

Special Needs Education In-Service Teacher Trainees' Views on Inclusive Education in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT The study investigated special needs education (SNE) in-service teacher trainees' views on inclusive education in Zimbabwe. Participants were 76 SNE in-service teacher trainees (37 male, 39 female) from Great Zimbabwe University's Faculty of Education. A questionnaire was used for data collection. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse the data. There were no significant differences between male and female SNE in-service teacher trainees' views on inclusive education. The trainees believed that the present Zimbabwean curriculum did not meet the needs of SNE children, inclusive education affected the teaching methods used, only specialist teachers could handle included children and that regular class teachers could not easily adapt their teaching programmes to accommodate included children. The trainees also believed that Zimbabwe was not ready for inclusive education and that parents of children without disabilities resented inclusion. Recommendations on the improvement of inclusive education in Zimbabwe especially in teacher training were made.

INTRODUCTION

The inclusion of children with special needs in educational settings has become a primary service option since the adoption of the UNESCO's Salamanca statement and frame-work for action on special needs education (UNESCO 1994). Although inclusion may mean different things to different people, it is generally believed to mean the extent to which a school or community welcomes children with special needs as full members of the group and values them for the contribution which they make. The children actively belong to, are welcomed by and participate in a mainstream school and community (Farrell 2004). Thus, inclusive education is about presence, participation and achievement of all learners (Ainscow 2005; Engelbrecht and Green 2007).

Inclusive education is an educational practice based on the social premise of justice that advocates for equal access to educational opportunities for all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, emotional or learning disability (Loreman et al. 2005). The guiding principle in inclusive education is that all children

have a right to learn in mainstream schools.

Inclusive education is an endeavour to recognize and take into account the sameness of learners while at the same time paying due regard to differences and diversity among individuals concerned (Norwich 1996). Ainscow (1995) states that the aim of inclusive education is restructuring schools so as to address the learning needs of all learners. That is, schools must change in order to be able to meet the learning needs of all learners in a given community (Kisanji 1999). In a similar vein, Armstrong (2005) points out that inclusive education means transforming entire educational systems to remove barriers to all learners thereby providing all children with equitable access to quality education.

Zimbabwe is a signatory to several inclusive education-related international charters and conventions such as the Salamanca statement and framework for action on special needs education (UNESCO 1994). In Zimbabwe, inclusive education is associated with disability and the school. It is one of the several ways in which the Zimbabwean education authorities have sought to enhance citizen rights for children with disabilities (Mpofu et al. 2007). Before the 1980 independence, there were no disability related policy or support at schools for black African students (Mpofu et al. 2007). Although Zimbabwe currently does not have legislation for inclusive education, inclusion-related policies like

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the Education Act of 1996 and the Zimbabwe Disabled Persons Act of 1996 were enacted after the 1980 independence. The Zimbabwean Education Act introduced free and compulsory education for all students regardless of any demographic differences implying support for inclusive education. The Zimbabwean Disabled Person Act addresses rights of people with in relation to education, employment, recreational facilities and community and social services but prevent people with disabilities to sue the Zimbabwean government for lack of access to government facilities.

Peresuh et al. (2006) state that today, there is much understanding of inclusion in many countries due to extensive research in the area. Their extensive review of literature on inclusive education revealed that one of the key factors that affect inclusion is the attitudes of teachers, parents and children/students. There is general agreement that teachers' attitudes, beliefs and skills are critical in successfully including marginalized and excluded children in education (Avramidis and Norwich 2002; Chireshe and Ndlovu 2002; Hastings and Oakford 2003; Potas 2005; Parasuram 2006; Mpofu et al. 2007; Stofile and Green 2007; Simui 2009).

Internationally, a lot of research has been carried out on the attitudes of teachers including trainee teachers towards inclusive education. Studies focusing on trainee teachers have been done in Scotland and Northern Ireland (Wishart and Manning 1996; Lambe and Bones 2007), United Kingdom (Avramidis et al. 2000), in America (Ivey and Reinke 2002), in Australia (Campbell et al. 2003); in Australia, Canada and Hong Kong (Loreman et al. 2007), in Nigeria (Obani and Doherty 1984) and in Zambia (Simui 2009). These studies indicate that in most cases, the trainee teachers had negative attitudes towards inclusive education with female trainee teachers having more favourable attitudes. The trainee teachers were reported to have developed positive attitudes towards the principle of inclusion as a result of exposure to children with disabilities.

