

Moving Forwards, Sideways or Backwards? Inclusive Education in Samoa

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The introduction of inclusive education (IE) has been promoted to meet the needs of all students. Initially this was a western-driven ideology but has been adopted by numerous developing countries such as Samoa. In this country, the education of students with special learning needs has followed the usual pattern of development from voluntary provision to government-funded segregated placements, followed by mainstreaming, and finally inclusion in regular schools. This qualitative phenomenologically oriented study gathered data from educators and parents about their perceptions of IE and how it was being implemented. The results indicated that this has not always been an easy transition and many participants in the study, although subscribing to the notion of IE, believe that there are a number of implementation difficulties, particularly around issues of support. In relation to this, IE is regarded as a borrowed policy that has overlooked cultural issues and ownership. A model for future developments is outlined and recommendations for future research are indicated.

Keywords: developing country; fa'aSamoa; inclusive education; phenomenological orientation; policy borrowing; professional development; special education; Samoa

Introduction

Historically, individuals with disabilities have not been treated equitably; and even today, some cultures, religions and ethnic groups have unfavourable attitudes toward disability (Pfeiffer et al., 2004). In this article consideration is given to the development of inclusive education (IE) in Samoa, which ironically has an inclusive cultural context but has experienced difficulties in implementing it. Like many developing countries, formal education first arrived with missionaries and co-existed with the traditional life-skills education in the villages. When Germany first ruled the country (1899–1914) it was left to the missionaries to provide schooling, but when New Zealand assumed control in 1914 a government schooling system began to evolve. Since independence in 1962, Samoa has progressively developed its system of education, assisted by international and bilateral arrangements. However, special education was slow to evolve, initially being a family responsibility; then voluntary organisations assumed control, but since the 1990s the government has assumed growing responsibility, adopting IE as policy. This research was undertaken because of an awareness concerning the difficulties of implementation.

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The aim of the research was to identify beliefs, experiences, expectations, and practices of key stakeholders regarding IE in Samoa with a view to identifying ways of moving forward with the policy's implementation. In particular, it was considered important to consider the voices of teachers and parents as they believed they had been mostly over-looked in the IE implementation. To place this research in perspective, information relating to the influence of fa'aSamoa (the Samoan way), disability in Samoa, and the evolving of IE policy has been considered. Minimal research centring on IE has been undertaken in Samoa.

Samoa: Culture and Inclusive Education developments

Samoa, a tropical Polynesian island, has a population of approximately 193,161¹ and a traditional culture characterised by fa'aSamoa (Pratt, 1893) specifying guidelines with regard to family, community and Christian church. It is a homogeneous cultural umbrella identifying the individual and collective in a unity (Powles cited in McKay, 1968) that provides an individual's status and welfare (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 1991). But according to St Christian (1994), it is much more than this—it is a fundamental contract for “being” and embodies many ideas including perceptions about ancestors, propriety and the way of living. But there is room for change because, as Meredith (cited Siauane, 2004) notes, fa'aSamoa exists as a way of life that has accommodated changes over the years. It persists because it has a passive communal strength supporting individuals and is a mindset embedded in the political, social and economic systems. It is the heritage of the people, and the beginnings are found in Samoan mythology intertwined with folklore, songs, legends, phrases and proverbs. Samoans believe they descended from gods and fa'aSamoa emerged from the sacred centre (Fido, 1995). A decentralised social and political structure evolved with a unitary culture, immediate authority resting with the village but ultimate allegiance being to God.

Ngan-Woo (1985) identified three fundamental principles that underpin fa'aSamoa: *ava* (respect), *fa'aaloalo* (humility/reverence) and *alofa* (love). These are not only fundamental individual requirements but also located in societal structures. Respect (to parents, family, *matai* [village chiefs], ministers, guests, etc.) brings honour to the family and, if not practised well, can lead to individual and family expulsion. *Fa'aaloalo* is expressed in terms of the space between people—the understanding of respectful “distance” between people and those commanding respect (e.g., *matai*, ministers). An individual should be humble in the presence of those of higher rank. *Alofa* is a demonstration of care and duty to others, particularly to family, *matai* and village, but also a general approach in all interactions. Overall, there is a strong consensus to display these behaviours; they are fundamental to successful societal interaction.

