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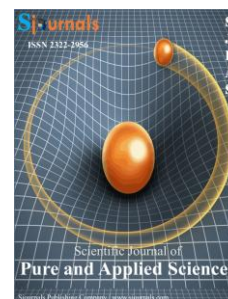**Pure and Applied Sciences**

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Original article

Inclusion awareness among mainstream teachers in rural schools of Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

Inclusion awareness among mainstream school teachers is critical in view of the global trend of educating children with special needs within mainstream schools. This study sought to interrogate the extent of inclusion awareness among mainstream teachers in rural schools of Zimbabwe. The study presupposes that inclusion awareness is a precursor to successful implementation and practice of inclusion. The study is predominantly quantitative and employed a single cross-sectional descriptive survey design to elicit data using a structured questionnaire from 50 teachers. The teachers were sampled via quota and coincidental sampling techniques from 30 schools spread across 5 districts of Zimbabwe. The results of the study indicate that, although many of the mainstream teachers had merely heard or read about inclusion, they had not studied or trained in it and hence lacked in-depth knowledge and insight of the philosophy. From this analysis, the conclusion of the study was that there was a lack of inclusion awareness among mainstream teachers in rural schools of Zimbabwe. On the basis of this conclusion, the researcher recommended in-service staff development workshops for practising mainstream school teachers and administrators, deployment or re-designation of specialist teachers to work as consultants, incorporation of a comprehensive module on inclusion into the curriculum for current teacher trainees, enactment of school level policies on inclusion and large scale studies on inclusion awareness and its implications.

1. Introduction

Inclusion is a philosophy which entails that children with special needs such as disability are educated in mainstream schools that they would have attended with their non-disabled peers had they not been disabled. It entails a restructuring of mainstream schooling to accommodate every child irrespective of ability or disability (Avramidis and Norwich, 2002). Meanwhile, inclusion has become a global trend in education that requires the involvement of and collaboration between educational stakeholders (Hwang and Evans, 2011). This study therefore presupposes that inclusion awareness among mainstream teachers is critical for the successful implementation and practice of inclusion in schools. The study is founded on the social model of disability and is informed by the positivist philosophy and thus is predominantly quantitative.

1.1. Background to the study

Traditionally, children with disabilities were discriminated against and as a result educated in segregated settings such as special schools. According to UNESCO (2010), children with disabilities still remain one of the main groups being widely excluded from quality education. International statistics indicate that 10% of the global population has disabilities (Mallick and Sheesh, 2013) and many of these live in rural areas (Mitra et al., 2011). According to UNESCO (2005), 115-130 million children with special needs are not attending school, 90% of whom live in developing countries and 80 million of them live in Africa. Among those who enrol in formal education, many of them dropout of school before even completing their primary education. In concurrence, Ahsan and Burnip (2007) observe that a vast majority of children with disabilities are not in school while a large percentage of those in mainstream schools dropout due to uninclusive teaching practices among other causes. Mistra et al. (2011) elaborate that in developing countries, disability prevalence is higher in rural than in urban areas and that evidence suggest a lower school attendance among children with disabilities.

In Zimbabwe, it is estimated that there are between 900 000 and 1.4 million people with disabilities (Lang and Charowa, 2007; UNICEF, 2013) translating to a prevalence rate of approximately between 7% and 11%. In the survey conducted by UNICEF (2013), the results showed that the percentage of people with disabilities who had ever attended school was lower than that of those without disabilities and that the proportion of children with disabilities who are not in school tended to be substantially higher in rural than in urban areas. A demographic survey by Lang and Charowa (2007) also showed that 70% of disabled people in Zimbabwe live in rural areas. Similarly about 38.5% of children with disabilities (Most of whom live in rural areas) who enter formal education, do not even complete primary education while 82% of them do not reach Form 4 (UNICEF, 2013). It is upon this background that this study explores the extent to which mainstream teachers in rural schools in Matabeleland South are aware of inclusion. The study is fore grounded on the realisation that inclusion awareness is a precursor to the implementation and practice of inclusion and hence has implications for the retention of students with disabilities in mainstream schools. While inclusion awareness is well documented in developed countries and is assumed to be growing among mainstream teachers even in developing countries, the researcher was motivated to conduct the study after interviewees for university part-time tutorship (Mostly those teaching in rural schools) at one point were persistently failing to define inclusion.