Unlike in the international arena, the majority of studies on inclusive education in Zimbabwe focus on the attitudes of qualified/ trained mainstream teachers towards inclusive education (Barnatt and Kabzems 1992; Maunganidze and Kasayira 2002; Mushoriwa 2002a; Hungwe 2005; Majoko 2005). To the knowledge of the

researcher, SNE teacher trainees' views on inclusive education have not been investigated in Zimbabwe hence the need for this study. This study sought to establish how SNE in-service teacher trainees view inclusive education in Zimbabwe. Trainee special needs education teachers are key stakeholders being prepared for the disability movement including inclusive education and their views should not be ignored. Their views would be used to improve the implementation of inclusive education. Loreman et al. (2007) state that while pre-service or initial teacher training is seemingly the best point at which to try and influence positive attitudes towards inclusive education, studies focusing on initial or pre-service teachers' attitudes towards inclusion remain limited in number and scope. Simui (2009) propounds that teacher education should be at the 'centre' of inclusive education reform hence, the need to see pre-service teacher education as a beginning in the long journey of inclusive education. He further argues that preparing teachers for inclusive education should include strategies aimed at transforming teachers' practices, which are largely influenced by their attitudes, beliefs and values.

The study focused on the trainee special needs education teachers' understanding and beliefs about inclusive education in relation to their gender. Specifically, the study centred on views pertaining to resources, professional (knowledge and expertise) and policy issues.

Teacher characteristics like gender are assumed to have an impact on the attitudes of teachers towards inclusive education (Hodge 1998; Avramidis and Norwich 2002; Rombo 2006). However, Rombo (2006) reveals that evidence from the literature appears inconsistent as some researchers noted that female teachers had a greater tolerance level for inclusive education than did male teachers (Thomas 1985; Aksamit et al. 1987; Eichinger et al. 1991) while others report of marginal tendency for female teachers to express more positive attitudes towards inclusive education (Harvey 1985) and others (Berryman 1989; Beh-Pajorh 1992; Leyser et al. 1994) did not report that gender was related to attitudes. Al-Zyoudi (2006) also found little difference between the opinion of female and male teachers towards inclusive education. Previous studies in Zimbabwe, for example, Chireshe and Ndlovu (2002) established that female qualified teachers had more positive atti-

tudes towards special needs education children than their male counterparts. The present study sought to find out if what prevails in the literature about attitudes of male and female teachers towards inclusive education among qualified teachers also applies to trainee teachers.

Statement of the Problem

The study was designed to find an answer to the following main research question: What are special needs education in-service teacher trainees' views on inclusive education in Zimbabwe?

Hypothesis

The study hypothesized that there are no significant differences between male and female SNE in-service teacher trainees' views towards inclusive education.

METHODOLOGY

Design: The survey design was used to collect data for this study. The survey design was preferred because it is the most appropriate design where self-reported beliefs and opinions of participants are sought (Neuman 2000; David and Sutton 2004).

Sample: Seventy-six (37 male and 39 female) Great Zimbabwe University SNE in-service teacher trainees participated in the study. They were enrolled in a two-year Bachelor of Special Needs Education in-service programme. Their experience with special needs education ranged from 0 to over 5 years. Participants volunteered to take part in the study.

Instrument: A questionnaire with both closed and open-ended items was used for this study. Three experts in inclusive education were asked to read the questionnaire. The experts had been practicing inclusive education for more than 10 years. They were asked to check whether all the items were clear and whether they captured trainee specialist teachers' views on inclusive education. The experts agreed that the questionnaires were valid hence their suitability for the study.

Procedure: The researcher explained the purpose of the study to potential participants (Great Zimbabwe University Bachelor of Special Needs Education students). After the explanation, volunteers were invited to fill in the

questionnaire. Out of the 85 questionnaires distributed, 76 usable responses were returned (89.4% response rate).