Ironically, although Samoa is a stratified society, it is inclusive within the limits of fa'aSamoa. In other words, although a traditional hierarchically organised society, change has been encountered (e.g., Christianity, colonial rule) and, providing there was no significant threatening of the normative framework, fa'aSamoa moulded around them. As noted by Siauane (2004), fa'aSamoa has a fluidity enabling it “to shift ‘meaning’ in different contexts” (p. 1), but characterised by continued strength and influence. According to Toleafoa (2008), significant changes to fa'aSamoa can occur if protective mechanisms are in place.

Fa'aSamoa has impacted upon family, community and schooling in a number of ways as it relates to disability (Tufue-Dolgoy, 2010). In pre-European times the term disability was unknown and often all were simply and unquestionably included in the

community. For example, a child with a handicap was given responsibilities (e.g., working in the taro patch; cooking meals) commensurate with their abilities but, if any behaviours significantly challenged fa'aSamoa, sanctions could be applied. However, the meaning of disability in Samoa is more complex today and has different interpretations, leaving the position of a person with a disability uncertain (Dolgoy, 2000). Co-existing with traditional means of achieving status, other indices (e.g., education, occupation and wealth) have become important and this has implications for disability. For example, shame and anger may be evident if disability is located in a family and exacerbated if interpreted as a curse. Furthermore, once the label of disability is confirmed, others may allocate a position/status to the family (e.g., "That's the family of the stupid one"). In response to this, some parents may also discount the child because of inability to conform, which may have implications for development. But it is even more complex than this because an overlay of acceptance can remain. Fitzgerald (1993), for example, reported a range of responses other than acceptance including being shunned, abandoned, teased or ridiculed and yet, ironically, behaviours of inclusiveness still remain. It is not uncommon for a person with a disability to be teased, for instance, but this can be an implicit recognition by all that the individual remains a group member.

It is apparent then that the principles of egalitarianism, equity and equal opportunity, which are foundational for IE, may not be as significant as situation-specific characteristics (Poasa, Mallinckrodt, & Suzuki, 2000). For example, some teachers may respond more favourably to a student on the basis of their family's position in terms of occupation, status and wealth. To compound matters, this potential for discrimination cannot be challenged as Samoa has not adopted the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, although an ombudsman can investigate allegations of governmental discrimination. It seems that fa'aSamoa is still accommodating itself to statuses evolving from western values.

The impact of western thinking about disability resulted in facilities being established for disability in Samoa. In the 1970s, some Samoan non-governmental agencies assumed responsibility for students with special needs in segregated facilities, replacing family care (McCullough, 2000), but it was not until the 1990s with increased awareness of disability issues and calls for compulsory education that the government established a few integrated special needs units (i.e., separate classrooms integrated within the confines of school grounds). Current IE policies are local initiatives but are strongly influenced by international policies (e.g., Salamanca Statement), agencies (e.g., United Nations), and aid projects (e.g., NZAid) but, as noted by Tufue-Dolgoy (2010), Samoa has continued to maintain a dual special education system (i.e., special school segregated units and IE provisions). Nevertheless, since 2006 there has been an emphasis on IE, and the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture (MESCS) has developed systems to promote policy and a national special education system.

The education policy in Samoa is guided by the principles of equity, quality, relevancy, efficiency and sustainability (Government of Samoa, 2006) and this has underpinned the development of IE. But in many respects it has been a two-edged sword; IE is consistent with the cultural imperatives and policy developments, but has placed demands upon a system with limited resources and teacher skill. Many teachers in Samoa remain ambivalent about the implementation of IE (Tufue-Dolgoy, 2010). Furthermore, teachers often do oppose change anyhow (Lindsay, 2007) and it is often acknowledged that top-down change can fail (Farrell, 2000). Moreover, as previously

discussed, IE is contextual (Mitchell, 2005), making it difficult to generalise research findings.

