

Perceptions towards Inclusive Education in Zimbabwe Teachers' Colleges

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Abstract

This study sought to establish how teachers' college administrators, lecturers and students perceive Inclusive Education. The study was guided by the interpretivism paradigm, qualitative methodology and multiple case studies. Homogenous purposeful sampling and snowballing techniques were adopted to draw up a sample of eight (8) key informants and seventeen (17) participants. Data were generated using the researcher as a primary instrument, face-to-face interviews, and document analysis guide. Data were analysed using thematic analysis and NVivo software of qualitative analysis. It was found out the perceptions of the lecturers depended on the level of knowledge and competence they had on disability issues. It was also noted that lecturers and college managers were comfortable with including mild cases of disabilities. The study concludes that because of negative perceptions exhibited by some lecturers and administrators towards disability, the conditions were still not ripe for the implementation of Inclusive Education on Teachers' Colleges of Zimbabwe. The study recommends that Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Science and Technology Development (MHTESTD) and college administrators should provide opportunities for workshops and staff development programmes for lecturers and administrators. College administrators should ensure mission statements, visions and values are aligned to their perceptions on inclusivity.

Keywords: Inclusive Education; Inclusivity; Inclusive Practices; Inclusion, Teachers' Colleges

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive Education (IE) is a topical issue around the globe, particularly the inclusion of students with disabilities across the educational spectrum. It is both a human rights and social justice issue which many societies are embracing as a way of meeting the demands of the cross section of the society [1, 2]. As a human right issue, Inclusive Education is about ensuring that every child has access and opportunity to quality education without any form of discrimination whatsoever, [2, 3]. Inclusive Education is more than making educational institutions available to those who could access it, [4, 5]. It is about identifying and removing barriers and obstacles to learning to increase access to quality education. Inclusion is not aimed at eliminating differences among people, but to enable individuals with different abilities and capabilities to be accepted by the society based on human rights, [6].

The Problem

In line with the philosophy of inclusive education, Zimbabwean Teachers' Colleges enroll trainee teachers with disabilities are part of the mainstream classes and they receive instruction alongside their peers without disabilities. The Zimbabwe State Party Report on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [7] noted that 1.1% of students with disabilities were enrolled in teacher education institutions by school term two of 2015. However, despite enrolling a smaller percentage of students

with various disabilities, the colleges seem to be experiencing challenges in trying to meet all the educational needs of these students. There is possible risk that student teachers with disability could just be physically placed without being included which could affect their effective development as professional teachers.

Research Question

The study sought to answer the following research question.

How do teachers' college administrators, lecturers and students perceive Inclusive Education?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The World Health Organisation and World Bank Global Report on Disability [8] indicated the prevalence of disability at 15% of the world population. Accordingly, it is expected that enrollment into educational institutions should be composed of a significant number with disabilities. Several empirical studies were conducted throughout the world on perceptions and attitudes of educators towards inclusive education. Abdulaziz [9] conducted a study in Saudi Arabia and found out that teachers had positive attitudes and had made classrooms inclusive but lack of support from their principals derailed the achievement of the targeted goal. Fossey et al. [10] carried out a study on perspectives of students with disabilities and disability service staff

on the implementation of inclusive education in tertiary institutions in Australia. They established that students with disability showed that they received different forms of assistance from the staff members who showed lack of knowledge on the disability services available. A European study by Kavouni [11] compared primary school teachers' perceptions of IE for students with mental disabilities in Greece and Sweden. Kavouni established that teachers in Sweden were prepared and more willing to change their teaching methods to meet the needs of children with mental disabilities than those teachers in Greece

A Zimbabwean study by Chiparaushe et al. [12] noted that administrators of higher and tertiary education institutions felt that they had enough support and services for students with disabilities. Earlier on, Mandina [13] had studied perceptions and attitudes of Bachelor of Education in service trainee teachers on inclusive education in Zimbabwe. Mandina found out that trainee teachers have negative attitudes towards inclusive education. In another study, Ngwenya and Chabwera [14] found out that at Bulawayo Polytechnic college, some lecturers embraced inclusive education as a noble practice while others still believed strongly in the separate education and strongly argued that it was costly to change the colleges to suit students with disabilities. Zimbabwean studies show dearth of research in respect of perceptions of college administrators, lecturers, and students in respect of inclusive education. A closer study by Ngwenya and Chabwera [14] was conducted at polytechnic colleges which are a different context with teachers' colleges, which are the focus of the current study.