Data Analysis: The SPSS- version 10.0 was used to analyze the data. Obtained data were presented in tables. Descriptive analysis, frequencies and percentages were used. Qualitative responses from open-ended items reflecting the same themes were grouped together.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows that the majority of both male and female SNE in-service teacher trainees believed that the present curriculum did not meet the needs of SNE children, inclusion affected the teaching methods one uses, not all teachers could handle an inclusive class, regular class teachers had problems adapting their programmes to accommodate included SNE children, the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture is not prepared for inclusive education, parents of children without disabilities resent inclusion, SNE children should be included where possible and that Zimbabwe was not ripe for inclusive education. The chi-square test in the table shows that there were no significant differences between male and female teacher trainees' beliefs on the above issues.

The table also shows that the majority of the female respondents believed that inclusion was most likely to hurt the emotional development of included SNE children while the majority of male respondents believed that SNE children will be isolated by regular class classmates. However, there was no significant difference in the two groups' response to the above issues.

Results from Open-ended Questions

Fifty percent of both male and female respondents indicated that the present curriculum does not include SNE children. They indicated that the curriculum was examination oriented. Both male and female respondents (28.1%) indicated that the present curriculum lacks the necessary support for inclusive education.

The majority (91.9%) of both male and female respondents indicated that teaching methods had to be modified if inclusion is to succeed. This is because some SNE children are slow and need special methods. Ninety-five percent of both male and female respondents in-

Table 1: Trainee teachers' perceptions on inclusive education by gender

Gender	Item	Response			Chi-square test (χ^2)
		Agree	Disagree	Not sure	
	Present curriculum meets SNE children's needs				
Male		4(10.8%)	31(83.8%)	2(5.4%)	$\chi^2=4.28$, df=2, p>0.05 (non sig)
Female		2(5.1%)	29(74.4%)	8(20.5%)	
Total		6(7.9%)	60(78.8%)	10(13.2%)	
	Inclusion does not affect teaching methods used				
Male		2(5.4%)	33(89.2%)	2(5.4%)	$\chi^2=3.95$, df=2, p>0.05 (non sig)
Female		6(15.4%)	33(84.6%)	-	
Total		8(10.5%)	66(86.8%)	2(2.6%)	
	Any teacher can handle an inclusive class				
Male		-	37(100%)		$\chi^2=1.95$, df=2, p>0.05 (non sig)
Female		2(5.1%)	37(94.9%)		
Total		2(2.6%)	74(97.4%)		
	Regular class teachers can easily adapt their programmes to accommodate included SNE children				
Male		8(21.6%)	27(73%)	2(5.4%)	$\chi^2=0.97$, df=2, p>0.05 (non sig)
Female		6(15.4%)	29(74.4%)	4(10.3%)	
Total		14(18.4%)	56(73.7%)	6(7.9%)	
	Ministry of Education is prepared for inclusive education				
Male		6(16.2%)	27(73%)	4(10.8%)	$\chi^2=3.10$, df=2, p>0.05 (non sig)
Female		12(30.8%)	21(53.8%)	6(15.4%)	
Total		18(23.75)	48(63.2%)	10(13.2%)	
	Parents of children without disabilities resent inclusion				
Male		24(64.9%)	3(8.1%)	10(27%)	$\chi^2=3.95$, df=2, p>0.05 (non sig)
Female		24(61.55)	9(23.1%)	6(15.4%)	
Total		48(63.2%)	12(15.8%)	16(21.1%)	
	SNE children should be included where possible				
Male		34(91.9%)	3(8.1%)	-	$\chi^2=0.01$, df=2, p>0.05 (non sig)
Female		36(92.3%)	3(7.7%)	-	
Total		70(92.1%)	6(7.9%)	-	
	Inclusion is likely to hurt the emotional development of SNE children				
Male		17(45.9%)	15(40.5%)	5(13.5%)	$\chi^2=2.68$, df=2, p>0.05 (non sig)
Female		23(59%)	9(23.1%)	7(17.9%)	
Total		40(52.6%)	24(31.6%)	12(15.8%)	
	SNE children will be isolated by regular classroom classmates				
Male		21(56.8%)	14(37.8%)	2(5.4%)	$\chi^2=5.93$, df=2, p>0.05 (non sig)
Female		18(46.2%)	13(33.3%)	8(20.5%)	
Total		32(42.1%)	34(44.7%)	10(13.2%)	
	Zimbabwe is ripe for inclusive education				
Male		2(5.4%)	33(89.2%)	2(5.4%)	$\chi^2=0.01$, df=2, p>0.05 (non sig)
Female		2(5.1%)	35(89.7%)	2(5.1%)	
Total		4(5.3%)	68(89.5%)	4(5.3%)	

