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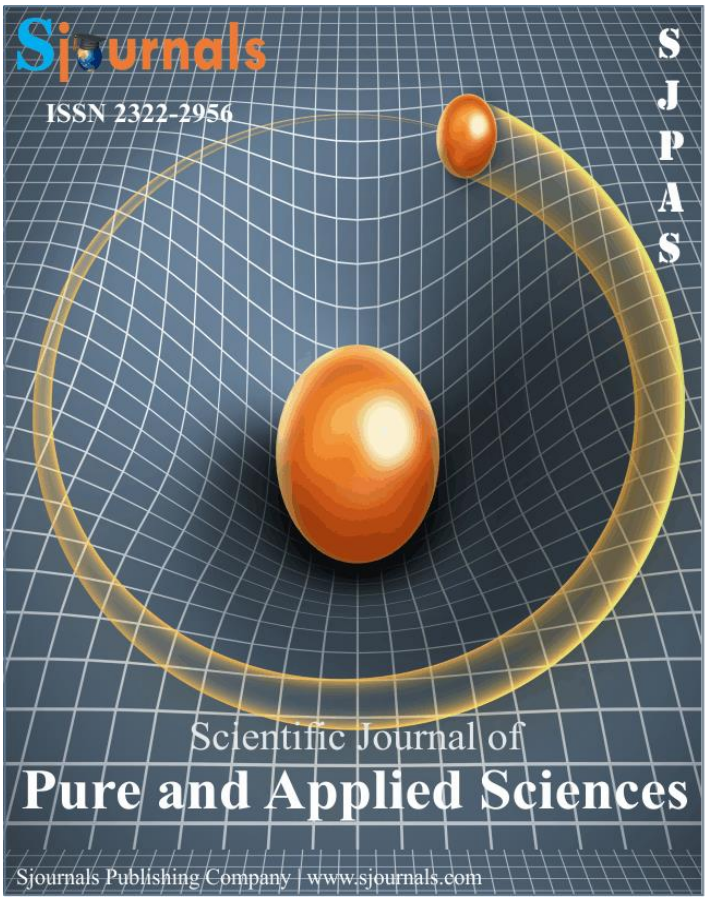

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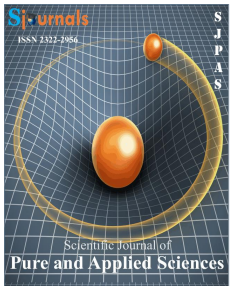

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Review article

Constituents of effective and sustainable implementation of school level inclusive education in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

This article reviews the constituents of effective and sustainable implementation of school level inclusive education with reference to Zimbabwe. Implementation of inclusive education is a collaborative concern involving multiple stakeholders who include teachers, school administrators, government, parents, counsellors, psychologists, therapists and social welfare officers among others. It comes at a cost, hitherto less expensive than continuing with exclusive arrangements. The constituents of effective and sustainable implementation of inclusive education include reviewing and reflecting on current practices; setting up the Inclusive Education Leadership Team; development of an action plan for change; principles for implementation; implementation parameters; and monitoring and evaluation. From thorough examination of these constituents, the article concludes that effective and sustainable implementation of inclusive education depends on strategic action planning, commitment, collaborative effort and continuous monitoring and evaluation. Consequently, the article implores the government of Zimbabwe to intensify training and development of teachers, increase resource allocation towards the implementation of inclusive education and to review teacher deployment patterns and enforce policies that support effective and sustainable implementation of school level inclusive education.