METHODOLOGY

The interpretivism paradigm, qualitative methodology and multiple case studies research design guided this study. The study was also informed by qualitative research approach which is based on various meanings derived from the participants' experiences basing on the social and historical context to get a deeper understanding (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Multiple case studies research design was suitable in this study because the more than one case was studied, that is, three Teachers' Colleges and their informants and participants. Homogenous purposeful sampling and snowballing techniques were adopted to draw up a sample of eight (8) key informants and seventeen (17) participants.

Description of Participants

Eight (8) Students with Disabilities (SWDs) were the key informants. They provided in-depth information about their experiences in Teachers' Colleges which are critical to establishing how Inclusive Education is being implemented and managed in Teachers' Colleges. The other seventeen (17) participants were

college administrators, lecturers, and student without disabilities (SWnDs) from three teacher training colleges in Zimbabwe.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

On perceptions towards Inclusive Education, some participants were positive and supported Inclusive Education in Teachers' Colleges. One participant explained.

Yes, IE (Inclusive Education) is a very noble idea. We have significant number of students with exceptionalities and cannot expect the few teachers from UCE (United College of Education) to run all the schools. It is better that we have it (Inclusive Education) and not only have it but have it on a larger scale than this one. Case 15

The expert explains that one teacher- training college in Zimbabwe had been training special needs teachers from establishment and as such the need to broaden Inclusive Education by having it in other colleges. After all, Inclusive Education, it does not need to be secluded to an institution, but everyone must come on board. The lecturers supported Inclusive Education though they indicated that they might be lacking in terms of skills and knowledge. As such, they seemed to be negative yet with relevant skills and knowledge they might be fully equipped and be effective. Hick et al. [15] established that teacher educators were supportive of Inclusive Education but highlighted their lack of confidence and expertise in implementing Inclusive Education in teacher education programmes.

Case 5 supported Inclusive Education by saying that:

I think it is a critical issue, especially in Education. When we consider that it is a human right issue. Everyone should have his or her right respected, as a result IE include various charters such as Dakar framework and Salamanca statement, came up with a good idea to include everyone and to reduce stigmatisation. Stigmatising leads to marginalisation and when you marginalise anyone, you are not respecting or recognising their rights, they have a right to education, to other rights and to learn in an environment conducive just like everyone. I think it is very relevant if it is done as it should, Case 5, Lecturer.

The participant took a human rights position to

support Inclusive Education as supported by frameworks and guidelines informing Inclusive Education. IE was emphasised by the participant (Case 5) as a positive step towards reducing stigma and discrimination. Furthermore, Case 4 had this to say:

It is very important because as we are saying, we are in Zimbabwe, some students and people who are not able to know what is happening, will stay indoors. If we do not reach out there, they don't reach to us. We want to teach the community so that we raise an awareness campaign whether work, in institutions, from primary, secondary levels. When we were talking about it there was this discussion on why some schools shun teachers with disabilities. I think the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MOPSE) should look at that one and think about how qualified teachers with disabilities could be deployed. We are looking at IE from Early Childhood Development (ECD) level to the workplace level, Case 4.

The participant brought the issue of how the society accommodates qualified teachers with disabilities. The participant pointed out that Inclusive Education should start from lower levels of education right through to the workplace. Having Inclusive Education introduced from ECD level up to workplace might help in reducing stigma and discrimination. Such strides might result in inclusive society where every individual is not looked down upon or segregated. In addition, Case 10 buttressed the lack of acceptance by the community by saying.

Even if we are to train them here, the environment outside the college in the school is not accessible, it is not disability friendly. it is left upon the government to come in and support them. There are still challenges in the communities that are going even after training. We have a challenge with a student with dwarfism, who has since graduated. She was deployed into a grade two class in some district in Harare. On the first day the students walked out of class and when the parents heard this they came

and withdrew their children. We went there and talked to the administration and the School Development Council and other teachers. It was after our intervention that they accepted the new teacher. The attitudes were negative, and members of the community were not willing to accept her, Case 10.