Relatively few disability and special education studies have been undertaken in the Pacific region (Tufue-Dolgoy, 2010) but there are indications that disability can be a problematic issue for schools, families and community. In one of the few reported studies undertaken in Samoa, Tufue (2004) established that special unit teachers in a regular school had favourable IE attitudes but felt alienated, isolated and segregated from their colleagues because they were located in separate units with insufficient resources. It was concluded that the inclusive attitudes were over-ridden by practical and professional concerns of teachers.

It is clear, however, that beliefs and culture do matter in IE (McDonald, 2004) and the importance of cultural assimilation of IE in Samoa assumes significance because it is a borrowed policy. It was borrowed because of a mixture of forces (Tufue-Dolgoy, 2010), but mainly due to the influence of bilateral and multilateral agreements and the desire to improve education for all students. However, as Sanga (2005) argued, cultural assimilation of ideas can be problematic because the underpinning values of international and donor agencies may encroach on the recipient's values and operating systems.

Method

This qualitative, phenomenologically oriented study sought insight into stakeholders' perspectives and experiences about IE and used a Samoan conceptual framework to guide the study—the concept *ola*, which has multiple meanings, was adopted as a research metaphor. The first meaning refers to a traditional woven basket requiring a meticulous selection of leaves and careful weaving to prevent seepage, and is the analogy for the literature search and choice of methodology leading to refinement of the research problem. The interlacing of the basket was akin to the different parts of the study culminating in the report. Life—the second meaning—symbolises the up-to-date knowledge, epistemologies, and philosophies (the food for the study). The third meaning—light—highlights the manner in which the knowledge and research findings would enlighten. The purposively selected participants comprised the following:

- (1) fifteen representative Samoan primary teachers from three schools involved in the IE initiative (a programme promoted by MESC to introduce key educators to IE), seven curriculum advisors and five parents of children with special needs who contributed via a focus group;
- (2) one MESC official, one curriculum advisor, two teacher educators and three community members who contributed via individual interviews; and
- (3) three participants (a teacher, a community leader and a parent) who were identified for individual follow-up interviews, reflecting on the study's findings and themes.

A “voice” to the findings was obtained by taping responses and using the *talanoa*—a face-to-face group conversation dependent upon cultural knowledge and emotional sharing in a collaborative relationship, typically used in the Pacific to establish rapport (Otsuka, 2005). The interview questions varied slightly depending upon the group. Information was sought about IE understanding, its usefulness, experiences and feelings, barriers/enhancers, ways to improve IE, parent/teacher/community roles,

training, resources, educators' awareness, implementation, benefits and disadvantages, consistency with fa'aSamoa, training, and the future of IE. Once collated, responses were related to information obtained from document analysis. These documents outlined national and international policies, procedures, roles, programmes, implementation and other issues, and were obtained from a range of sources such as MESC, university library, government departments, and private collections.

Interviews in the Samoan language were transcribed into English and returned for feedback. Following this, transcripts were read a number of times by the researcher prior to coding (identification of concepts in the data) for a conceptual thematic analysis process (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Credibility was established via triangulation (using several data sources), member checking, peer examination (colleague examination of the research process) and referential adequacy (via audio-recording and field notes) whilst transferability was ensured by using a nominated sample and dense narratives. Dependability was established via detailed description of research methods, triangulation, peer examination and code–recode procedures, whilst an audit (to check researcher bias) and researcher statement of position (making researcher interests and potential biases apparent) facilitated the confirmability of results.

There were a number of potential research limitations. As for phenomenological studies, the participants defined truth which was in turn interpreted by the researcher and, being a small-scale qualitative study, there was potential for generalisation difficulties. In addition to this, potential for researcher bias was ever present as the researcher was a colleague of most of the participants—careful checking of data was adopted to prevent this.

Results and Discussion

Participant responses indicated a number of recurring interdependent findings related to the nature of IE, implementation supports and restraints, policy and partnership concerns and interaction of cultural dimensions with IE.

