RESEARCH ARTICLE

EXPLORING CONSTRAINTS TO EFFECTIVE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	The education of children with special needs has become a worldwide phenomenon. Inclusive education is an approach that focuses on the idea that all children should have equal learning. Removing barriers to participation in the learning of all learners is at the core of inclusive education. This study set to explore the challenges that interfere with the successful implementation of inclusive education. The qualitative case study deemed fit to be used in the study. The population consisted of teachers and school heads undertaking a Bachelor of Education Degree Education Psychology at Great Zimbabwe University. The sample consisted of 35 teachers and 5 school heads. The study established that effective implementation of inclusive education is hampered by inadequate training of teachers on special needs education, lack of resources like equipment, negative attitudes and lack of specific policies on inclusion. The study recommends that government should come up with stringent measures to ensure policies are implemented.

INTRODUCTION

Discrimination against people with disabilities has been widespread before the 1960s and 1970s. They were excluded from the mainstream schooling. This segregation was said to contribute to prejudice and bias in schools and society (UNESCO, 2000). A gradual shift led to initial efforts which consisted of special led programs, institutions and specialist education which functioned outside of the mainstream education. The genesis of special schools can be traced to Europe and North America. People with disabilities began to advocate for the end of discrimination and inequalities in accessing social services (www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/ diva2:421429/fullTEXT-102). Many countries started enacting social policies and registration meant to eliminate all forms of barriers to participate in various life activities. Special education needs was being transformed into a more democratic perspective, the term inclusion began to be used. According to UNESCO (1994) education programmes should be designed and implemented to take into account the unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs of every child. The Salamanca statement and framework for action on Special Needs Education (1994) reaffirmed the right to

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education of every individual as enshrined in 1948 declaration (UNESCO, 1994). The UNESCO'S Salamanca Statement in 1994 has become the impetus to the notion of inclusion. The Statement held that inclusion and participation were essential to human dignity and enjoyment and exercise of human rights. The Statement signed by representatives of 92 governments and 25 international organisations calls on governments to adopt the principle of inclusive education, enrolling all children in regular schools unless there are compelling reasons for doing otherwise (UNESCO, 2000:44). Inclusive education appears to be a concept in the 21st century with most countries recognizing appreciation and accepting children with disability in inclusive classrooms. The philosophy of inclusive education was a world-wide advocacy of education to children with special needs in the mainstream schools, regardless of their abilities (Lakhani, 2006).

By the way of definition inclusion is a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners and of reducing exclusion to and within education system, it is concerned with learners being placed in mainstream where there is a commitment to removing all barriers to the full participation of each child as a valued, unique individual (Chepkwony, 2009; Stubs, 2008). An educationally inclusive school is one in which teaching and learning, achievement, attitudes and well-being of every child and young person

matters (Office for Standards in Education, 2001). Rieser (2008) asserts that schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other impairments. It enables children to reach their full potential. Thus, inclusive education as echoed by Bunch (2008) is a human rights and social justice approach to education and disability. Zimbabwe is a signatory to the Salamanca Statement and Framework for action on Special Education (Musengi, Mudyahoto and Chireshe, 2010). Inclusive education in the schools seeks to address the learning needs of all children and young people with special focus on the marginalized and the excluded. In Zimbabwe in 2013 new constitution section 22 was incorporated with the motive of equating disabled and able-bodied children. Section 22(2) of the Zimbabwe constitution states that the State and institutions and agencies of government and every level must within the limits of the resources available to them, assist persons with physical, or mental disabilities to achieve a full potential and minimize the disadvantages suffered by them (the constitution of the Republic of Zimbabwe Amendment (No 20) 2013:21).

The practice of inclusive education has in recent years been widely embraced as an ideal model for education internationally (Donohue & Bornman, 2014). However, this acceptance of the ideal practice does not necessarily translate into what actually occurs within the classroom, hence this study was concerned with exploring the constraints in the implementation of inclusive education.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Although the concept of inclusive education has been promoted internationally for more than a decade most children with disabilities are finding it difficult to access basic education, multiple barriers remain to the full participation of children with disabilities in education. Children with special needs are not being provided with basic resources, facilities and equipment to cater for their special needs, they are socially excluded from the mainstream settings by nature of their learning disability.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study was guided by the following questions:

a) What are the barriers to the effective implementation of inclusive education?
b) What mechanisms should be devised to alleviate these challenges?

