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Inclusive Education in Zimbabwe: the Need for Teachers to Be Trained in Assisting Learners with Learning Disabilities in Mainstream Primary Schools of Bulawayo Province

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Abstract:

The study sought to establish the impact of teachers' training in the implementation of inclusive education for children with learning disabilities in primary schools of Zimbabwe. A survey design which was fundamentally quantitative in nature was used. Two hundred and fifty primary school teachers from five different provinces of Zimbabwe were randomly selected and participated in the study. The data were collected using a questionnaire. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 16 was used to perform the descriptive and inferential statistical analyses. The results revealed that primary school teachers in primary schools of Zimbabwe lacked training in the implementation of inclusive education for children with learning disabilities. The findings also indicated that most of the teachers in schools do not have the expertise to deal with learning disabilities in a teaching learning-situation mainstream class. It also emerged in the current study that teachers in the mainstream primary schools are not adequately trained to identify children with learning disabilities in their classes and how they should assist them.

Keywords: *Inclusion, Inclusive education, disabilities, learning disabilities*

1. Introduction

The adoption of UNESCO's Salamanca statement and framework for action on special needs education (UNESCO 1994) has resulted in inclusion of children with special educational needs in educational settings becoming a primary service option. Inclusive education is the practice of including everyone irrespective of talent, disability, socio-economic background, or cultural origin in supportive mainstream schools and classrooms where all student needs are met (Swart, Engelbrecht, Elloff & Pettipher, 2002:176). Inclusive education means that all students in a school regardless of their strengths, weakness or disabilities in any area become part of the school community. In this regard, inclusive schools should respond to the diverse needs of their children, accommodating all styles and rates of learning ensuring quality education to all. The basis of inclusion is that special needs pupils have a right to the benefits of a full school experience, with needed modifications and supports, alongside their peers without disabilities who receive general education (Mukhopadhyay, Nanty & Abosi, 2012:2). Inclusion describes the process of integrating children with special education needs into the least restrictive environments as required by the United Nations declarations that give all children the right to receive appropriate education (UNESCO, 1994: viii). For inclusive education to be able to achieve its goals it needs competent teachers. Teachers are perceived to be integral to the implementation of inclusive education (Haskell, 2000:3). Research communicates the view that teachers are the key to the success of inclusionary programmes (Cant, 1994: 40; Tshifura, 2012:116), as they are viewed as linchpins in the process of including students with learning disabilities into regular classes (Whiting & Young, 1996: 30). Other studies acknowledge that inclusive education can only be successful if teachers are part of the team driving this process (Malone, Gallagher & Long, 2001: 580). Commitment to a different professional role does not immediately empower educators with the skills needed to carry out the new role successfully. If teachers in mainstream and special education want to implement inclusion within their classrooms, they need to know how far they should consult or instruct and also how to collaborate or operate independently.

2. Literature Review

In Zimbabwe, Mavundukure and Nyamande (2012: 2) maintain that most teachers in special schools and special classes in Zimbabwe have no special training to teach learners with disabilities and other special educational needs. In his research on 'The state of inclusive education in Zimbabwe', Chireshe (2013:226) also concluded that most teachers were perceived to be lacking training in inclusive education regardless of the existence of more universities and teachers' colleges in Zimbabwe that are training teachers in special needs education. Researchers note that teachers may resist the implementation of inclusive education for children with disabilities, such as Hearing Impairment and physical disabilities, on account of inadequate training (Heiman, 2001: 453; Hines & Johnston, 1996:7; Musengi & Chireshe, 2012:231; Pottas 2005:62). Other researchers, in Botswana (Mukhopadhyay, 2013: 76; Dart,

2007:63) and Swaziland (Fakudze, 2012: 68) have focused on the implementation of inclusive education for children with mental retardation and visual impairment and maintained that the majority of the interviewed teachers had not been trained in inclusive education whilst undergoing their initial teacher training, which explains their lack of clear and precise knowledge of what inclusive education is.

It would appear that teachers perceive themselves as unprepared for inclusive education for children with learning disabilities because they lack appropriate training in this area (Daane, Beirne-Smith & Latham, 2000: 333; Malone et al., 2001: 583). Inadequate training relating to the implementation of inclusive education for learners with learning disabilities, may result in lowered teacher confidence as they plan for inclusive education (Schumm, Vaughn, Gordon & Rothlein, 1994: 25). In support of this view, Dagnew (2013:61) maintain that teachers must be both competent and confident in their teaching ability in inclusive settings. The teachers are responsible for any adaptation that may be necessary for students' success in the learning environment and consequently, these teachers must have skills to develop and adapt curricula that meet the needs of students with learning disabilities. Guerin and Male (2006:4) argue that the lack of qualified special education teachers in South Africa lead to poor instruction, poor classroom management which is coupled with the lack of knowledge about the learning disabilities experienced by learners and the general decrease of quality instruction.