The Nature of Inclusive Education: Varying understandings and practices

When the educators were asked to comment upon the nature of IE, there were four viewpoints identified: disability, capability, rights, and personal/professional perspectives. Almost all educators accepted the notion of IE although interpretations of it varied. Some adopted a disability placement perspective—students were considered atypical and placed in the regular classroom, with no emphasis upon additional assistance. For example, one teacher stated:

IE ... focuses on children who are not normal ... it is a system where these students who are abnormal are educated in the same system.

Other teachers positively emphasised the value of context and learning capabilities of students situated with their peers, and some interpreted IE from a human rights perspective or a wider perspective based upon the need to redress marginalisation in society:

Inclusive Education is ... the slow learners, those who have problems with learning are put together with the strong ones ... to help them learn.

My own definition of inclusive education is all encompassing, ... including all people all students/children ... to fulfil potentials.

Teachers' responses to IE also indicated a range of views about their personal–professional responsibilities and practices. For example, some believed teachers should accept challenges and try to implement IE and be personally and/or professionally responsible:

Once you accept this child he must be in my class regardless of his condition ... without any pre-conditions like he is the son of the pastor, this child is rich ... poor ... inclusive starts from me. I must think, act and behave inclusive.

In the back of my mind [they] are my children ... I am driven by the thought that my work will be reflected through my own children ... The fruit of your work ... will come back via your own children.

Because of the range of perspectives about what constituted IE, it was not surprising there were differences expressed about effective teaching practices. For example, the issue of grouping exemplified these differences. Many believed in separating students with special needs from other students when intensive teaching was undertaken because it made teaching easier and, what is more, some students could flounder if the same work was given to everyone. A number believed there was value in heterogeneous group membership, however:

... grouping makes it easier for me to teach. Cos there is no reason why they should be put together then the strong children will be faster (excel) and how about the weak children?

The reason for grouping my class in mixed abilities ... is so the strong students help the weak ones.

Overall, beliefs and implementation ideas indicated contradictions identifying an understanding–practices conundrum. There was a range of inconsistencies brought about by the different IE beliefs and what constituted best practice, exemplifying the need for further training—basic teaching practices for IE seemed to be unknown by many of the teachers. Nevertheless, although it is accepted that (radical) change in school and classroom practice requires careful planning and strategising (Fullan, 2007), some teachers accepted the students into classes and included them despite this lack of training. This highlighted the very complex relationship between teacher beliefs and practice—sometimes beliefs impact significantly on practice, at other times they are a weak influence. It therefore seems that participant experiences and professional/personal/cultural beliefs impact upon practice, creating a complexity difficult to untangle, and whether practice follows beliefs or *vice versa* is another dimension requiring consideration (Guskey, 2002). Furthermore, relating teachers' beliefs and understanding to effective practices and the needs of the students also requires consideration (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2009), and yet this was not elaborated upon by teachers apart from peer learning opportunities and group work.

Supports and Restraints

The second major finding revolved around perceived supports/restraints of IE. In particular, significant people in the community and family members were considered important supports whilst the IE benefits to teachers and other students also helped to

sustain it. But on the other hand, class size, lack of resources, inadequate teacher training and policy implementation procedures were considered barriers.

Many suggestions were focused on IE supportive mechanisms and processes. For example, it was noted that the council of chiefs, orators, church ministers and politically powerful people (in the village and parliament) often had useful ideas to promote IE and influence attendance. It was noted by one parent that:

There is a penalty imposed on those families whose children are not sent to school ... the village council may take action, and make a decision to banish them from the village.

The important role that the *aiga* (family) had in an individual's development was discussed by some participants, as was the importance of a parent-teacher partnership. As one teacher stated: "What inspires, me are positive responses from parents who came and thanked me". Although parent-school liaison in Samoa is at a developmental level, the significance of parent assistance was emphasised, particularly to help with instruction and teacher support. A number of parents noted the value of support in raising the achievements of the children and therefore valued parent-teacher liaison:

Parents' support is very crucial, if there is anything that I need they can provide ... Parents come in and help with reading, of the at-risk child ... this relationship is very important and they are my right hand.