From the excerpt, society tended to stigmatise and discriminate such teachers with disabilities, yet such teachers would be supposed to act as role models in the community. This was in line with the observations made by Kougiyas[16] that in Greece, there was lack of institutional support for PWDs and their transition into the development of the country after they graduate at higher education. Hence support for students with disabilities should continue even after graduating and in the workplace. One other participant perceived Inclusive Education as empowering persons with disabilities. The participant posited.

As a lecturer with a disability, I feel if you are included in the MHTESTD, you become recognised. Inclusive Education means all people being included in the education system and helping people to realise their talents whether they are living with disabilities. Inclusive Education is a better tool for the improvement of human life, Case, 7.

The sentiments implied that Inclusive Education is an important element in improving the lives of individuals with disabilities. As a human right issue, Inclusive Education improves the lives of everyone especially PWDs and helps to reduce stigma and discrimination (OECD, [17]. This was supported by Case 10.

We need to have Inclusive Education so that all pre-service teachers they get doses of IE so that when we chain them out, when they go out into the schools, they have the skills with various challenges. It is my desire that even in university curriculum for educators, they should have doses of IE, Case 10.

The sentiments show that teachers could not manage inclusive classes if they have not been adequately prepared in inclusive setting. Furthermore, Case 14 had this to say.

*It is a good idea because it reduces the perception out there that people with varied abilities are limited in a way. I am in the SRC. We should not look at the physical composite of the people but at what they could offer. Here they are trying to be inclusive in many programmes in the college, **Case 14***

In addition, another key informant confessed that.

*The major benefit is that they have a self-esteem to go there and teach children. Being called sir or madam whilst you have a disability counts, **Case 2***

It could be noted that Inclusive Education is very relevant to our society. Another participant (Case 13) had the following perceptions.

*It is very important not to the college students only but as teachers going out there, at a school you may see SWD, as a teacher you should know about IE so that you educate learners and other in the school to accommodate disabilities, **Case 13***

The views of the participant show that Inclusive Education is not only beneficial to educational fraternity, but also to the society at large. If teachers can manage inclusive classes in schools after being exposed to inclusive practices at Teachers' Colleges, then the society benefits. IE (Inclusive Education) boosts self-esteem and confidence of PWDs. Furthermore, it was a steppingstone in removing perceptions that PWDs were not able to do some things as indicated by Case 14. Yet given the opportunity, PWDs could achieve a lot and even do more than those without disabilities. It was further noted that Inclusive Education was practical and effective with the right manpower and attitude and resources.

Some key informants (Cases 20, 23 and 24) explained that they are human and should be treated equally.

*We are human and should be treated equally in all areas including education. Therefore, inclusive education is quite relevant, **Case 20**
IE is important because you feel being part and parcel of the society. You feel you are like other students, **Case 23***

*We are equal and should be give equal opportunities, **Case 24***

Inclusive Education is important because it makes one feel part and parcel of the group and society at large. It makes one feel like other students, equally in all areas including education. According to UNCRP, [2], one of the principles of Inclusive Education is equality of opportunity. Being given equal opportunities as derived from Inclusive Education is an important aspect in the treatment of human beings. One of the informants (Case 6, Case 2) noted that they took pride when they did all assignments as expected and even performed better than others without disabilities.

One informant (Case 2) further noted that they benefited from other without disabilities as they share notes.

*It is a good idea because in our country every person wants to make a living. If education caters for those without disability only, those with disability will continue to suffer. I benefit from other without disability, we share notes. I can even do better than them. When we write assignments, I find others without disability getting failing marks (rewrite) and I perform better than them, **Case 2***

The participant referred to the ability by students with disabilities to make a living because of Inclusive Education. The views corroborated the findings cited by the European Agency [18] that Inclusive Education enhances opportunities for employment among people with disabilities. The key informant (Case 2) explained that if education caters only for those without disabilities, those with disabilities might continue to suffer. Thus, the key informant viewed Inclusive Education as a good idea to economically empower people with disabilities. This resonates with the observations by Chataika [19] that education is the primary vehicle which empowers a nation and an indispensable means of realising other human rights. Therefore, by implementing Inclusive Education in Teachers' Colleges, the lives of students with disabilities were being improved.

