. Schools in which the Ministry of Education and Training has appointed inclusive education teaching staff have a clear advantage over schools with no or limited resources dedicated to inclusive education.

When we examined the practices of those schools actively implementing inclusive education initiatives, we noticed that their approach relates more to segregated and integrated educational environments. Schools that provided a designated inclusive education space or classroom demonstrate segregation of students with disability from mainstream classes, and schools that provide additional teaching staff to specifically attend to students with disabilities within a mainstream class demonstrate integration.

Advancements made through school-based initiatives:
• One school assesses students’ special needs if they have indicated they have a disability on enrolment forms.
• Two schools in the urban area have established an inclusive education centre/classroom. Students who have been identified as having a disability are referred to an inclusive education classroom and teacher to provide one-on-one learning support. These schools expressed their commitment to inclusive education and ongoing fundraising efforts to provide more accessible facilities and resources.
• One school stated that they changed school policy to ensure inclusion of children with disabilities in enrolment processes.

Early Intervention and Life Skills programs

The Vanuatu Society for People with Disabilities (VSPD) provides Early Intervention and Life Skills programs for children and youth with disabilities in Port Vila urban area. They find that without these resources, children with disabilities are left behind and can never develop readiness for formal education. The programs cater for children up to the age of 15, and provide specific resources, teaching aids and strategies to support their development. VSPD also links their clients with specialist health services and has a good partnership with the education sector to place graduates of their programs in formal education.

Disability inclusive skills training

Vanuatu Skills Partnership (VSP) is the co-investment of the Governments of Vanuatu and Australia for the development of the national skills system. VSP has a strong emphasis on disability inclusive development and supports schools and rural training providers to be more inclusive. Disability inclusion is mainstreamed throughout all activities, and therefore more closely represents an inclusive education effort regarding technical vocational education and training. People with disabilities are engaged as trainers of skills programs and also as participants (additional support can be provided to enable their participation such as for carers and adequate transport). Youth Challenge Vanuatu is similar in its approach to mainstreaming disability inclusion throughout its programs.
CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

The Youth-led Action Research project on inclusive education practice in Vanuatu investigated the initiatives and experiences of schools, parents, students and education stakeholders in the urban area of Port Vila in light of national inclusive education policy directives. Findings of this study echo the analysis undertaken by KoBLE in 2019 on disability inclusive education policy and practice.

Youth researchers found that there are significant gaps in policy implementation at the school level, where a limited number schools are actively rolling out disability inclusive education initiatives (albeit at a limited capacity) whereas other schools do not have the capacity or know-how to do so. The lack of national guidance and an agreed approach for inclusive education in Vanuatu has meant that it is still very much in testing phase, almost ten years after the launch of the policy. Moreover, the fundamental issue impeding inclusive education is a complete lack of disability accessible facilities within schools. If children with disabilities cannot even attend schools with the same dignity afforded their peers, then their needs will continue to be overlooked simply because they are not present.

The research team puts forth the following practical recommendations for inclusive education actors, particularly the Ministry of Education and Training, to improve educational opportunities for children and students with disabilities.

**Recommendation 1:** Immediately review the pre-service inclusive education teaching units at VITE to ensure they provide in-depth and intensive training in disability inclusive principles and strategies for prospective teachers.

**Recommendation 2:** Commit increased financial and technical resources to rapidly develop a national sign language and acquire adequate teaching and learning materials for curriculum roll out that enables students with disabilities to receive a quality education. Ensure teachers are adept in the use of these materials.

**Recommendation 3:** Ensure all school facilities throughout Vanuatu are disability accessible by 2025, to enable and encourage children with disabilities to attend school.

**Recommendation 4:** Strengthen and harmonise services across education, community services and health sectors (through government ministries) to establish a streamlined system for children with disabilities regarding early identification, early intervention and the transition to formal education. This will need to ensure that communities and families are empowered through information on the services and support available to enable their children can access education, regardless of disadvantage or disability.