Whatever the teachers need I am always happy to serve. I did not have a good education but I now focus on my children for I know that this is their future.

If parent and teachers do not work together then it becomes a barrier. In terms of homework and bringing them to school.

Some teachers believed IE benefitted the other students and the teacher. For instance, the development of positive attributes, such as acceptance and non-discrimination (and so forth) by the other students, was promoted by IE. Rather than being a hindrance, these students became a source of value for the development of social skills and positive attitudes in the other students. Teachers also gained from the IE experience because it provided a means for facilitating professional growth:

[My son] seems to have excelled since he was moved. ... All he did at Malolo was draw ... and now he is very fast especially in maths ... His speech is developing ... guess because the children talk to him.

The benefit is that the teacher, like myself, will learn from it, because if I have a deaf child then I will try to learn how to sign.

Although there were a number of potential opportunities, many participants were also aware of IE implementation difficulties. For example, a number of teachers noted the impact on a teaching programme that was already under stress from high student numbers, the demands of examinations, and lack of teacher experience and adequate training:

There are too many children already in my class, plus these children ... it will slow down the program. I would just say "Leave that child to be taught tomorrow and teach these children".

Not good if the children are brought into school and we have had no training ... because if brought into my class I may end up doing something drastic to the child.

I just did not know what to do ... The principal said “all you have to do is to make him quieter” ... Sometimes I hit him with a broom.

A number of teachers and parents had concerns about negative teacher and parent attitudes and irresponsible behaviours. A few teachers indicated that some colleagues made value judgements based on family background, resulting in stereotypical attitudes. In addition to this, some felt “dumped” upon and believed that parents did not always provide adequate child-rearing practices:

Problems arise from home ... One can easily note a child whose parents never give him good instructions; those ones keep going off the track.

Some teachers identified shame and non-caring attitudes about having a child with a disability in the family as contributing to poor student enrolment and attendance. This was interpreted as dysfunctional family dynamics and/or because of societal/cultural reactions:

Parents are one barrier when they are ashamed to bring their children to school. Even now there are children who are hidden at home and are not taken to school.

My heart is with the slow learners for some of them attend school once a week. Parents are too slack in sending children to school. Children who are slow learners are well known for missing schools.

However, some parents believed teachers were the cause of a number of difficulties. For example, a few parents noted the deleterious teacher authoritarian style and the lack of understanding and skill that promoted non-acceptance:

I see the teacher as a barrier to the child’s education if the child refuses to come to school due to the teacher’s characteristic—if the teacher is too strict and hit the child resulting in the child refusing to attend school.

... there was a problem when we put my son into one of the classrooms and the teacher ... said “Oh no we never taught anyone before with a disability I don’t know what to do, I don’t want him in my class”, which was so stupid ... I couldn’t believe it.

In many countries, lack of teaching resources and funding are often considered inadequate and this was no different in Samoa. It was frequently noted that a range of resources was lacking and, in particular, technical resources were often considered scarce. One teacher related lack of resources to her motivation to teach:

My expectations ... is that the Ministry should be well prepared in terms of resources so the program will be carried out. ... For example, a photocopying machine. I would not be lazy [then].

Parental lack of resources was also identified as a problem—lack of finance, provision of food and transport (and so forth) often impacted on student attendance. As one parent noted:

With those families who don't send children to school, when asked for reason as to why children are not sent to school, the answer is that parents cannot afford to, meaning not enough money to send children to school ... Some children attend school but would stay home again when there is no money for school fees.

The feedback from the participants has indicated that there is a range of perceptions about how IE could be sustained, but almost all of the teachers (and some of the parents) indicated that there were issues to be resolved to ensure it worked correctly. The importance of the pastors, family and the benefits to all students and teachers were highlighted as promotive factors, but class sizes, lack of training and resources and teacher/parent unresponsiveness were concerns. These issues were directly related to the classroom teaching-learning environment but concerns were also expressed about policy and lack of partnership as indicated below.