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1. Introduction

Implementing inclusion is not as linear and rudimentary as has been expressed in some literature and policy documents. For UNESCO (2009) inclusive education entails presence and accessibility of an education system that allows for equal participation of learners with diverse needs. It is not about the types of school children attend but is about the quality of their learning experiences and how far they are helped to learn, to achieve and participate fully in the life of the school (DFES, 2004). This is not easy. So, implementation of inclusive education is pillared on quality, positive attitude, human diversity-friendly policies, differentiated curricula, disability friendly environments and teachers who are oriented toward dealing with learners of diverse differences. Resources that are amenable to individual needs such as Information and Computer Technologies (ICTs) as well as appropriate Assistive Technologies (ATs) are also central in the implementation of effective and sustainable inclusive education. Thus, implementation of inclusive education is much more dynamic and complex than has been envisaged. It is certainly not an over-night, finite or discrete process. As a result, for developing economies like Zimbabwe, inclusive education can remain a pipe dream as long as it is not properly conceived and planned. In a study of challenges in the implementation of inclusive education in Zimbabwe Mafa (2012) observes that, while a lot has been said about inclusion even in supplementary policies, there are no comprehensive strategies for its enforcement.

It takes the collective effort of everyone and everybody to achieve effective and sustainable implementation of inclusive education. Everyone, including the government, the schools, religion, industry, NGOs, teachers (both mainstream and specialist), psychologists and counsellors, social welfare officers, disability activists and persons with disabilities and their families themselves among other stakeholders are called upon to put genuine collective effort if inclusive education is to be effectively implemented and be sustainable. Nevertheless, there are determinants that constitute standard effective and sustainable implementation of inclusive education which Zimbabwe and other developing countries could tape from. This paper examines these constituents which include reviewing and reflecting on current practices; setting up the Inclusive Education Leadership Team; development of an action plan for change; principles for implementation; implementation parameters; and monitoring and evaluation. However, these are not by any means meant to be neither final nor finite but definitely provide a benchmark for success.

2. Reviewing and reflecting on current practices

In order to move forward with certainty, it is crucial to first determine the education practices that are currently in place. Information collected on the current situation will serve as baseline data on which to measure success of future inclusive practices (Kilgore, 2013). In so doing the following information should be collected:

- ✓ Number of students with disabilities enrolled in the mainstream schools;
- ✓ Performance data of the students with disabilities relative to their non-disabled peers;
- ✓ Scheduling of the students with disabilities into mainstream classrooms based on their numbers and individual needs;
- ✓ Support systems in place for the students with disabilities to access education. These include the various available provisions;
- ✓ Availability of specialist teachers. It should also be established at that juncture whether the specialist teachers are co-teaching and if so, the approaches they are using;
- ✓ Whether joint planning is practiced by specialist and mainstream teachers who share instructional responsibilities for the same students;
- ✓ Number of mainstream teachers who are able to implement high quality differentiated instructional strategies;
- ✓ Various intervention strategies used to ensure inclusive practice e.g. co-enrollment, co-teaching, buddy systems and study groups, cooperative learning, online teaching etc.;
- ✓ Availability of resources to help meet the needs of students with disabilities e.g. appropriate assistive devices, personnel such as specialist teachers, psychologists, counsellors, speech therapists etc.;
- ✓ Commitment levels and attitudes toward inclusive education and
- ✓ Training and development as well as deployment patterns.

It is also important to establish the current levels of knowledge teachers have about inclusive education. Basically, it has to be established how teachers conceive and understand inclusion and how they practice it. In a study of inclusion awareness among rural mainstream school teachers in Zimbabwe, Sibanda (2017) found out that, although many of the 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 lack of inclusion awareness among mainstream teachers in rural schools of Zimbabwe meaning that the implementation of inclusive education was either random or sparse. Even in urban setups, teachers hardly understand the fundamentals of inclusion. Many confuse it with mere integration. Tied to the current knowledge levels is the need to determine the teachers' preparedness and readiness for the implementation process. With examination oriented curricula being the dominant arrangement, teachers are naturally more concerned about group excellence rather than individual progress which is central to the practice of inclusive education. Quite importantly, it should also be established whether there are inclusive practices already in place (after all) and the extent of willingness among the teachers to engage in the implementation of those existing inclusive practices (Wright, 2015; Wilson et al., 2011). Having collected sufficient data on the status quo, it is imperative for the school to set up an Inclusive Education Leadership Team.