Further, participants (Case 1 and 21) professed.

Inclusive Education is the way to go.... It helps them to live in harmony with all members of the society. When SWD learn together with those who do not have disabilities, their development improves. They

help each other and learn from each other, Case 1

Inclusive Education means having everybody in and as they are in, they assist each other. Other students help to push wheelchairs, clothing and to get them to the toilet, Case 21

When students learn from each other and help each other, it improves their performance and their tolerance towards diversity. The Social Learning Theory emphasises on the aspect of reciprocal causality is where individuals learn from each other and the people from the environment [20]. Thus, in Teachers' Colleges IE could become effective when students with or without disabilities learn from each other. It was explained that by learning Inclusive Education, students learn to tolerate each other (Case 11). Those without disabilities learn to tolerate disability while those with disabilities learn to cohabit with others.

I like being in college with other without disabilities. I learn from them and they learn from me. Some students are coming to me to learn Sign Language and I am happy to teach them, Case 8
Inclusive Education is a very good idea. It boosts the self-esteem of SWD. We also learn from them. There are things that we appreciate from our colleagues with disabilities. It gives us an understanding of the diversity that we have as people and this will help us to manage inclusive classes when we go out there, Case 25

The foregoing sentiments showed that students assist each other while in inclusive settings. This reinforced the reciprocity causality in learning as indicated by the social learning theory that students learn from each other (Woolfolk, 20). In Inclusive Education, students with and without disabilities interact and be given opportunities to demonstrate their competencies.

Some participants perceived Inclusive Education as enabling every member to feel comfortable and to be part of the society.

It is very important not to the college students only but as teachers going out there, at a school you may see students with disabilities. As a teacher you should know about IE so that you educate learners and other in the school to

accommodate disabilities, Case 13

It is a good idea because it reduces the perception out there that people with varied abilities are limited in a way. I am in the SRC. We should not look at the physical composite of the people but on what they can offer. Here they are trying to be in as many programs in the college, Case 14.

The sentiments showed that the focus should not be on disability but on the strengths of the individual. The participants implied that students with disabilities should be accommodated in whatever is happening. They should not be discriminated because of a challenge one could be having. Inclusive Education was important and as a human right issue it is helpful in developing our society [2].

Despite lecturer participants being positive about Inclusive Education in Teachers' Colleges, some administrators noted that lecturers had negative perceptions. This was derived from the views of one participant who said.

It is a problem; the way lecturers view Inclusive Education. Some lecturers complain about having such students in college. The complaint was more on the unpreparedness of the institution to cater for students with disabilities. They think that it is not a good move to recruit such students when some of us are not prepared. Yet the honour is on them to be capacitated to handle such learners, Case 16.

The lecturers might be having negative perception due to lack of skills to manage such students in colleges and therefore may be reluctant to have such students in colleges. In addition, the negative attitudes of lecturers might have contributed to their reluctance to have such students in colleges. It could be noted that the lecturers who were positive about Inclusive Education were the few who were skilled and were trained in Inclusive Education and Special Education. As has been established by Ngwenya and Chabwera[14] that while some lecturers have embraced Inclusive Education as a noble practice in Zimbabwe; others are still negative about it. Complementing these negative perceptions by the lecturers, were the observations made by the researcher that some lecturers seemed not to notice the presence of SWD during lectures. In addition, the

mission statement of college A as noted above and the values of all the three colleges demonstrated some positive perceptions and will to embrace SWDs. It was also found out that lecturers' perceptions and attitudes were influenced by the support they got from the Principals. The findings corroborate conclusions by Walker [21] that teachers' attitudes towards Inclusive Education in Chicago improved positively when they were supported by their Principals. Therefore, the lecturers needed adequate support from the managers to have positive perceptions and work towards effective implementation of Inclusive Education in Teachers' Colleges.