METHODOLOGY

This section discusses the design and methodology used to gather data on barriers affecting successful implementation of inclusive education.

The Design

The study adopted a qualitative case study. A case study is an in-depth study of an individual or unit in its real life context. It is a situated activity that locates the researcher in the world of study, of an isolated group of the population (Magwa &

Magwa, 2015:53). The researcher tries to discover all the variables that are crucial in the history or development of the subject. This study set to examine challenges faced in implementing inclusive education in Zimbabwean schools.

Sampling

Creswell (2010) asserts that sampling in social research aims to produce representative selections of population elements. The target population consisted of teachers and school heads. Teachers and school heads were purposefully selected to participate in the study. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) in purposive sampling participants are selected because they possess particular knowledge being sought. Teachers and school heads undertaking the Bachelor of Education in Educational Psychology were selected in the study because of their knowledge and experience in inclusive education. Teachers and school heads are important sources of information related to implementation of programs in their schools. The sample comprised of 35 teachers (15 males and 20 females) and 5 school heads (3 males and 2 females).

Data Collection and Analysis

In addition to the literature review, data was collected through questionnaires and interviews. The data was analysed using thematic approach. Similar codes were grouped together to form major ideas from the data (Creswell, 2010). The identification of themes provided depth to understanding individual views of participants.

Ethical considerations

When carrying out research, the best interests of participants must always be the guiding principle (Magwa & Magwa, 2015). With insight from the above authors the researcher informed the participants of the purpose of the study after obtaining their consent to participant. Anonymity and confidentiality were achieved by removing names of participants from research instruments, identifying responses by way of codes and not including names in the research report. Permission to audio-tape interviews was obtained. Participants were informed that their participation in the study was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw from study at any stage during study.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in Vygotsky socio-cultural theory. Vygotsky was critical of segregation and mindless inclusion. He proposed that a very different learning environment where all staff could concentrate on the individual needs of the child was necessary. Vygotsky asserts that the student must always be maintained within the mainstream social and cultural environment (Chepkwony, 2009).

The theory consists of the value of the socio-cultural context in learning, significance of social activity in the development of individuals and the input each active learner has towards their development (Malbryd & New, 1994). Vygotsky purports that children do well in learning with the help and guidance of

adults or more capable peers. This help according to Vygotsky is scaffolding. In scaffolding, learners and teachers begin by diagnosing the learners' level of operation so as to be able to give the appropriate help (Goldstein, 2008). The theory also involves the notion of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) where individuals are aided in tasks that are beyond their level of comprehension and ability. Teachers in inclusive classrooms need to first establish the status of each learner so that they can give suitable help and guidance. They need to establish the extent to which the child is disabled so that the learner is helped to fit into the mainstream class setting without segregation.

In his socio-cultural theory, Vygotsky emphasised importance of learning cultural tools. Mallory and News (1994) asserts that Vygotsky's conceptualizations of knowledge are relevant in identifying ideal means in which children with disability can receive an education. Instrumental values are cultivated through learning and are shaped by the social cultural context. Instrumental values are skills that are internally necessary for example, knowing how to hold a pencil. Learning cultural tools enables individuals with special needs to fully participate and be accepted in school. Language as a cultural tool for communication is also effective in inclusion education. Teachers can enhance language development by using proper language so that learners imitate and this will lead learners never to despise or stigmatize each other.