1.2. The philosophy of inclusion

Inclusion entails accommodating all children with diverse needs and cultures within the mainstream of the education system. Hyde et al. (2006) posit that inclusion is often described as the outcome of a process of providing for social and personal learning needs of all students including those with special needs. By definition, inclusion is an educational approach and philosophy that provides all students with community membership and greater opportunities for social achievement (Nevada Partnership for Inclusive Education, 2016). For UNESCO (2005) inclusion is a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities and reducing exclusion within and from education. Unlike, integration, inclusion is concerned with strategies of transforming educational systems and environments to become responsive to the diverse student population (Kursters et al., 2015). Consequently, Bagga-Gupta (2007) explains that inclusion entails that educational institutions function as arenas for diversity where difference is celebrated and not frowned upon and children with disabilities are respected as human individuals. Thus, inclusion describes the process of integrating students with special needs into the least restrictive environments as advocated for by the United Nations Declarations that give all children the right to appropriate education (Mafa,

2012). According to Hyde (2013) it is typically seen as both a process of access towards the participation of all students and a process of change which calls for increased awareness and positive attitudes in terms of legislation, policy and educational practices. In the inclusive order, children with special needs attend the nearest school, attended by their peers and that which they would have attended had they not been disabled.

Thus, inclusion is a process of strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach out to all learners (UNESCO, 2009) while at the same time leaving open the possibility of personal choices and options for special assistance and facilities for those in need (UNESCO, 2005). However special assistance is done without the stigmatisation that comes with separation and exclusion (NVPIE, 2016). For Kursters et al. (2015) in such discourses, there is a need to foreground a specific understanding of inclusion as societal inclusion and as needing a group right-based foundation. In this way, inclusion is a system that thrives to promote the improvement of educational and social frameworks to cope with new trends in educational structure in order to achieve quality education for all (UNESCO, 2005) within regular schools. UNESCO (1994) in the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education promulgates that, 'regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating, welcoming communities building an inclusive society and achieving education for all.' UNESCO (2005) proposes that the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Education is arguably the most significant international document that has ever been available in fostering the education of children with special needs.

In effect, the call for inclusion is the outcome of a complex set of discourses about the quality of education that is driven by changing demography, ideologies and perceptions of marginalised groups as well as associated social issues (Such as diversity of languages and cultures) (Winzer and Mazurek, 2000; Bagga-Gupta, 2007). Thus, inclusion is a dynamic approach of responding positively to learner diversity and of treating individual differences not as problems but as opportunities for educational and social enrichment (Kursters et al., 2015) However, some sections of society still believe that Special Education rather than inclusion is the better option for children with special needs. This argument is well supported with regards to type and severity of disability for instance in that inclusion maybe difficult for children with severe to profound particular types of disability. Mallick and Seesh (2013) note that many mainstream schools are not ready for inclusion with regards to inappropriate infrastructure, inaccessible curriculum, lack of inclusion awareness and use of uninclusive teaching-learning strategies. In spite of these dissenting views, Sultana (2010) maintains that the education of children with special needs has gradually been shifting away from segregation towards inclusion. As a result, there has been a growing international trend to avoid categorising people according to their disabilities or difficulties (Mallick and Sheesh, 2013). Thus, the idea of inclusion has been promoted worldwide to ensure that all learners belong to a school community (Avramidis et al., 2000). Similarly, there is a growing consensus among educational professionals and disability rights organisations all over the world that inclusion in the mainstream schools is the only way to provide a means for education and learning for all children (UNESCO, 1994, 2005, 2009; Mallick and Sheesh, 2013).

Further, inclusion involves adopting a broader vision of Education For All (EFA) by addressing the wide spectrum of educational needs of a diverse student population (UNESCO, 2005). Ultimately, this would lead to the achievement of Millennium Development Goal Number 2 on universal primary education set forth by UNDP (2000) which was replaced by Sustainable Development Goal Number 4 on quality education (UNDP, 2015) and of late the Incheon Declaration on Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Lifelong Learning for All (2015). The UNESCO (1990) World Declaration on Education for all together with the Dakar Framework for Action view inclusion as a proactive means of achieving educational equity and of identifying and resolving barriers to access to educational opportunities. It is clear from the foregoing that inclusive education is a right and policy issue (UNESCO, 2005, 2009). UNGEI (2010) confirms that, at the core of inclusive education is the human right to education as promulgated in the United Nations (1948) Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Inclusion is also featuring prominently in the United Nations (1989) Convention on the Rights of the Child and in the United Nations (2006) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRDP).

