

Challenges Faced in the Provision of Inclusive Primary Education for Learners with Disabilities in Mzilikazi District of Bulawayo

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Abstract

The study sought to determine challenges faced in the provision of inclusive primary education for learners with disabilities, and this pushed the need for the study. The study used Interpretivism paradigm which then employed a descriptive research design. The population of the study included learners, teachers and school heads of schools in Mzilikazi District of Bulawayo. A sample of twelve school head, four learners and five teachers from the two schools selected per cluster was used. The study made use of questionnaires and interviews to access relevant data. The data was presented in tables and graphs, being analysed according to the research questions. The findings of the study revealed that learners with learning disabilities in Mzilikazi District of Bulawayo face challenges in terms of the teachers' attitude towards learners with learning disabilities, the learning materials thus instructional materials and the physical facilities at schools in the provision of inclusive primary education.

Key words: Inclusive education, Provision, Challenges, Disabilities.

1. Introduction

The stumbling blocks that retard the teaching and learning process should be address holistic. These require flexible measures in the curriculum, teachers training in the different areas of special needs, provision of instructional material and human resources and providing access to all learners. Access addresses the physical impediments and the economic barriers. Putting the physical structures which will cater for all learners would not be of any benefit, but having affordable fees that would enable all learners to pay. Obtaining independence in Zimbabwe, brought with it some policy shifts and reforms in many educational areas. The new government policies on education favored growth with equity (Zindi, F. 2007). Due to this, there was a rapid increase in the number of schools and the enrolment also had a shift in demand. In 1987, the government for the day passed a new education act that is the 1987 Education Act.

The major highlight was that every child in Zimbabwe has the right to education. It declared that education to be compulsory and free at primary school. Another notable development was that it placed education in the category of a human right and viewed it as a conveyor belt for social transformation (Government of Zimbabwe, 1987).in 1991 there was an amendment. This introduced school fees at primary school, and schools were classified as either Government Schools or non-Government Schools (Government of Zimbabwe, 1991). The Education Act in 1991 and also in 2006 was amended. In both amendments of 1991 and 2006 there was no provisions and sections specifically addressing the issue of learners with learning disabilities. However, it is enough to highlight that the Education Act, focused on addressing issues of inequality and discrimination. The implication was within that context, inclusive education had to be provided for. On the other side of the coin there were no clear guidelines to help the marginalized children in terms of disability and accessibility.

In 1990, the Ministry of Education publicly made integration operational through its instruction that schools should avail rooms which are specialised for use by those learners with learning disabilities. Pressure from human rights campaigners and alongside with the outcomes of the Jomtien and Salamanca conventions moved the government to introduce inclusive education. Swart (2002) state that in recent times, places available in special schools are deteriorating as more students with learning disabilities joins the mainstream schools. Smith (2003) argue, that it is true that there will always be some children whose needs cannot be met in a regular classroom and will require specialized education system and resources to provide the level of support they require. In the Zimbabwean context according to Mpofu (2004), every school can apply to open a special unit through the assistance of the District Psychological Services officer based at each of the District Offices across the country. The special unit is a separate room devoted specifically to the education of learners with learning disabilities (Soon, R. (2001). Ideally, these classrooms should be staffed by specialised teachers, who are able to provide specific, individualised instruction to individuals and groups of learners with learning disabilities.

Despite this noble idea the inclusive education encounters numerous challenges which impedes its full implementation. No specific legislation or statute for inclusive education in Zimbabwe has be enacted (Mpofu, 2004). Despite that, a number of government policy issues are intandem with the intent of inclusive education. For example, the Zimbabwe Education Act (Education Act, 1996), the Disabled Persons Act (Disabled Persons Act, 1996), and various Ministry of Education circulars

(Education Secretary's Policy Circular No. P36, 1990) require that all learners, despite of race, religion, gender, creed, and disability, have access to basic or primary education (up to Grade 7). On the other hand, the Disabled Persons Act (1996) does not take to task the government to provide inclusive education in any concrete way; in fact, it specifically prevents citizens with learning disabilities from taking to court the Zimbabwean government regarding government facility access issues that may hinder their participation to the fullest (Mpofu, Kasayira et al., 2006). Having no mandatory directive stipulating the services to be provided, there could be no meaningful educational services for learners with learning disabilities in Zimbabwe.