Implementation of inclusive education outside the environments advocated by the Vygotskian out-look results in constraints (Chepkwony, 2009). The school system represents a socio-cultural community where all learners must somehow fit. Inclusion brings together both disabled as much as the non-disabled. The sociocultural theory is thus relevant to this study because it recognises inclusive schooling as inclusion of all students, regardless of ability into same schools and classrooms.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the determinant factors that impede the successful implementation of inclusive education. The analysis of the empirical data yielded four themes on the notable difficulties faced in inclusion education.
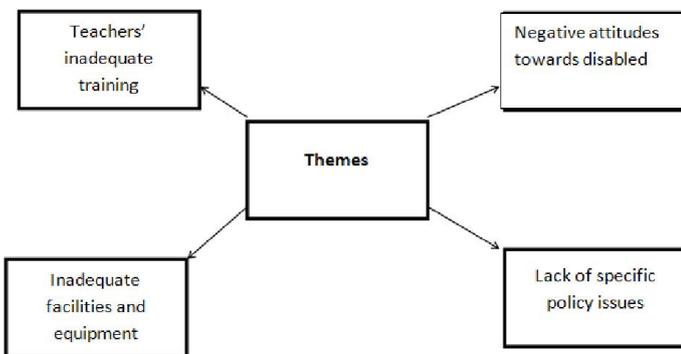
Source: Field data 2015

Fig. 1. Themes to Barriers to Successful Implementation of Inclusive Education

The number of participants who mentioned each barrier to effective implementation of inclusive education are presented in the graph below.
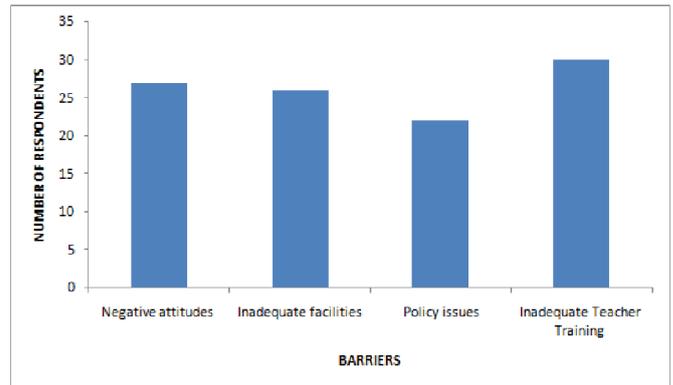
Fig. 2. Responses to Barriers

The graph shows that inadequate teacher training with 30 responses (75%) is a key challenge to inclusive education. Second was inadequate facilities and equipment with 27 responses (67, 5%), third was negative attitude of teachers, parents and peers with 22 responses (55%), lastly, lack of specific policy issues had 15 responses (37, 5%).

THEME 1: Inadequate training of teachers

Results from both questionnaires and interviews reveal that both school heads and teachers lack proper knowledge in the implementation of inclusive education. As reflected in the graph above 75% of the participants mentioned inadequate training of teaching as a setback in successful implementation of inclusive education. From the sentiments or responses it was clear that effective inclusion will only remain a dream if teachers lack the knowledge and skills to handle disabled and non-disabled learners in one class. The following quote reflects the sentiments of most of the participants:

Placing students with special needs in an inclusive setting where the teacher has no expertise results in minimal learning. In most schools, teachers manning the mainstream classes lack the training to handle inclusive classes. Teachers' colleges do not offer special needs education training.

This finding corroborates with findings made by Mwangi and Orodho (2014) in Kenya on inclusive education. It was established that teacher preparedness in terms of training and experience posed great challenge to inclusive education with most teachers agreeing that their professional training was inadequate to take charge and impart knowledge and skills to pupils with special needs. As rightly put by Forbes (2007) the obligations of inclusive education will be met when all schools have teachers with adequate training in special needs education.

THEME 2: Inadequate facilities and equipment

Of the total participants, 67, 5% (refer to Fig 2) mentioned that another key challenge in successful implementation of inclusive education is attributed to poor infrastructure and lack

of provision of specialized equipment. Absence of disability friendly facilities were said to impede inclusion. The participants listed narrow doors and corridors, poor toilets, and play grounds as unsuitable physical facilities in the inclusion setting. It emerged that learners with specific disabilities require specialised educational resources such as hearing aids, braille, textbooks wheel chairs and talking books. One school head lamented that:

There are inadequate resources to help learners with special needs. Most of the infrastructures at schools do not have elevators but steps and this blocks health interactions when for example, a student fails to pave way to meet the school head.