According to Kusters et al. (2015), disability hence inclusion has been increasingly mainstreamed in human rights and development discourses. Article 3C of the CRDP emphasises full and effective participation and inclusion of persons with disabilities in society. Similarly, De Beco (2014) notes that inclusion has a legal basis while Winzer and Mazureki (2000) implore that inclusion emerged as a broad notion of social justice that was manifested as an expression of concern for safe guarding the rights of all children. As UNESCO (2005) puts it, the move towards inclusion requires changes both at societal and classroom levels accompanied by elaboration of policy agendas that respect the right of every child access to quality education. Fillan (1991) cited in Sibanda (2015) advocates for

school level policies on inclusion as a way of quality control and admittance of responsibility on the part of school authorities and the teachers. In these regards, implementation of inclusion is founded on a set of right based principles of access to quality education, content and process and to equality and inclusivity in conjunction with practical ideas and strategies to guide the transition towards policies addressing inclusion in education (UNESCO, 2005). Meanwhile, Article 24 of the CRDP (2006) calls for reasonable accommodations, individual support measures, universal design and accessibility as the basis for inclusion. Inclusion awareness, then becomes pivotal in these conceptualisations.

The United Nations (1989) Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 23 actually stipulates that, children with disabilities should have effective access to and receive education in a manner conducive to the child achieving the fullest possible social integration and individual development, including his/her culture and spiritual development. A logical consequence to the foregoing according to UNESCO (1994) is that all children have the right to receive the kind of education that does not discriminate along the dimensions of disability or language for instance. This calls for physical and social adjustments together with relevant policy reviews and teacher development (Mafa, 2012) curriculum reforms, that is, curriculum differentiation (Sibanda, 2015) in order to accommodate all children including those with special needs in the mainstream of the school system. Clearly, inclusion involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies with a common vision which covers all children of appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular (School) system to educate all children (UNESCO, 2005) including those with disabilities. This is done without 'watering down' the curriculum (NVPIE, 2016). In these regards, inclusion can therefore be perceived as a cycle between curriculum differentiation and uniformity (Vislie, 2003). Thus inclusion is more than mere integration or mere placement of children with special needs in mainstream schools.

1.3. Inclusion awareness

According to Lifshitz et al. (2004), there is a correlation between cultural beliefs about disability, attitudes towards disability and inclusion awareness and acceptance as evidenced by results of some studies. One such study conducted by these authors has documented lack of inclusion awareness among mainstream teachers in Palestine and ultra-orthodox communities of Israeli. In a study of attitudes of mainstream pre-service physical education teachers in Korea, Mousouli, Kokaridas, Angelopoulou-Sakadami and Aristotelous (2009) reported limited awareness and understanding of students with special needs and unfamiliarity with the idea of inclusion among the teachers. In another study in Bangladesh, the results showed that there was lack of awareness of children with special needs and of inclusion among regular school teachers (Mallick and Sheesh, 2013).

Invariably though, other international studies have indicated that while general education teachers are favourably disposed towards the theory of inclusion, they are not grounded in its rubrics particularly for rural based teachers (Hwang and Evans, 2011). However, Hwang and Evans (2011) cite several studies particularly from the West presenting results that show increased inclusion awareness and positive attitudes towards inclusion among general education teachers. A study by Ali, Mustapha and Jelas (2006) conducted in Malaysia also generated data that reflected adequate inclusion awareness among mainstream teachers in that country, but the researchers noted a depressed mean score for the teachers in the rural areas. This entails that effective implementation of inclusion can only be possible if mainstream teachers are aware of inclusion and are receptive of it.

1.4. Statement of the problem

From the background of this study, it is clear that the majority of children with special needs in Zimbabwe, many of whom live in rural areas are either out of school or have a high propensity for dropping out of school. One cause of this could be lack of inclusion awareness, hence the need for this study.

1.5. Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to interrogate the extent of inclusion awareness among mainstream teachers in rural primary schools of Zimbabwe.

1.6. Research question

To what extent is inclusion awareness among mainstream teachers in rural schools of Zimbabwe?

1.7. Sub-Research questions

- To what extent have the mainstream teachers in rural schools of Zimbabwe been exposed to the philosophy of inclusion?
- What knowledge do mainstream teachers in rural schools of Zimbabwe have about inclusion?