Hence poor performance, school drop outs by learners with learning disabilities in Mzilikazi District becomes a motivational and inspirational factor for the researcher through this current study to investigate challenges faced in the provision of inclusive primary education for learners with disabilities in Mzilikazi District of Bulawayo. Van et al (2001) stipulate that the success of an inclusionary programme may be at risk if a lot of barriers are witnessed. Also Mushoriwa (2001) noted that a number of challenges affect the way learners with disabilities learn in regular classes. Abosi, Mukhopadhyay, & Nenty, (2012).outlined eliminating challenges faced by learners with disabilities can shape the way inclusive education is promoted.

Some of the studies on inclusive education include: A study of the attitudes of primary school teachers in Harare towards the inclusion of blind children in regular classes (Mushoriwa, 2001); Inclusive education in Zimbabwe (Mpofu et al, 2007); Inclusive education practices in Zimbabwe (Ntshangase, S., Mdikana, A., & Cronk, C. 2008); Views of parents on the inclusion of children with special needs in Masvingo, Zimbabwe (Mudekunya & Ndamba, 2011); Inclusion of deaf students in mainstream rural primary schools in Zimbabwe (Musengi & Chireshe, 2012); Prevalence of learning disabilities in mainstream classroom in Zimbabwe (Mavundukure & Nyamande, 2012) only but to mention a few. Since the challenges faced in the provision of inclusive primary education for learners with learning disabilities prevents the success of learning in an inclusive situation, it becomes necessary for this current study to investigate challenges faced in the provision of inclusive primary education for learners with learning disabilities in Mzilikazi district of Bulawayo.

2. Conceptual framework: Inclusive education

Inclusion entails the integrating of children with learning disabilities into the mainstream classes as required by the United Nations (UNESCO, 1994). It is assumed that human differences are normal and that learning must be adapted to suit the needs of the child rather than the child adjusting to the preordained assumptions regarding the pace and nature of the learning process (The Salamanca Statement, 1994). Inclusive education states that schools should be able to seek out, welcome, nurture, respect and educate all learners despite of their gender, physical, intellectual, social, economic, emotional, linguistic or HIV/AIDS status (Mwamwenda, 2013). UNESCO (1994), states that the concept of inclusion has evolved towards the idea that all learners, despite different cultural background, social background and learning backgrounds, should have the same learning opportunities in schools. The main idea is on generating inclusive settings. These should include respecting, understanding and taking care of cultural, social and individual diversities. The issue of equality and inclusive education has been on the international agenda for a number of years now. This has been seen through the different frameworks for action which addresses the different forms of inequality and disparities in education. These inequalities are hinged on gender, race,

religion, physical disabilities and ethnicity. UNESCO, Salamanca Framework of Action, Article 3 states that schools and the education system should accommodate all learners regardless of their physical, intellectual, emotional, social, linguistic or other conditions. UNESCO, Dakar Framework of Action (2000) noted that In order to attract and retain learners from disadvantaged groups and excluded groups, education systems should respond flexibly. Education systems must be inclusive, actively seeking out learners who are not enrolled. In the 1990s the government of Zimbabwe took up the policy of Inclusive Education. The Jomtien Conference (1990) had affirmed the need to uphold the rights of all people while the Salamanca Convention (1994) suggested that Inclusive Education by acknowledging that inclusive education is the most potent in eliminating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities which are learner friendly, building an inclusive society, and achieving education for all. Zimbabwe being a signatory to the Salamanca Convention of 1994, the government was obliged to implement inclusive education.

3. Theoretical Framework: Social Learning Theory

In the school setting, students are expected to learn both academic concepts and behavioral skills. These areas many at times are potential stumbling blocks for learners with disabilities, they create low self-esteem issues which hinder them from social gains. Ntshangase et al (2008) advocates that t learners, due to their historical background of repeated failure at school, are likely to feel as though academic outcomes are beyond their control, thus seeing themselves as less competent than their peers.

Albert Bandura the father of social learning theory purports that learning, both cognitive and behavioral, takes place through the observation modeling and imitation of others. Albert Bandura states that the main characteristic of the social learning theory, are observational learning, a causal model that involves an environment-person-behaviour system cognitive contributions and self-efficacy and agency. His theory is the best because it purports that academic and behaviour modeling takes place through verbal instruction, live modeling by a person, and symbolic modeling. More so, Harding (2009) viewed that inclusive learning capitalize on this theory because learners with disabilities can observe their non-disabled learners and their facilitators and then imitate them both academically and behaviorally. Social learning theory combined with Freudian learning principles focus on teaching learners important real-life social skills.