**Recommendation 5:** Engage diverse stakeholders in disability and education to share lessons learnt from pilot initiatives and identify the most effective approach to achieve inclusive education in schools in Vanuatu to be rolled out from 2021, with the Ministry of Education and Training taking a lead role. This must involve robust research and evaluation to provide a strong evidence base for national guidance on inclusive education, followed by careful planning and advocacy within government to gain political will and secure financial investment.
ANNEX 1: RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

Participant group 1: People with disability who have attended formal education
What type of disability do you have?
Where did you go to school?
What level of education did you reach?
Why are you no longer in school?
During your studies did the school facilities or buildings meet your needs?
Did you understand the lessons/sessions taught in class?
What were the types of problems/challenges you faced in school?
Did you understand the textbook used in school?
Did you feel that the teacher understood your needs?
How did the school support you?

Participant group 2: Parents and caregivers of children or youth with disabilities
What type of disability does your child have?
Gender of child
Where does (or did) he/she go to school?
If your child is not in school, why?
At the school they attend, are there facilities that meet the specific needs of your child?
Do you think the teachers have the skills to teach them?
Are you aware of the Convention on the Rights of People with Disability?
Is there anything else you want to share with us regarding disability in general?

Participant group 3: Schools including teachers and principals
How many students with disability do you have in your school? (disaggregate by gender)
What type of disability do they have?
What are some of the problems students with disability have that limits their enjoyment of school and education?
Are the school facilities accessible to students with disability?
Have you attended any disability/inclusive education training? If yes, has this training helped you to support students with disabilities?
Do you think it is important to be trained in how to use disability specific resources and tools such as braille or sign language?
Do you think the Ministry of Education and Training should ensure that all primary and secondary teachers receive disability/inclusive education training?
Do you have any other comments?

Participant group 4: Education stakeholders including government, community-based and development organisations
Are your policies inclusive?
Do you support any inclusive education programs? If so, tell us more.
Did you consult with the Disability Desk or disability organisations prior to design and planning? If not, do you plan to do so in future?
Is your office accessible for people with disabilities?
What percentage of your donor funding supports inclusive or disability-focused programming?
What do you think is the major contribution your work has made towards disability inclusive development and education?
Do you have any other comments?
# Annex 2: Inclusive School Facilities Checklist

**Inclusive Schools Observation Checklist**

**School Name:** _______________________________

**Type:** ECCE  Primary  Secondary  Tertiary

## Facilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Tick if present</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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<tr>
<td>Entry – Clear and well lit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramp – has railing and landing space, and is of sufficient width</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wide Doors – Car park area is close to the entrance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sign fonts – clear, with large font</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Venue – emergency exits are well marked with signage, sufficient space for mobility devices.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Doors – with handles, at height of 900mm - 1000mm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Stairs – well lit, especially at ends</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Signage – to identify different areas inside the building i.e toilets, kitchen, office, etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Second floor – accessible ram or elevator</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Hazards signage – clear, with pictures</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Desk and chairs – appropriate height and support</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Light – visual white light</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wash rooms – clear signage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Railing and bathing stool</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Doors – wide, has low handle, inwards opening</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sink – low level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Toilet – different heights, or universal design</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation – easy and safe access to transportation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you consult with PWD and their carers during school construction design and planning processes?</td>
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ANNEX 3: RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Participating schools:
- Freshwater Bilingual School
- Malapoa College
- Lycee de Louis Bougainville
- Vila North Primary and Secondary School
- Central School
- Vila East Primary School
- Seaside Community School
- University of the South Pacific

Participating stakeholders:
- Save the Children
- Vanuatu Society for People with Disabilities
- Vanuatu Skills Partnership
- Youth Challenge Vanuatu
- UNICEF
- Curriculum Development Unit, Ministry of Education and Training

A further 13 participants were recorded, consisting of students with disabilities and parents and carers of children or youth with disabilities in Port Vila.
ANNEX 4: REFERENCES