In Zimbabwe, a research by Musengi and Chireshe (2012:230) revealed that teachers admitted to not having the skills to individualistic instruction in class and lacked appropriate training in inclusive education which would assist them in helping children with learning disabilities in the school. Teachers who have not undertaken training regarding the inclusion of children with learning disabilities may exhibit negative attitudes towards inclusion of children with learning disabilities. From this view of related literature the present study sought to establish the impact of teachers' training in the implementation of inclusive education for children with learning disabilities in primary schools of Zimbabwe using the quantitative approach to research in order to establish, confirm and validate relationships.

The lack of skills, knowledge and tools to identify children with learning disabilities has a serious negative impact on the provision of effective teaching and support in the classroom (Mkhuma, 2012:35). Teachers often depend on their intuition that something is wrong with a certain learner or they make an incorrect identification, which becomes apparent when they differ on whether such a learner requires extra support or not. Other teachers carelessly label learners as 'lazy,' 'naughty' or 'slow,' and further assign any failure to their parents' socio-economic status (Khoele, 2008:64; Ntsanwisi, 2008:1). Research by Ntsanwisi (2008: 89) observed and concluded that some teachers, having failed to identify children with learning disabilities have labelled and still continue to label learners who experience barriers to learning as slow learners, mental retards, behaviourally disordered, crippled, emotionally disturbed and so forth. The current study would want to assess whether lack of skills to identify children with learning disabilities affects the implementation of inclusive education for children with learning disabilities in primary schools of Zimbabwe. Some teachers may not have the skills and knowledge to identify different forms of learning disabilities (Khoele, 2008:64). The lack of knowledge to identify different forms of learning disabilities for students in primary schools requires teachers to acquire basic theoretical knowledge and practical skills to identify the learning disabilities. According to Mpya (2007:46), the teachers' limited knowledge about learning disabilities may create problems in the identification of students who experience barriers to learning in primary schools.

In her research, Fakudze (2012:74) argue that teachers are not fully supported through the provision of resources for their training. They are trying to implement inclusive education but they encounter many problems because of lack of preparedness on the part of governments. Teachers in South Africa, feel that the government has to train them for inclusive education and provide them with the necessary resources for the smooth running of inclusive education (Fakudze, 2012:74). As it is, in South Africa and Botswana teachers upgrade themselves at their own expenses on a part-time basis (Fakudze, 2012:75). Teachers in South Africa believe that the Ministry of Education must bring people who have learnt about psychology and disabilities to teach and show them how to help these learners. According to Fakudze (2012:75), the South African Government should do what it can to make sure that teachers are given the skills so that they teach efficiently and implement inclusive education. In view of the above, the present study seeks to establish whether the above South African Scenario applies to Zimbabwe.

The training of teachers in inclusive education will bring a positive impact in the implementation of inclusive education for children with learning disabilities in primary schools of Zimbabwe. However, the implementation of inclusive education in schools may also depend on the availability of material resources. The next section deals with how material resources affect the implementation of inclusive education for learners with learning disabilities in schools.

2.1 Goals of the Study

The study sought to establish the impact of teachers' training in the implementation of inclusive education for children with learning disabilities in primary schools of Zimbabwe. The study also sought to establish the strategies that could be suggested on improving inclusive education implementation in Zimbabwe.

3. Methodology

3.1. Design

The survey design which was mainly quantitative in nature was used. The survey was used to provide a clear picture of how teachers' training that affects the implementation of inclusive education for children with learning disabilities as they appear in primary schools settings of Zimbabwe. Surveys are normally appropriate for studies that seek to obtain participants' perceptions, opinions and beliefs on a phenomenon (Slavin 2007). Since the present study sought to establish the impact of teachers' training in the implementation of

inclusive education for children with learning disabilities in primary schools of Zimbabwe, the survey design was chosen as the most appropriate design for the study.

3.2. Sample

The primary school teachers were used in this study because they are the implementers of inclusive education in primary schools of Zimbabwe. They are in a position to give the required information on how teachers' training affects the implementation of inclusive education for children with learning disabilities in primary schools of Zimbabwe. The sample was drawn from five conveniently selected educational provinces which are: Bulawayo, Harare, Midlands, Masvingo and Matabeleland North. The sample consisted of 250 primary school teachers. The teachers were randomly chosen from primary schools in their respective regions or place of work, using a table of random numbers. Randomised samples in the survey designs facilitate the generalisability of results to the target population (Neuman & Neuman, 2000:247). In this study, the teachers were selected because of their knowledge and experience in inclusive education.