Adding on though, these learning community learners with learning disabilities are able to middle with their friends and develop friendships. Social learning, development also has some implication for inclusive learning. Lev Vygotsky, says that the zone of proximal development learners learn when guided by an adult or when working with more capable learners. Learners with learning disabilities can learn from their friends or classmates without learning disabilities as well as with the support of the facilitator's guidance to gain a better understanding of the concept being taught. Again the facilitator can scaffold learners with learning disabilities, Harding (2009) advocates that scaffolding occurs a great learning support is providing as the time new concepts are introduced and the support is lowly taken from the learner as they grasp the mater. This theory is suitable for the learners with learning disabilities, as they need a lot of scaffolding especially the mentally challenged. Vygotsky theory is of paramount importance to inclusive education as it ushers the

facilitator with knowledge and understanding the level of development of learners with learning disabilities so that they can assist the learners with learning disabilities. The facilitator can usher the learner through hints and prompts since the learner with learning disabilities is and apprentice, who learns by being pulled, helped or challenged by others. Ntshangase, et al (2008) argues that Vygostky understands of that learner construct knowledge through social interaction with others thus guided learning theory appropriate for inclusive education. These two theories discussed describe how learning occurs in an inclusive classroom. According to Ntshangase, et al (2008) social interaction is at the center stage not only for learners' academic achievement but also for their long term well-being and personal development or growth in conjunction with the social learning theory.

4. Methodology

This research adopted the Interpretivism paradigm to try and analyse and examine challenges faced in the provision of inclusive primary education for learners with disabilities in Mzilikazi District of Bulawayo. The concept of Interpretivism was developed as a reaction to positivism. It was developed among researchers dissatisfied with post-positivism whose theories sort an objective perspective, (Alvermann & Mallozi 2010). The Interpretivists look for meaning in the subjective experiences of individuals engaging in social interaction. Interpretivists interpret the reality though a sense-making process rather than a hypothesis testing process of the positivists. The paradigm operates with different assumptions about knowledge and being. Researchers using an interpretive approach aim to uncover meaning toward a better understanding of the issues involved. This research took this paradigm as it was looking for meanings in the challenges faced by learners with disabilities in mainstream classes. This type of paradigm allowed the researcher to adopt the descriptive survey. Descriptive survey is a research design which describes what we see over and beyond. Descriptive survey research design seeks to obtain information concerning the current status of the phenomena. This means that the researcher can focus on the current situation, assessing the nature of existing conditions as they are. Thus descriptive survey design is considered to be most suitable in this current study. The descriptive survey design involves natural settings, which entail physical observation, interviewing participants and involvement of the researcher, hence the choice of this design which includes human beings as participants can be justified. However, the researcher notes that the descriptive survey study falls short in certain areas. Despite the shortfall of the descriptive survey, the researcher made efforts to minimize them by triangulation of questions and maintaining a professional code to guard against confidentiality and to be as objective as possible.

The population of this current study comprise of one thousand two hundred and forty learners and teachers and thirty-one school heads. There are thirty-one primary schools in Mzilikazi District. These schools are divided into six clusters. It is from the large population that the researcher chooses a sample that resembled the characteristics of the entire group. Therefore, sampling is simply stated as selecting a portion of the population, in the research area, which was a representation of the whole population (Neuman, 2006). The researcher choose the sample size, was as large as the researcher can obtain with reasonable expenditure of time and energy. In order to reduce the bias two schools from each cluster was randomly selected which made a total of

twelve schools. Twelve head teachers from all the selected schools made up the sample and then four learners and five teachers from each selected schools was also selected purposively so as to include only teachers whose classes have learners with special needs and learners with disabilities. The total sample size for this research was one hundred and twenty that is twelve head teachers, sixty teachers and forty-eight learners.

The data collection approach applied in this research was structured and based on the ontological view of universal truths and epistemological notion of objectivity. Collected data provides an evidential base from which researchers can make interpretations and advance knowledge and understanding with regard to a specific research question or problem. The researcher used the questionnaires and interviews as instruments for gathering data.

5. Findings and Discussion

Teachers and head teachers agreed that they experience some challenges in the provision of inclusive primary education for learners with disabilities. Same results were obtained from questionnaires and interviews. Swart & Pertipher (2007) say majority of teachers are faced with a difficult task in their classrooms nowadays. These challenges are brought by bringing learners with special needs to regular classrooms where teachers are expected to continue to use the existing curriculum to teach learners who were previously not in the mainstream. The provision of inclusive primary education for learners with disabilities is yet not optimum because of many challenges. For example, the children, parents, and teachers involved in this programme are not ready to participate fully in the programme. So far, those who go to regular schools are those whose intelligence is average and above and ready to participate in regular activities.