The researcher probed whether lecturers were comfortable with all types and classes of disabilities in their classes. Some participants (Case 5, 18, 19) indicated that they were comfortable with mild cases where the student is independent and easy to manage. They showed that they were not comfortable with severe and profound cases as they were not fully equipped with skills to manage such students. The lecturers' perceptions appeared to concur with the findings by Yeo et al. [22] that educators felt that mild cases of disabilities could be included and not severe and profound cases. They were hesitant that such students might present challenges in the lecture rooms and demand more time and attention which they might not have.

However, another lecturer noted that college leaders/administrators had negative perceptions towards Inclusive Education. One lecturer participant unearthed.

They (Principals) see Inclusive Education as a waste of resources. If you talk of enrolling the students with disabilities, they pretend to show that they are concerned. They do not want to include such students. It is all because they do not understand the element of inclusivity, Case 1.

The lecturer could interpret the Principals' perceptions from their attitudes when they fail to provide necessary resources to effectively accommodate SWDs. Contrary to perceptions by Case 1, another participant (Case 7) showed that Principals are beginning to see that inclusion is the order of the day such that their attitudes tend to be positive toward SWDs. This could be attributed to various workshops they attended and the involvement in the Inclusive Education policy making process as indicated by (Case 3 and Case 4). Also, in line with the changes, such as that of Inclusive Education, in the education system, the Principals tended to develop positive perceptions. Accordingly, the chronosystem as explained by Bronfenbrenner refers

to the time frame which affects interactions of systems, [23]. As such, the changes in the education system because of the urge to adopt Inclusive Education could have influenced the perceptions of Principals. As a ministerial requirement to implement IE in Teachers' Colleges, college leaders could have been left with no option than to be positive in line with chronological developments.

CONCLUSION

The main limitation of the study is that it covered a few Teachers Colleges in Harare and the findings may have limited generalisability when applied to colleges that are outside Harare. Irrespective of this limitation, the study findings led to six conclusions viz.

- ❖ Positive perceptions towards Inclusive Education as a human right and as a way to reduce stigma and discrimination provide a necessary condition for Inclusive Education in Teachers' Colleges in Zimbabwe.
- ❖ As a result of negative attitudes exhibited by some lecturers and administrators towards disability, the conditions were still not ripe for the implementation of Inclusive Education on Teachers' Colleges of Zimbabwe.
- ❖ Some lecturers still believed in institutionalising disabilities as evidenced by those who might have wanted SWDs in their Teachers' Colleges to transfer to colleges which had a mandate to train special needs teachers.
- ❖ Lecturers and managers were comfortable with including mild cases of disabilities and not severe and profound cases therefore some students with disabilities remain segregated.
- ❖ There were perceived benefits to inclusion such as students learning from each other as well as, reducing stigma and discrimination and creating conducive social environment in Teachers' Colleges.
- ❖ Despite positive perceptions by college personnel, the society still had a challenge in accommodating PWDs who would have graduated as teachers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Basing on the conclusions the following recommendations were made.

- ❖ College administrators should provide adequate support to Inclusive Education programmes through provision of adequate resources an assistive device
- ❖ The Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education should provide opportunities for workshops and staff development programmes for lecturers and administrators to equip them with relevant skills and

attitudes towards Inclusive Education. These could be done on rotational basis to ensure that all lecturers are equipped with Inclusive Educations skills and attitudes.

- ❖ College administrators should ensure mission statements, visions and values are aligned to their perceptions on inclusivity.
- ❖ The Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, through various departments, must conscientize communities so that they develop positive perceptions towards Inclusive Education.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO KNOWLEDGE

There is dearth of ecologically valid African literature in relation to inclusive education and how it should be implemented. The study findings will go a long way towards influencing policy in respect of the gaps that have been identified. In addition, the study of perceptions has highlighted inclusive education in teachers' colleges as two-pronged process. Firstly, it highlighted enrolment issues for students with disabilities in line with prevalence rates. Secondly it highlighted adaptations to infrastructure and the curriculum and lecturer skills. Current perceptions of inclusive education are constructed basing on the later. Thus, the need to give qual emphasis to the former.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

I, on behalf of all the co-author declare that author(s) have no conflict of interest with this manuscript.

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