It was clear in the minds of many of the participants that effective IE was directly related to perceptions of support and collaboration. As Fullan (2007) detailed, understandings, practices and attitudes necessary for educational change need to be integrated within a context of support. McDonald's (2004) study concerning implementation of ideas in a similar setting to Samoa highlighted that it was the key variable for establishing effective IE. In this current study, desire for support related to a range of issues including the need for physical and material resources, curriculum and pedagogy support, professional development opportunities, commitment, interagency assistance, and support from others. Although it was implicitly and explicitly noted by the participants that a passionate and dedicated teacher was the most important resource, a framework of other supportive mechanisms was also identified as important. These findings are consistent with those of Losert (2010), who identified successful IE in terms of a range of support factors including adequate flexible funding, partnerships, adequate resources, curricula and instructional knowledge, at least daily part-time attendance in a regular class by students, teacher professional development and ongoing performance-based assessments linking to student programming reviews. Indeed, the participants identified many of these needs. The difficulty is of course funding of resources—an adequately prepared IE teacher costs, as does the provision of advisers and technical resources. But, as Stubbs (2008) notes, the limitation of resources is not necessarily problematic providing awareness and principles are known, local context and culture are utilised and there is ongoing effective participation by stakeholders.

Policy and Partnership Issues

Policy development and implementation were important considerations impacting upon IE, according to many of the teachers. Frequent mention was made of the MESCC's sudden decision to implement IE when all were unprepared for it. As one teacher noted:

... they [the children] are pushed straight into the classroom ... teachers are not so accepting ... Now it has gone back to the problem that was there at the beginning ... teachers refusing to take them and children refusing to come to school and parents being scared themselves.

Furthermore, the approach seemed to cause continuing confusion and uncertainties. Responses from the MESCC official and a number of the teachers indicated that the changes revealed an unknown and uncertainty. Teachers agreed that the failure of the

segregated units in schools was because of lack of collaboration, and the “new” venture seemed no different:

If we look at the system, when we tried to build up special units to accommodate students to mainstream education, what have they done? They [MESC] closed the units.

We [MESC] are planning a monitoring visit ... specifically on these children ... we want to know how truthful IE is, but I don't know how successful it is.

Underlying these concerns were beliefs that there was no teacher–MESC partnership, no evidence of success and it was policy rhetoric pushing IE, not collaborative action. As noted by one teacher, partnership between teachers and policy-makers would promote IE but it needed to be a *quid pro quo*:

When we [i.e., teachers] ask for our salaries the MESC pushes this [IE] on us other than trying to identify why there is a shortage of teachers—it is because of [low] salaries.

Another teacher commented on the overall lack of action:

But now it's like ... no more talk but action. The policies are there and people have talked and talked ... now action [is needed].

These findings indicated a perceived disconnection between policy-makers' and educators' interpretation, understanding and practice of IE. Furthermore, although most teachers had an inclusive mindset it did not link to effective practice—a difference frequently observed (Lindsay, 2007). Undoubtedly this disconnect was partly related to the need for IE training and knowledge (Phillips, Alfred, Brulli, & Shank, 1990) but also to a range of other contextual factors—demands of examinations, inadequate resources and the perceptions about top-down policy.

The policy-partnership theme implies ambiguous expectations, sustained because of the difficulty of educational change, exacerbated by policy-down demands and minimal teacher involvement and training.

Cultural Considerations and Inclusive Education

A fourth finding revolved around the degree to which the culture was consistent with IE. To a certain extent, the relationship of the culture to IE has been discussed in the results already presented; in this section, there is an elaboration about how IE and fa'aSamoa directly interact.

The understanding of the place of fa'aSamoa in IE was essentially captured by one teacher:

Fa'aSamoa is putting children together and not to set apart. My views are based on my own experience growing up in Samoa, observing fa'aSamoa.