Teachers are experiencing the following challenges: lack of teaching and learning materials or resources, lack competencies, large classrooms which are difficult to manage, an environment which is not conducive for the learners with disabilities and that most schools are inaccessible to learners with disabilities. The problem is further compounded by the fact that educators in the mainstream are not trained, the curriculum is inflexible, and teachers are unable to cope with new roles. In addition, there is inadequate parental involvement, lack of relevant human resources, numerous effects of poverty few resource centers. How to assess learners with different levels of abilities is problematic. When asked if respondents were able to use communicative devices or technological devices, they mentioned that they have never seen some of the materials but theoretically they knew about them but practically not touched them. Educators are to be empowered with skills to make use of the available materials. Inaccessibility to learning materials and educators are some of the contributory factors to learning problems. Pringle (2002) asserts that blind learners are unable to access the curriculum effectively if Braille facilities, large prints and other equipment are not available. Large classes may be viewed as an obstacle to the successful implementation of inclusive education. Westwood (2004) postulates that larger classes place additional demands on the regular educator while reinforcing concern that all students may not receive proper time or attention from the teacher. Van Reusen (2001) says the inclusion of students with disabilities cannot exceed twenty (20) if there is one student with disability in a mainstream class. In some schools it was gathered that there are twenty to thirty learners in one class. It is true

that it is not workable.

Head teachers and teachers agreed with an overwhelming resonance that the provision of inclusive primary education for learners with disabilities is necessary but teachers resent it because of the added workload. Responses from questionnaires showed that teachers have concerns with work load that it will increase. This is similar with what Green & Engelbrecht (2012) says. He states that inclusive education makes an additional demand on teachers especially those in general classes because they are not used to diversity. It is nevertheless the most important suitable route to follow in order to reach the goal of implementing the programme. Teachers' lack of training makes it impossible for them to supervise teaching and learning in inclusive classrooms. One overlooked aspect of inclusion is that it is successful when the teacher receives necessary training. Too often, inclusive education in Zimbabwe has meant dumping learners with disability into a regular education classroom with little support from teachers as they lack training and development. According to Ladbrook (2011) educators who teach learners with disabilities require specialized training. The basic professional training such as the entry level, must prepare the educator to respond to a wide range of learners' needs. All educators must be prepared to accommodate diversity among learners and to recognize the need of some learners for alternative instruction. Educators need to be trained to work with each other as well as other professionals, such as nurses, psychologists, parents and social workers. The results also indicate that schools should be upgraded through staff training so that they are able to respond to the needs of nearby mainstream school. Despite the fact that this was the best move in education that the government of Zimbabwe has made, introduction of different systems of approach in a short space of time seems to be problematic. All participants felt it is too much for them to be expected to understand a lot of different concepts and put to them to practice in a very short space of time. Some felt that the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education preaches the theory but does not practically demonstrate what they mean. For example, the ministry has not shown how educators can solve the problems they are facing every day.

6. Conclusion

It can be concluded that mainstream facilitators generally lacked confidence as they attempted to include learners with learning disabilities into mainstream classes. This may be the result of lack of requisite training. Also the unavailability for instructional media, lack of proper infrastructure to cater for learners with learning disabilities, lack of proper sporting facilities to cater for learners with diverse needs and very large classes where some of the challenges affecting the fully implementation of the provision of inclusive primary education for learners with learning disabilities. The significance of the study gives a clear picture of how the implementation process of inclusive education is processed.

7. Recommendations

- The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education has to lined up clear educator skills development plan that would address the problem of skills gap on the part of educators who are already serving in the mainstream schools.
- Short in-service training courses must be offered to all educators. At least one course on

Inclusive Education must be included in all future education studies that are undertaken by prospective teachers in all different tertiary institutions.

- There should be a collaborative approach in staff-developing facilitators in the area of Special Needs Education. The in-service staff development should be run over a period of time, with each teacher being required to attend several sessions of it.
- There is need to address the issue of facilitator-learner ratio. Facilitator overload may result in them neglecting learners with learning disabilities.
- There should be an improvement in the provision of resources to support inclusive education for learners with learning disabilities.
- There should be an improvement in accessing technology by teachers and pupils. Inclusive education should be everyone's responsibility.

8. References

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