3. Setting up the inclusive education leadership team

The major purpose of the Inclusive Education Leadership Team is to drive the vision towards full inclusion. The leadership team itself must be inclusive. It should basically include the head and/or deputy head of the school, the School Development Committee (SDC) member (on behalf of the parents), a local leadership representative, both mainstream and specialist teachers and somewhat the children themselves. Alternatively, there could be no need to come up with a new leadership team as the existing multidisciplinary administrative structures could be utilized. In the Zimbabwean context, for instance, the school administration can incorporate a member of the School Development Committee, a representative of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) working in the area, representatives of other government departments, counsellors and psychologists, a representative of parents of children with disabilities and representatives of disability organisations in the local community to form a multi-stakeholder inclusive practices leadership team. Additionally, it is important to include at least one specialist teacher who has knowledge and experience about inclusive practices (Friend, 2005). The team could include more other stakeholders who are ordinarily members of the school multidisciplinary team, but while representative, the inclusive practices leader team should not be too large.

Kilgore (2013) asserts that an Inclusive Education Leadership Team is meant to address the overall implementation of inclusive education in the entire school. Like already suggested, the main role of the Inclusive Education Leadership Team is therefore to spearhead the implementation of inclusive education. This team has the following specific functions:

- ✓ Meeting regularly to review implementation data;
- ✓ Coming up with an appropriate implementation action plan;
- ✓ Fostering the implementation of school-wide inclusive education practices;
- ✓ Continually reviewing practices and procedures as specified in the action plan to determine if they are consistent with the school's mission statement;
- ✓ Ensuring that all staff members are in agreement with the inclusive practices in place;
- ✓ Assisting in the establishment of policies regarding inclusive education practices;
- ✓ Identifying actions for the entire staff to ensure effective implementation of inclusive policies;
- ✓ Identifying the needs of both learners and staff and endeavoring to address those needs and
- ✓ Identifying and implementing possible solutions to likely challenges.

The team members should appreciate that implementing inclusive education is not as routine or linear as most literature seems to assume. Thus, implementing inclusive education is not achievable through trial and error or just by politicking or paying lip service. It should be guided and supported by a well-articulated action plan for change as well as strict adherence to specified principles for effective implementation of inclusive education.

4. Developing an action plan for change

Having set up the Inclusive Education Leadership Team, it is most logical to come up with an action plan geared toward the achievement of the vision of a fully inclusive school. Schuelka (2018) believes that most educators envision an education system that fully meets the needs of all students and one that enables all students to achieve maximal success. However, for many of these educators the vision becomes a pipe dream due to lack of action planning, hence ineffective or unsustainable implementation of inclusive education. Action planning is critical towards the realization and actualization of the vision of full inclusion. This is because action planning involves setting of clear goals and specific actions that target the actualization of the vision. Each goal of the action plan should be accompanied by specific activities or actions. Similarly, the goals of the action plan need to be as concrete, feasible and specific as possible. When goals are specific and concrete, it becomes relatively easy to implement the planned inclusive education practices.

As already alluded to, one of the functions of the Inclusive Education Leadership Team is to collaborate in developing an action plan with both long and short-term goals (Wilson et al., 2011; Friend, 2005). Kilgore (2011) implores that the team should identify activities that can be reasonably initiated within a specified period of time because planning too much too quickly might lead to failure. It is also advisable that once the action plan is complete, it should be availed to the whole staff, parents and other key stakeholders in order to elicit further input. Such a gesture would generate a sense of ownership among the whole staff, parents and other stakeholders. Further, this would facilitate acceptability of the action plan hence ensure effective and sustainable implementation of inclusive education. This also adds impetus to the need to regularly update the action plan to keep pace with global dynamic changes and best practices in inclusive education. In orchestrating the action plan, the Inclusive Education Leadership Team should subscribe to principles that guide sustainable implementation of inclusive education at the school level.