indicated that not every teacher can handle inclusion because SNE needs knowledge and expertise. They indicated that regular class teachers do not have the necessary training to adapt and accommodate SNE children.

Both male and female respondents indicated that although the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture had an inclusive education policy, the policy was not binding, the Ministry had not adapted the environment, provided little

support and lacked resources. Thus, they felt the Ministry was not prepared. Seventy-six percent of both male and female respondents indicated that Zimbabwe was not ready for inclusive education because it lacked material and trained personnel, lacked adopted infrastructure, lacked clear policy and the majority of its people had negative attitudes towards disability.

Sixty-four percent of both male and female respondents indicated that parents of children without disabilities resented inclusion because they did not understand disability. They felt that SNE children should be included where possible because they are human beings and this will make them feel near normal. They also felt association leads to acceptance.

Fifty-three percent felt that inclusion was likely to hurt the emotional development of SNE children because the included children were most likely not to get the help they needed and the settings had negative labeling. However, some felt this depended on the type and severity of the disability.

DISCUSSION

The study revealed that teacher trainees felt that the present curriculum did not meet the needs of SNE children. The curriculum as indicated by some respondents is examination oriented and teachers tend to focus on preparing learners for examinations to achieve high pass rates and get recognition. As a result, children with disabilities are ignored. Mpofu (2000) states that African education systems tend to emphasise competition rather than cooperation among learners. Thus, learners with disabilities are often ignored. The negative effects of the exam oriented curriculum on inclusive education were also observed in Lesotho (Johnstone 2007). Arvimidis (2005) also reports of inclusive education receiving a raw deal because of the competitive atmosphere in schools where schools are expected to raise their standards. He cites some literature for example, Farrell (2001) and Dyson et al. (2003) reporting that some schools resist inclusive education because they believe it will lower academic standards in their schools.

Related findings on present curriculum not meeting the needs of SNE children were established in Namibia by Mowes and Engelbrecht (2004) who established that inclusive education

can only succeed if the current curriculum is changed.

In-service teacher trainees in this study felt that SNE children should be included where possible. The finding is consistent with those reached by Miles (1999) and Johnstone (2007). The finding implies that the trainee special needs education teachers believed that not all SNE children should be included. There are some learners with profound disabilities who may need specialized equipment and support which is normally available from special classes. This sentiment is supported by Mutepfa et al. (2007) who state that children with significant disabilities have been turned away from schools in Zimbabwe because teachers perceived themselves as untrained and ill-equipped to assist them. In a similar vein, Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996) and Avramidis and Norwich (2002) argue that teachers resist inclusion of students with severe disabilities and behavior problems.

It also emerged from this study that trainee teachers believed that not all teachers could handle an inclusive class. Similar findings have also been established in Namibia (Mowes and Engelbrecht 2004; Zimba et al. 2007) and South Africa (Stofile and Green 2007). SNE in-service teacher trainees believed that inclusion affected the teaching methods used and thus, regular class teachers would have problems adapting their normal teaching programmes to accommodate included SNE children. Regular class teachers could have problems in adopting their teaching methods to cater for the inclusive class because they are not trained to handle SNE children. Similar findings also obtains in South Africa where Pottas (2005) reports that teachers lack adequate knowledge, skills and training for effective implementation of inclusive education. The finding also confirms UNESCO (1986) cited by Kisanji (1999) that the majority of mainstream teachers needed training in the special needs education field. Peresuh (2000) argued that inclusive education could work in Zimbabwe if teacher training courses were restructured to make them compatible with inclusive education and including special needs education content and practice in teacher training. A related argument was put forward by Mpofu (2000) who asserted that everyone from school personnel to parents and local communities need preparation and training for inclusive education to succeed in sub-Saharan Africa. In a similar vein,

Mutepfa et al. (2007) state that research on Zimbabwean teachers' attitudes towards students with disabilities point to a need for boosting of teacher training in inclusive education practices. Inadequacy of preparation of teachers to meet the needs of diverse students was also established by Avrmidis (2005). As such, Avrmidis (2005) calls for making initial teacher training courses more relevant to inclusive education while Loreman et al. (2007) advocate for the inclusion of practical experiences with inclusive education by teacher training colleges. This is most likely to result in teachers' colleges producing well qualified teachers for the inclusive education movement.