Literature has reiterated the fact that shortage of resources impedes the implementation of inclusive education. The construction of some facilities like library, laboratory, classrooms, do not portray child friendly learning environment. The designs are not adapted to suit special needs education pupils (Chireshe, 2011; Alkin & Oredho, 2014). Charema in 1990 observed that in some mainstream schools where children with learning impairments were integrated, hearing aids had no batteries or codes, some speech trainers were not working. He also noted that some wheelchairs were old fashioned and difficult to push (Charema, 2005).

THEME 3: Negative attitudes towards learners with disabilities

Negative attitudes are just as obstructive as other barriers like physical barriers, limiting those with disabilities to participate fully in their learning (www.Ise.ac.uk/asiaResearch Centre/files/ARCWP34-DasKottomuri.pdf). Findings of this study revealed that negative attitudes of teachers, peers and parents influence successful implementation of inclusive education. These various negative attitudes are summarised in the table below.

Table 1. Negative attitudes towards disability

Category	Negative attitudes
Regular teachers	• consider children with disabilities as responsibility of specialist teacher • they feel distributive behaviours cause disturbances delaying course completion
Peers	• Low acceptance of the disabled • Tease the disabled • Bully the disabled • Feel disability is transmitted
Parents	• Unwilling to share work load with teacher • Not visiting school regularly to monitor child's progress • Not free to take their disabled children to school, they view disability as a curse.

In a study by Avramidis, Bayliss and Burden (2000) cited in Charema (2005) it was noted that teachers showed negative attitudes when they were allocated pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties, fearing that they disturb the class. Having large numbers already and being assigned some special education students was also said to contribute to teachers developing negative attitudes to the disabled leaners.

Literature indicates that acceptance by peers provide a much greater challenge for children with disability (www./se.ac.ok./asia ResearcCentre/files/ARCWP34-dASKttumi,pdf). The peers in school are the classes on par, play an important role in lives of children with disability. Attitudes of parents, teachers and peers are decisive factors for successful inclusion. Negative attitudes can result in difficulties like decline in academic performance, dropping out of school or behaviour problems.

THEME 4: Policy issues

Lack of specific policy issues was mentioned by 37.5% of the participants as a barrier to successful implementation of inclusive education. Lack of direct supportive legislation leads to failure to implement inclusion programs as is reflected in the statement below:

Policies and circulars are there but these are not enforced. What is contained in the policies and circulars is quite different from what is actually happening in the so called inclusive schools. Policies largely remain on paper, with minimal actual implementation.

Similarly Charema (2005) posits that policy and legislation are essential to ensure that services are provided. Agreeably, Mutepfa, Mpofu and Chataika (2007) found that there are no specific legislation for inclusive education in Zimbabwe. Zindi (1997) cited in (Charema, 2005) assert that some developing countries develop splendid policy plans to stimulate programs that educate children with special needs in order to tempt donors to donate funds but fail to implement the programs.

Conclusion

As highlighted in the Salamanca Statement the roles of inclusive education are to accept all excluded or disadvantaged children and youth with various special needs and improve and enrich the quality of education in classrooms in a way that children with special needs would stimulate and influence those without special needs in a positive way, and eliminating discriminatory attitude (UNESCO, 1994).

There are many barriers for educating children with disabilities in regular classes. Lack of training by teachers in special education derails the inclusion of children with disabilities in regular classes. Resource related challenges attributed to poor infrastructure, lack of provisions of specialized equipment required by disabled are also barrier. If society holds negative attitudes towards people with disability, the success of inclusive education may be far from over (Chireshe, 2011). Without enforcing policies in the implementation, realizing provision of appropriate services for children with disabilities, inclusive education will remain at an embryonic stage due to absence of legislation enhancing the provisions of those services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Basing from findings of this study the following recommendations are made:

- There is a need for teachers to train in inclusivity. There is need to undertake specialised further training in special needs education so that teachers are professionally prepared to handle such learners.
- Colleges need to upgrade and offer quality training in the special needs education field. There should be a module on special needs in training for all teachers.
- It is recommended that there should be improvement of physical structures where disability friendly facilities should be constructed so as to easy movements and operational activities of children with special needs.
- Schools need to be resourced accordingly. Instructional materials should be provided so that teachers find it easy to discharge their responsibilities.
- There should be legislation that ensures continuous provisions of materials, appliances as well as legislations that ensure the physical school infrastructure are disability friendly.

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