Furthermore, there were many ideas identified that related to the responsibilities of caring and support and the consequent blessings arising from these behaviours. But the imposed western education system was viewed by some as creating disability, promoting individual competition in a society founded upon cooperation and inclusiveness. One parent noted:

Education was removed from the family and this disability notion came out very clear whereas in the traditional Samoa the role of the family is education ... [now] we have to get a certificate. Our traditional learning does not need those things ... inclusive it's very much a Samoan thing but we are losing it.

Another teacher represented the views of many when discussing the importance of Christian beliefs and togetherness:

I don't think [segregation] is appropriate ... our culture and the Bible claims this is not the will of our Lord to discriminate.

Some others were concerned that IE was an imported idea not sufficiently related to the cultural context and unlikely to have immediate impact unless local ownership occurred. As one teacher described:

Most of these ideas we are using are outside ideas. I'd like Samoa to take the credit ... but deep down I know that this was very much a push from overseas and that is why it is going to take longer ... because we don't own the idea.

Bines and Lei (2011) noted the need to adapt IE to the context and that especially in developing countries there was a need to localise and gain policy commitment. There were indications by many participants in the study that the philosophy of IE and fa'aSamoa were consistent but there were perceptions of a disconnect because of implementation difficulties and the emphasis on individual attainment set with a Western-driven educational philosophy.

Overall, the data obtained from participants resulted in a number of significant findings and, although there was no general understanding about what constituted IE, in the main most were not overly critical of the idea—only the implementation of it. Participants were aware of what IE had to offer but also of the need to balance this with the practical and logistical requirements. They identified a range of local contextual factors promoting and thwarting IE and also a number of inconsistencies between the plans and their implementation. Participants' comments often reflected cultural issues that impacted upon IE—fa'aSamoa was a lens to understand IE implementation.

A Meta-explanation: The paradox of Inclusive Education in Samoa

Analysis findings indicated a number of interdependent themes: the understanding-practices conundrum, support and restraints, policy concerns and culture-IE issues. A meta-theme could also be detected—the paradox of IE in Samoa.

Although, increasingly, beliefs about people with disabilities are being linked to family background, place, competence and ability, there remains the general view that individuals with a disability are still part of a family/village. But to an extent this is challenged by IE because it highlights and makes more public student differences. IE has become a category itself defining important differences between students; the paradox is, as participants identified fa'aSamoa to be embracing of members (as does IE), the inadequacies of implementation and the ensuing debates about what can be achieved have created students who are clearly “visible” in an individually oriented education system. The adoption of IE in the absence of clear understanding and direction, resourcing and support inadequacies, lack of effective teacher professional development and a cultural adaptation, exacerbates the problem.

This contradiction highlights that borrowed policies are not value free (Phillips & Ochs, 2003), and being externally driven often create contradictions in the local context. IE is driven by the belief that all children have a right to participate together and yet this is problematic in Samoa. Because local consultation, adaptations, resources and professional development have been overlooked, problems have emerged and been exacerbated by adoption of a western-oriented education system. Of course the introduced approach can hold promise but it also has potential to void the inclusive ideology. Samoan IE needs to be framed in a culture of local support as identified by McDonald (2004). Furthermore, the approach would be better framed within a social-centred ideological paradigm—that is, IE outcomes need to have more than an inclusive environment promoting individuals’ attainments. IE should be more aligned to promoting the collective good (e.g., cooperative learning methodologies; objectives relating to group meetings between parents/teachers) and a standards-based system with a human face and social emphasis is needed. (Refer, for example, to the ideas of Flynn, Mesibov, Vermette, & Smith, 2004.)