2. Materials and methods

This study is informed by the positivist research philosophy and is therefore predominantly quantitative. A single cross-sectional descriptive survey design was utilised since a close- ended questionnaire was used to collect data from a technically large sample within a single administration (Franklin and Walker, 2010; Polland, 2005). A sample of 50 mainstream teachers from 30 schools spread across 5 districts of Zimbabwe chosen by way of convinience and coincidental sampling techniques participated in the study. Data were summarised into a 3 point Likert Scale tables and analysed using basic frequency counts.

3. Results and discussion

Table 1 indicates that 14% of the teachers in rural schools of Zimbabwe had not heard about inclusion, 18% were not sure whether they had ever heard about inclusion while 68% had done so. Thirty percent of the teachers had not read about inclusion, 16% were not sure while 54% had read about it. Meanwhile, 62% of the teachers had never attended a workshop on inclusion, 18% were not sure and 20% had done so. Further, 26% of the teachers said that they at times discussed inclusion in their staff meetings with 18% saying that they were not sure if they had done so but 56% had. Twenty four percent of the teachers reported that their schools had no policy on inclusion while 36% were not sure and 40% indicated that their schools did have a policy on inclusion. Seventy percent of the teachers said that they had not studied inclusion during their teacher training, 22% were not sure while 8% indicated that they did. The table also illustrates that 66% of the teachers have never heard about the Salamanca Conference, which popularised inclusion awareness internationally, 18% were not sure and only 16% of the teachers thought that they have heard about the Conference.

Table 1
Indicators of teachers' exposure to inclusion (n=50).

	0	1	2	Total
I have heard about inclusion	7 (14%)	9 (18%)	34 (68%)	50 (100%)
I have read about inclusion	15 (30%)	8 (16%)	27 (54%)	50 (100%)
I have attended a workshop on inclusion	31 (62%)	9 (18%)	10 (20%)	50 (100%)
We at times discuss inclusion in our staff meetings	13 (26%)	9 (18%)	28 (56%)	50 (100%)
Our school has a policy on inclusion	12 (24%)	18 (36%)	20 (40%)	50 (100%)
I have studied inclusion during my teacher training	35 (70%)	11 (22%)	4 (8%)	50 (100%)
I have heard about the Salamanca Conference on Inclusion	33 (66%)	9 (18%)	8 (16%)	50 (100%)

Key: 0=No; 1=Not Sure; 2=Yes

From the table, 26% of the teachers in rural schools of Zimbabwe did not understand what inclusion entails, a further 26% was not sure but 48% understood what inclusion entailed. Twenty eight percent of the teachers thought that inclusion is the same as integration while 48% were not sure about this comparison and 24% understood that inclusion was not the same as integration. The table also illustrates that, 22% of the teachers were not aware that inclusion means more than integration while a significant number (54%) were not sure and 24% were aware that inclusion means more than integration. Thirty percent of the teachers were not aware that

inclusion entails equal participation and similarly a large number (44%) were not sure of this critical aspect of inclusion and only 26% were aware that inclusion entails equal participation. The table further indicates that 20% of the teachers were conscious that inclusion does not constitute mere placement of children with disabilities in mainstream schools but 30% were not sure and a hooping 50% believed that inclusion does constitute mere placement of children with disabilities in mainstream schools. Thirty four percent of the teachers in rural schools of Zimbabwe were aware that inclusion is not about subject integration, 40% were not sure about this revelation while 26% thought so. Only 18% of the teachers understood that inclusion does not entail exposing children with disabilities to a special curriculum in the mainstream school, 30% were not sure but 52% exhibited this misconception.

Table 2
Indicators of teachers' knowledge of inclusion (n=50).

	0	1	2	Total
I understand what inclusion entails	13 (26%)	13 (26%)	24 (48%)	50 (100%)
Inclusion is the same as integration	14 (28%)	24 (48%)	12 (24%)	50 (100%)
Inclusion means more than integration	11 (22%)	27 (54%)	12 (24%)	50 (100%)
Inclusion entails equal participation	15 (30%)	22 (44%)	13 (26%)	50 (100%)
Inclusion is about mere placing of children with special needs in mainstream schools/classrooms	10 (20%)	15 (30%)	25 (50%)	50 (100%)
Inclusion is about subject integration	17 (34%)	20 (40%)	13 (26%)	50 (100%)
Inclusion is about exposing children with special needs to a special curriculum in the mainstream school	9 (18%)	15 (30%)	26 (52%)	50 (100%)