5. Principles guiding effective implementation of inclusive education

There are at least 4 basic principles that the leadership team has to take into consideration. The first principle entails that all students in the school are capable of learning. This principle also means that every student, disabled or non-disabled, has potential to achieve some level of success. It takes the teacher's ability and patience to determine the right content and appropriate teaching strategies to realise the output of this principle. Teachers need to be conscious that students neither learn in the same way nor within the same timelines (O'Gorman and Drudy, 2011). Thus learning matter and teaching strategies have to be differentiated according to the students' varying needs, abilities and learning styles. Planning should therefore be individualized. Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) should be used to guide the learning of individual students. The use of IEPs is premised on the realization that all students, whether disabled or not have unique educational needs, learning trajectories, learning styles and abilities (Kilgore, 2011; 2013). Meanwhile, none of the students can be condemned to total failure. Every member of the school should hold this conviction that every student can learn. After all, all children have a right to appropriate learning and to achieving success in education. In this equation, the principal role of the school, family, community and government is to provide the necessary resources.

The second principle is rights based and advocates for all students to have a right to quality instructional programming. In order for students with special needs to experience progress and success, they need exposure to quality instructional programming. Quality instructional programmes are those that embrace individualized teaching and are based on well researched individual needs, abilities and interests (Wright, 2015; Wilson et al., 2011). Quality instructional programmes should also appeal to all the developmental domains of the student and varied yet appropriate teaching and learning strategies and media should be used to achieve them. The programmes should also bear valid assessment and monitoring and evaluation procedures. For the output of the second principle to be realised, everyone in the school should take responsibility of every child's performance. Thus, the collective vision of the school should be to provide quality inclusive education that enables each learner to excel in their own right.

Consequently, the third principle states that all students belong to all staff. This principle entails that all the teachers, school administrators and even ancillary staff have responsibility over each and every student in the school. They should take ownership, not only of the students under their direct purview, but of all the students in the school. In other words, each member of the school should embrace best inclusive education practices and

ensure that inclusive policies are adhered to in every aspect of the school. All children should be aware of this initiative and be groomed to be receptive to each other regardless of disability, ability or need. The school must be seen as a family or business enterprise where every member cares about the progress of each other and about the overall performance. The selfish practice whereby some teachers take learners in their classes as personal possessions and their classrooms as their personal dominions has no place in the inclusive education arrangement.

In the fourth principle, everyone focuses on supporting all students in all school environments. This is an extension of the third principle but goes beyond caring for learners with special needs in the classroom. It entails taking responsibility of all learners during sporting and other co-curricular activities. It also means ensuring that learners with special needs benefit equally in play and leisure activities in the school and that, therefore, every member of staff should ensure that this does genuinely occur. The principle requires that administrators, teachers and auxiliary staff members recognize that for full inclusion to occur everyone in the school should be committed to the rights and freedoms of each and every child despite differences the students may exude. In a way, every member should take it as his/her responsibly to ensure that all students in the school get the support they need; be it in the classroom or anywhere else within the school. Nobody should expect that children with special needs could only get support from either the specialist teacher or from administrative staff members. There should be collective as well as individual genuine commitment to both group and individual needs of all the learners in the school. This collective culture should resonate through all school activities including co-curricular programmes (Wilson et al., 2011).

6. Parameters for implementation of inclusive education

Realising parameters for effective and sustainable inclusive education constitutes setting the implementation process in motion. The process begins with the action plan as alluded to earlier. However, to ensure effective and sustainable implementation, decisions should be first made regarding specific parameters and logistical demands related to inclusive education practices (Louisiana Department of Education, 2011). The full range of the major parameters include identifying support needs, mobilisation of logistics, professional training and development, family engagement or parental involvement and ultimately placement of students with special needs in mainstream classes.