At the policy level, the issue of IE adoption and its impact on implementation have been documented. Two interactive explanations can provide insight. The first simply outlines that the student is located within a multiplicity of interacting influences (international, cultural, educational, programme, family and individual qualities) and IE encounters these in implementation. The second perspective, however, identifies that ultimately the education of the student in this cultural context is closely bound by a number of specific local dilemmas—the interaction of an understanding-practice conundrum, with the need for the development of support for individuals within a system that borrows international policies. Together these perspectives contribute to the paradox of

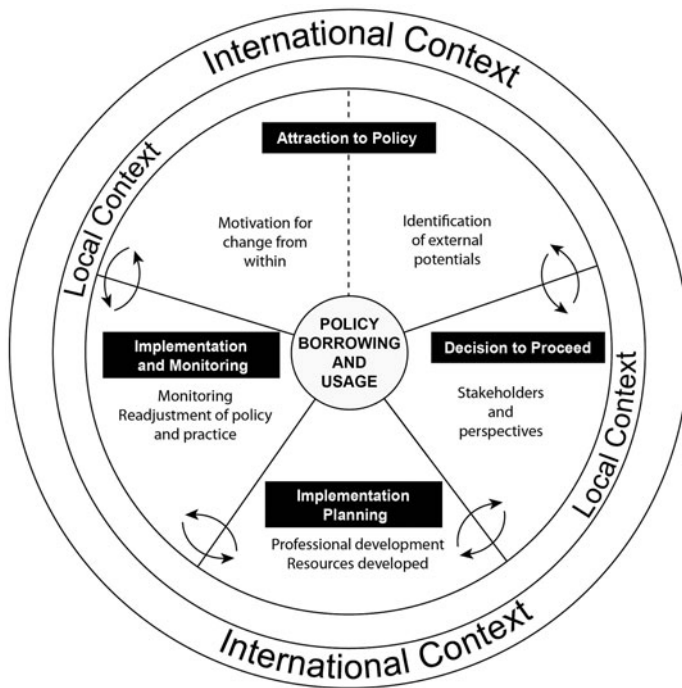


Figure 1. Education policy borrowing system development.
 Note: Modified from Phillips and Ochs (2003).

IE; fa'aSamoa and IE could be cosy bed-fellows but implementation difficulties within an individually oriented education system preclude this from happening.

An alternative implementation approach (see Figure 1) can provide insight into how the paradox could have been overcome. This explanatory model is a modified version of Phillips and Ochs's (2003) ideas—its strength lies in an introduced cybernetic dynamic quality with options for interactions/negotiations and adaptations as well as being centred within a local and international context. It is accommodating, for it permits a review of stages with options for revision.

There are four stages involved in this model, each needing local contextualisation of the borrowed policy. The model provides a framework for interpreting and gauging perceptions about the introduction of IE into Samoa. The first stage is concerned with the impetus for policy. Is it internally or externally driven? Why? Is it politically motivated? Why? Accordingly, how contextually relevant would it be? The next stage is "agreement to proceed" with transparency, credibility and experience as important markers—if stakeholders feel comfortable about the value and benefits of a local policy then the likelihood of resistance is minimal. The third stage concerns preparation for implementation and often involves planning for professional development and resource preparation but an acknowledgment that resistance results if this is not undertaken. The fourth stage, implementation and monitoring, is essential for evaluation and assessment for further adjustments.

Each phase of this model can provide insight into how IE could have been more successfully introduced into Samoa. Its value lies not only in its dynamic nature but in its significance for forward thinking and planning and backward alterations and adjustments.

Conclusion and Future Directions

IE has been implemented in Samoa; however, it has not been an easy transition. Interestingly, because of the centrality of inclusiveness in fa'aSamoa, it was essentially a debate centring upon the fit for the local scene and practicalities and resourcing, not a philosophical issue. Essentially, training and preparation for IE were considered inadequate, not only because there was too little, but because it did not reflect the local setting's needs. This highlights the need to consider fa'aSamoa in future IE research endeavours.

The road to IE has been constructed in Samoa; this research provides the structure for a map. However, the terrain remains largely uncharted and there probably remain twists and turns, potholes and speed-bumps to navigate before the IE highway is completed:

E sao mai i Amouta 'a e tali' le Amotai, fa'i fo'i o lea, 'a o le toe aso i Moamoa.

Things went well on Amouta, but there is still Amotai and finally the big day on Moamoa.

Proverb meaning: we have overcome some difficulties, but there are more ahead of us.

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Note

1. See www.internetworldstats.com/pacific.htm.

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