3.3. Instrumentation

Questionnaires were used in this research in an effort to reach as many respondents as possible. The questionnaire items for this study are in the form of a four or five point Likert-Scale. The Likert scales were used in this study for the structured items to allow for fairly accurate assessments of beliefs and opinions from the respondents. For most of the items a 5-point Likert scale was used. The items focused on the challenges faced in implementing inclusive education and how the challenges can be overcome. Two inclusive education experts were asked to check on the relevance and clarity of the questionnaire items.

3.4. Procedure

Permission to conduct the study was sought from and granted by the Head Offices of the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education of Zimbabwe. A research assistant distributed and collected the questionnaire. She explained the purpose of the study to potential participants. Participants were informed that participation was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw from the study at any stage during the study.

3.5. Data Analysis

The researcher used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 16 to perform the descriptive and inferential statistical analyses. The SPSS package allowed the researcher to summarize and display data in graphics, particularly tables.

4. Results

The results are presented in Table 1 in accordance to the categories that emerged. The findings of the present study on primary school teachers' training on the implementation of inclusive education for learners with learning disabilities in primary schools are presented and analyzed below.

| Aspect | Teachers' Responses | | | | | | | Ratio | |
|--|---------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------|-------------------|-------|---|--|
| | Very great extent | Great extent | Un decided | Little Extent | Very little extent | Total | Ratio | | |
| 1. Trained to identify a learner with learning disabilities | 69 (3.1%) | 56 (2.5%) | 5 (0.2%) | 36 (1.6%) | 84 (3.7%) | 250(11.1%) | 1.0 | Chi-square (X²) X²=1466.56 df=39 p<0.01 (significant) | |
| 2. Have skills to assist children with learning disabilities | 54 (2.4%) | 42 (1.9%) | 10(0.4%) | 45(2.0%) | 99(4.4%) | 250(11.1%) | 0.7 | | |
| 3. Trained to assist children in learning disabilities | 14(0.6%) | 13 (0.6%) | 4 (0.2%) | 95(4.2%) | 124 (5.5%) | 250(11.1%) | 0.1 | | |
| 4. Trained to assist in Special Needs education | 66(2.9%) | 15 (0.7%) | 13 (0.6%) | 43 (1.9%) | 113 (5.0%) | 250(11.1%) | 0.5 | | |
| 5. Have classroom management Skills | 18(0.8%) | 14(0.6%) | 0(0%) | 123(5.5%) | 95 (4.2%) | 250(11.1%) | 0.1 | | |
| 6. Initial teachers' training courses assist learners with learning disabilities in schools. | 57(2.5%) | 29(1.3%) | 22(1.0%) | 39(1.7%) | 103(4.6%) | 250(11.1%) | 0.6 | | |
| 7. Trained to implement IE in schools | 20(0.8%) | 14(0.6%) | 5(0.2%) | 109(4.8%) | 102(4.5%) | 250(11.1%) | 0.2 | | |
| 8. Have knowledge about inclusive education | 66(2.9%) | 43(1.9%) | 11(0.5%) | 48(2.1%) | 82(3.6%) | 250(11.1%) | 0.8 | | |
| 9. Effect of Non-inclusion of Special Needs Education courses in initial teachers' training | 29(1.3%) | 15(0.7%) | 7(0.3%) | 96(4.3%) | 103(4.6%) | 250(11.1%) | 0.2 | | |
| TOTAL | 393(17.5%) | 241(10.7%) | 7781(3.4%) | 634(28.2%) | 905(40.2%) | 2250(100%) | | | |

Table 1: The extent to which teachers are trained in the implementation of inclusive education (IE) for children with learning disabilities in primary schools

The first column of Table 1 represents the statements stated on the questionnaire. The second column in the table represents responses to the rating scale of the particular questionnaire item relating the training of teachers in the implementation of inclusive education for children with learning disabilities. The rating scale shows the level of agreement on the various statements from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. The last two columns represent ratios and Chi square calculations respectively.

The number of responses observed for each questionnaire item has been indicated and the percentage each cell contributes towards the total frequency is provided in brackets. A Chi-square test was done to establish whether the pattern of response with reference to statements related to the training of teachers in the implementation of inclusive education for children with learning disabilities in primary schools of Zimbabwe differed significantly. The establishment of the significance implied that primary school teachers'

responses on how teachers training affected the implementation of inclusive education for children with learning disabilities in primary schools in Zimbabwe were different. The respondents evaluated some statements 'more positively' (more to the 'agree/strongly agree' side) and others to the more 'negatively' ('disagree/ strongly disagree') side. The significance was established at 0.01 or 0.05 significance levels. If the probability associated with the Chi-square value is less than 0.05, significance on the 5% level of significance is established. Ratios were also computed for each questionnaire item in order to identify items that were negatively or positively rated.