Before assigning learners with special needs to mainstream classes, it is crucial to first determine the type and level of support they will need. This is necessary for the learners to experience significant success in mainstream settings. In other words, best inclusive practices consider learner needs ahead of all other issues. The slogan is, 'LEARNER NEEDS FIRST'. An implementation process of inclusive education that is premised on this slogan ensures that support needs of children with disabilities dictate their placement into particular mainstream classes and the ways the children will be supported in those classes (Schuelka, 2018). The process begins with thorough review of educational data on each learner with disability. The data are obtainable from progress reports, IEPs, assessment scores and parental and teacher reports. Comparing the expected/potential to the current performance of the learner will expose the gaps and discrepancies which necessarily become the areas of support the learner will need to succeed in the mainstream settings. These gaps and discrepancies form the core of the learner's IEP.

According to Villa and Thousand (2003), once these support need areas are identified, it is then possible to identify the level of support and the type of staff (for instance) who will provide the support. In this regard, matching appropriate support level to individual learners is critical because it increases the likelihood of successful academic and behavior outcomes in mainstream settings (Wright, 2015). Learners with special needs particularly those with disabilities must be considered according to severity of need because the levels of support would vary accordingly. Firstly, there are those who function fairly close to their peers at the grade level; secondly there are those who need accommodations and modifications to access education and thirdly there are those who need maximum, intense support and accommodations. Obviously the needs and levels of support for these students will also vary both in type and intensity. This has to be considered within the constrained resource allocation experienced by mainstream schools in Zimbabwe for instance. Financing and resourcing to meet the identified support levels should be one of the major priorities of the Inclusive Education Leadership Team.

Thus, there are obvious logistical concerns that go with support for inclusion of learners with special needs into mainstream schools. The main concerns relate to staffing that is amenable to collaborative engagement. In its basic form, this collaborative engagement would entail deployment of at least one specialist teacher in each and

every mainstream school to coordinate the implementation of inclusive education practices. Use of Collaborative Teaching Support Models such as co-teaching, consultancy and deployment of para-educators are some of the most noticeable concerns. Co-teaching entails pairing together mainstream and specialist teachers as part of an initiative to create more inclusive classrooms (Friend et al., 2010). In the consultancy model, specialist teachers play the role of transmitting information about implementation of inclusive education while para-educators are assistant workers who have been oriented into handling of children with special needs but who work under the instruction of certified teachers. How these models will be successfully implemented and practiced is a serious logistical concern for the Inclusive Education Leadership Team and the ministry because they call for the deployment of additional staff and other resources.

There are also logistical concerns pertaining additional personnel such as speech and language therapists, school psychologists and counsellors who need to be part of the implementation process. In other words, there are logistical challenges that must be considered with regards setting up such multidisciplinary teams. Such concerns become more pronounced in rural settings where certain personnel are hard to come by. There should also be considerations pertaining to environmental adaptations and provision of assistive devices as part of the process of facilitating inclusive education. Mainly, these initiatives have financial implications, suggesting that government and the schools themselves would need to be committed to meeting the cost of inclusive education. However, Sibanda (2018) noted, from a review of literature, that funding inclusive education is relatively cheaper than the cost of educating learners with special needs in separate classes and schools.

The other parameter for effective and sustainable implementation of inclusive education is to do with professional training and development. Implementation of inclusive education heavily depends on the skills and knowledge levels of the teachers and therefore professional training and development is paramount. Without requisite knowledge and skills, teachers may not be able to appropriately implement inclusive education. For instance, mainstream teachers must receive training in the conception and practice of inclusive education during pre-service training and continue to receive professional development in models of inclusive education and how to implement them. Thus, teacher's colleges and universities that train mainstream teachers should offer at least a module on inclusive education. In Zimbabwe, on-going professional development can be practiced through in-service training and staff development programmes. According to Kilgore (2013), on-going training and development is necessary if increased positive student outcomes are to be achieved for students with special needs in mainstream classes. Gorman and Drudy (2011) recommend that the areas of professional development for mainstream school teachers should include the following:

- ✓ The IEP process;
- ✓ Knowledge of specific disabilities;
- ✓ Administrative skills for inclusive settings;
- ✓ Testing, diagnosis and assessment'
- ✓ Teaching methodologies e.g. behavior modification, task analysis, curriculum differentiation; modeling, role play, drama, games; therapeutic interventions etc. and
- ✓ Models of inclusive practices e.g. co-enrolment, co-teaching, cooperative learning, consultancy, para-educator etc.