SNE in-service teacher trainees also believed that Zimbabwe as a country was not ripe for inclusive education. This finding concurs with Peresuh's (2000) assertion that although inclusion was an accepted principle in Zimbabwe, the country was not yet positioned to implement it. The lack of readiness was evidenced by the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture's lack of a binding policy on inclusion. Mpofu et al. (2007) observed that Zimbabwe has no specific legislation for inclusive education although a number of Government policy issues like the Zimbabwe Education Act (1996); the Disability Persons Act (1996) and Education Secretary's policy circular No. P.36 (1990) are consistent with the intent of inclusive education. In a related argument, Mutepfa et al. (2007) state that successful implementation of inclusive education in Zimbabwe is hampered by lack of commitment by policymakers towards students with disability. The Ministry did not supply SNE materials to support inclusive education and the classes were too large. The school environment was also not adapted to cater for SNE children. The Ministry did not also have trained teachers in SNE. The finding of lack of material and large classes confirms previous Zimbabwean findings by Mpofu (2000); Peresuh (2000) and Mpofu et al. (2007). Mowes and Engelbrecht (2004) also found out that lack of materials affected inclusive education in Namibia while Johnstone (2007) made similar observations for Lesotho. A similar scenario was also reported in South Africa by Eloff and Kgwete (2007) who revealed that South African teachers included large classes and insufficient resources as challenges to inclusive education. The scenario of lack of resources may be explained by Eleweke's (2001)

argument that expenditure on SNE is given little priority in many developing countries. The findings of this study and those from literature support Mushoriwa's (2002b) observation that lack of resources in developing countries negatively affects the implementation of inclusive education.

A key issue that hindered inclusive education was the prevalence of negative attitudes towards disability. This was evidenced by trainee teachers' belief that parents of children without disabilities resented inclusion. The parents may believe that the included children may slow the pace of the teacher thus negatively affecting their children. Some may even believe that their children may contract the disability. Previous studies in Zimbabwe for example, Mpofu (2000); Peresuh (2000); Chireshe and Ndlovu (2002) and Mpofu et al. (2007) also revealed negative attitudes towards children with disability.

It also emerged that the in-service teacher trainees perceived included SNE children as being isolated by their regular classmates. The children without disabilities may isolate the included children because they may not have the social skills to interact properly with them. The issue of negative attitudes alluded in the preceding paragraph could also account for the isolation. The trainee teachers believed that inclusion was most likely to hurt the emotional development of SNE children since they were isolated by their classmates. Peresuh (2000) however, believed that inclusion of SNE children had long term benefits. He argued that the SNE children would develop social skills from being included and in turn influence the attitudes of children without disabilities who would form and shape society's future.

CONCLUSION

From the findings of this study, there were no significant differences between male and female SNE in-service teacher trainees' views on inclusive education in Zimbabwe. Inclusive education in Zimbabwe is experiencing some challenges as perceived by the trainee teachers. The challenges hinge around policy, present curriculum, resources and society's attitudes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the SNE in-service teacher trainees' views, the Ministry of Education, Sport and

Culture should put in place a binding inclusive education policy. There is need for curriculum change to give all learners equal opportunity to succeed. There should be a separate budget for inclusive education so that the issue of resources can be addressed. All new teachers should be trained in SNE while the already servicing ones should receive some in-service training for them to handle included children. Society's attitudes towards disability should be improved through awareness campaigns. There is also need for research on the perceptions of those SNE children who are already included towards the practice. There may be need for further study which focuses on SNE in-service teacher trainees' views on how the training they are receiving prepare them for inclusion.

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