The information from Table 1 shows a p value of less than 0.01 for primary school teachers. Such a current difference is extremely statistically significant by conventional criteria. The computed Chi-square test for primary school teachers shows significant differences in primary school teachers' responses on the extent to which teachers are trained in the implementation of inclusive education for children with learning disabilities in primary schools of Zimbabwe. Ratios in Table 4.2 reveal that the extent to which teachers are trained in the implementation of inclusive education for children with learning disabilities in primary schools of Zimbabwe by primary school teachers was substantially more negatively viewed. They did not have training in assisting children with learning disabilities and classroom management. Inversely, the ratios in the table also reveal that school teachers' training to identify a learner with learning disabilities was positively viewed by the primary school teachers.

5. Discussion

It emerged from the respondents of all the five provinces of Zimbabwe in the current study that teachers in Zimbabwe are not trained in the implementation of inclusive education for children with learning disabilities in primary schools. The primary school teachers, all viewed the teachers as not having the training in assisting children with learning disabilities. The lack of teachers' training in the implementation of inclusive education negatively impacted on the implementation of inclusive education for children with learning disabilities in primary schools. The findings that teachers are not trained in the implementation of inclusive education by the current study concur with a research by Tshifura (2012:116) in South Africa which revealed that teachers were not trained enough to implement inclusive education. This is also supported by Engelbrecht and Green (2001:19) who maintained that the implementation of inclusive education for children with disabilities in South Africa is hampered by the incompetent untrained teachers. In Zambia, the study by Aro and Ahonen (2011:32) found practicing teachers in inclusive primary schools were untrained in inclusive education and have poor reading and grammar skills, weak elicitation techniques, limited vocabulary, as well as limited facility to adequately assist children with learning disabilities.

The lack of skills, knowledge and tools to identify children with learning disabilities has a serious negative impact in the implementation of inclusive education for children with disabilities (Mkhuma, 2012:35). Teachers often depend on their intuition that something is wrong with a certain learner or they make an incorrect identification, which becomes apparent when they differ on whether such a learner requires extra support or not. Furthermore, a research by Ntsanwisi (2008: 89) in South Africa observed and concluded that some teachers, having failed to identify children with learning disabilities have labelled and still continue to label learners who experience barriers.

The current study further revealed that qualified teachers in the primary schools of Zimbabwe do not have the classroom management skills to assist children with learning disabilities in a mainstream class. The primary school teachers, education officers and college/university lecturers all agreed in their responses that qualified teachers in primary schools have no classroom management skills to assist children with learning disabilities in the implementation of inclusive education in primary schools. This means that the teachers are not prepared to implement inclusive education for children with learning disabilities. The findings that teachers do not have the skills to manage and assist children with learning disabilities concur with Mavundukure and Nyamande (2012: 2) who maintained that most teachers in special schools and special classes in Zimbabwe have no special training to manage and assist learners with disabilities and other special educational needs. This is also supported by Chireshe (2013:226) who also concluded that most teachers were perceived to be lacking training in inclusive education regardless of the existence of more universities and teachers' colleges in Zimbabwe that are training teachers in special needs education. It would appear that teachers perceive themselves as unprepared for inclusive education for children with learning disabilities because they lack appropriate and specialized skill to manage their classes in inclusive setup. (Daane, Beirne-Smith & Latham, 2000: 333; Malone et al., 2001: 583).

6. Conclusion

From the findings of this study, it can be concluded that school teachers in primary schools of Zimbabwe lacked training in the implementation of inclusive education for children with learning disabilities. The findings indicated that most of the teachers in schools do not have the expertise or skill to assist children with learning disabilities in a teaching learning-situation mainstream class. It can also be concluded that teachers in primary schools are not adequately trained to identify children with learning disabilities in their classes and how they should assist them.

7. Recommendations

From the findings of the current and the literature study, the implementation of inclusive education would be improved if there would be adequate professional preparation and training of Zimbabwean primary school teachers in the implementation of inclusive education for children with learning disabilities. The teachers in primary schools need to be trained in teaching methods that are child-centered, and using active and participative learning techniques that improve their confidence and capacity to teach children both with and without learning disabilities. The current study further recommended that the government should put in place clear educator skills development plan for the implementation of inclusive education for children with learning disabilities that would address the problem

of skills shortage on the part of teachers who are already serving in the mainstream schools. Short in-service training courses on implementation of inclusive education must be offered to all teachers.

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