Some of this training should be extended to other participating professionals such as psychologists, counsellors, therapists etc. In addition, it should be noted that parents or the family are key stakeholders in the attainment of effective and sustainable inclusive education and therefore should be involved throughout the implementation process.

Family engagement hence parental involvement is thus a crucial factor in the process of implementing inclusive education. This involves informing parents or the family about the benefits of inclusive education. In effect, parents need to be made aware of inclusive education and at times training sessions should be conducted in these regards. The parents need assurance that their children with disabilities will continue receiving specialized instruction as spelt out in the IEP despite their placement in the mainstream class, for instance. Even parents of children without disabilities must be engaged and assured that including children with disabilities in mainstream classrooms will not retard their children's learning. The parents should be assured that inclusive models and approaches actually enhance the instructional programmes and school performance of their children (Villa and Thousand, 2003). In other words, benefits of inclusive education with regard academic performance and behaviour exhibition should be clearly articulated to all concerned parents. Parents or families must actually be involved at every step of the implementation process. In this way, they will be fully informed about the benefits and process of

inclusive education. Such parental/family involvement would ensure meaningful family-school relationships hence effective and sustainable implementation of inclusive education. Schuelka (2018) argues that parents and families who are well informed about inclusive education are the greatest ambassadors of the school's inclusive education initiatives.

To reinforce the family-school relationship, it must be a school policy for teachers to maintain on-going, positive communication with parents or families of especially learners with disabilities. Such communication should include issues related to both the student's strengths and weaknesses. Indeed, schools must support families in a variety of ways such as guiding them to where they could seek treatment services, counseling for acceptance, provision of information about where and how to obtain assistive devices and so on. Creative ways of securing family engagement and/or parental involvement such as allocating duties on school functions and using them as resource persons in areas they have expert knowledge should be explored. But, having successfully implemented inclusive education in the school, there is need for both central and local level policies pertaining to monitoring and evaluation of the implementation process.

7. Monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of inclusive education

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) are key practices for measuring progress and success of any programme. According to the World Bank (2013), monitoring is a continuous function that uses systematic collection of data on specified indicators to undertake management of ongoing programme interventions in order to make indications of the extent and achievement of progress. The World Bank then conceives evaluation as the rigorous process of determining the worth or significance of a programme, relevance of objectives, efficacy of design and implementation, efficiency of resources used and sustainability of results. These two are synergistic and therefore M&E as an integrated system in inclusive education entails continuous, periodic retrospective control and assessment of inclusive practices to ensure effective implementation and sustainability. Thus M&E of inclusive education measures progress and effectiveness of implementation using student behaviour and achievement data as well as school performance data among other indicators (Table 1).

Table 1
Domains and indicators of successful and effective implementation of inclusive education.

Domain	Indicators
Foundations of Inclusive Practices	High expectations for success; inclusion awareness; supportive stakeholders; inclusive mission statement; responsibility and ownership of all students; parental involvement; inclusive policies; inclusion as a right; whole-school inclusion
Diversity	Acceptance of human divergence; reflection of community plurality; multicultural practices; multivariate stakeholder interaction; equitable treatment; enrolment of learners with diverse abilities and disabilities
Collaboration	Collaborative spirit; multi-stakeholder involvement; communication; shared responsibility; peer tutoring & cooperative learning etc.
Service Delivery	Enrolment at neighborhood school; special education as a service, support within mainstream class; flexibility; equitability; IEPs; variation, collaboration; co-teaching; assistive devices
Instructional Practices	Differentiation; adaptation; accommodation; participation; problem solving; flexibility; variation; accountability; collaboration; co-teaching; cooperative learning
Behaviour Supports	Positive behavior management strategies; Behaviour Intervention Plans (BIPs); functional assessment; age appropriate techniques; respect, trust and optimism; social skills training; parental involvement; school safety; counselling services
Professional Development	Highly qualified teachers; specialist knowledge; multidisciplinary teams; effective professional development policy; continuous professional growth; in-service and staff development; parental knowledge and support
Administrative Responsibilities	Belief in inclusion; advocacy; encouragement; safe, friendly and welcoming climate; responsibility; strategic planning; change management; collaboration; proactive action; supervision & assessment; research