Key: 0=No; 1=Not Sure; 2=Yes

The results indicate that although many of the mainstream teachers in rural schools of Zimbabwe have heard about inclusion, read about it and at times discussed it in their staff meetings; they had not attended workshops and had not studied it during their teacher training. This is in tune with international literature suggesting that while mainstream school teachers could be well disposed towards the theory of inclusion, their appreciation of it may be rudimentary (Hwang and Evans, 2011) due to lack of a studious approach hence in-depth awareness. As a result, the mainstream teachers in rural schools of had not been exposed to the contents of the Salamanca Framework of Action on Special Needs Education which UNESCO (2005) brands as the most significant international document that informs the implementation and practice of inclusion. In other words, inclusion awareness among mainstream teachers may not be complete unless they have studied the parameters of inclusion contained in the document. In addition, mainstream rural schools of Zimbabwe hardly have a policy framework on inclusion to which the teachers could be exposed. This is despite widespread international promulgations and Zimbabwe Government's rhetoric that inclusion is policy driven and at the heart of social justice discourses (Kusters et al., 2015; De Beco, 2014; UN, 2006; Winzer and Mazureki, 2000). Fillan (1991) cited by Sibanda (2015) inversely implies that lack of policy on inclusion entails compromised awareness of inclusion which positively correlates with the provision of quality education to all.

On the knowledge or conceptualisation of inclusion by the mainstream teachers in rural schools of Zimbabwe, the results show that, although a significant number of the teachers claimed to understand what inclusion entails, they had widespread misconceptions. Many of the teachers were not knowledgeable about the distinction between inclusion and integration and even between inclusion and Special Education. In these regards, lack of inclusion awareness had to be assumed on the basis of the teachers' lack of knowledge that inclusion is more than

mere integration or mere placement of students with special needs in mainstream schools (NVPIE, 2016; Kusters et al., 2015). The study also noted that the teachers lacked consciousness that the practice of inclusion has seen the education of children with special needs shifting away from the segregatory Special Education practices towards inclusion on a global scale (Sultana, 2010).

4. Conclusion

From these findings, the researcher concluded that there was a lack of adequate inclusion awareness among mainstream teachers in rural schools of Zimbabwe. The teachers lacked adequate exposure to the meaning and conceptualisation of the philosophy and practice of inclusion and their knowledge of inclusion was limited. This was consistent with studies in Korea (Mousouli et al., 2009) and in Bangladesh (Mallick and Sheesh, 2013) which found lack of awareness among mainstream teachers in rural areas. However the results of the current study contradict those from the West and fast developing countries, although the Malaysian study (Mustapha and Jelas, 2006) confirmed lack of inclusion awareness among mainstream teachers in rural areas. The explanation for this variance could be to do with resource provision and level of exposure to contemporary developments as part of the cultures of those countries. This suggests that there is more compelling evidence for increased inclusion awareness proliferation among mainstream teachers in rural than in urban areas. The implications of this lack of inclusion awareness among mainstream teachers could be far reaching with regards to the failure of mainstream schools to retain children with special needs. Literature is replete with large numbers of children with special needs who drop out of school largely due to lack of awareness of inclusion and of inclusive practices (UNESCO, 2005; Lang and Charowa, 2007; Mitra et al., 2011; UNICEF, 2013).

On the bases of the findings and conclusion of this study, the researcher proffered the following recommendations which are directed at the Ministries of Primary and Secondary Education and of Higher and Tertiary Education, Science and Technology Development as well as to research and scholarship practitioners in Zimbabwe:

- In-servicing of practicing mainstream teachers and school administrators and training of local members of the School Development Committees (SDCs) in rural schools on inclusion awareness through staff development and awareness workshops respectively. With regards to school administrators, Chopra (2008) believes that having a more crystallised understanding of inclusion may enable them to review the necessary supports and services to mainstream school teachers to make inclusion work.
- Deployment and/or re-designating specialist teachers in rural mainstream schools to act as consultants on inclusion awareness, implementation and practice.
- Incorporation of a compulsory but comprehensive component or module on inclusion into the curriculum for teachers in pre-service training.
- Enactment of school level policies that specify enforcement procedures.
- Large scale studies on inclusion awareness among teachers in rural areas and on implications of these findings thereof.

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