(Adapted from Kilgore, 2013)

Data should be collected in order to determine if maximum outcomes are being achieved as a result of implementing inclusive education practices. This should be done in the context of the action plan. This should however be complemented through on-site monitoring, peer evaluation and supervision. Both in-school and interschool visits can assist teachers in learning from each other on the best strategies for effectively implementing inclusive practices. For Kilgore (2013) in-school observations and visits to other schools and districts is the most effective way to provide meaningful learning opportunities with regards implementation of inclusive practices. In addition, there must be collegiality among the teachers and the teachers must be supported in order to feel empowered to effect changes consistent with inclusive practices in mainstream schools. But what matters most is how well students with special needs perform when inclusive education is implemented. Kilgore (2013) concludes, 'While it may be helpful to know that staff is supportive of inclusive practices, if positive student outcomes are not evidenced, then inclusive education practices are not effective'.

There are measures that provide an index for the evaluation and monitoring of the effectiveness of the implementation of inclusive education. They act as a yardstick against which schools could use for monitoring their own practices and school inspectors could use for evaluation. Identifying indicators of effective inclusive education practices provides schools with a model of excellence. It also serves as a monitoring tool to gauge success and progress of inclusive education. Table 1, which was adapted from Kilgore (2013), displays the major domains/components and resultant indicators for successful implementation of effective and sustainable inclusive education. While the list is by no means exhaustive, when these indicators are evident, inclusive practices are guaranteed. It should also be noted that these domains are not discrete but inter-connected. Additionally, some domains effectively become indicators in their own right and vise-versa.

8. Conclusion

It is succinct from this review that for the implementation of inclusive education to be effective and sustainable, it has to be systematic and collaborative. Thus, one most important aspect in the process of implementing effective and sustainable inclusive education is collaboration among stakeholders. Equally important is action planning guided by the appreciation that there are logistical demands in the implementation process. Any hope that inclusive education can be implemented without hefty initial costs would lead the whole process to be doomed. However, in the ultimate, inclusive education is relatively cheaper than exclusive arrangements. Meanwhile, a practical action plan is that which realizes M&E of inclusive education as the focal point for measuring outcomes. As such, M&E is an imperative tool for measuring progress, success and sustainability of the implementation of inclusive education both at school and at national level. This article therefore concludes that effective and sustainable implementation of inclusive education mainly depends on strategic action planning, commitment, collaborative effort and continuous monitoring and evaluation. Ultimately, the domains and indicators of inclusive education are the major sources of data for M&E by education inspectors and can be used as an inclusive education performance checklist or scale for schools in Zimbabwe.

Recommendations

From the conclusions of this review, it is recommended that the government:

- ✓ Designate inclusive education modules in the training of pre-service teachers to be mandatory;
- ✓ Mandate in-service training on inclusive education for every practicing teacher;
- ✓ Deploy teachers who have been trained in inclusive education to act as peripatetic or resource teachers in every cluster;
- ✓ Designate model inclusive education schools in every district;
- ✓ Designate all special schools as resource centers for the implementation and practice of inclusive education;
- ✓ Intensify implementation and M&E of inclusive education;
- ✓ Enact policies that mandate schools to implement inclusive education as guided by this and other published works that genuinely advocate for the implementation and practice of inclusive education and
- ✓ Put aside a specific budget for inclusive education and mobilise sufficient resources for its implementation and monitoring and evaluation.

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