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The Dynamics of Implementing Inclusive Education in Schools

Abstract

Located within constructivist paradigm, this is a qualitative study that used a case study design. Qualitative data collection methods – interviews, observations and document analysis – were employed for this study. The sample comprised of 43 teachers and principals from four case study schools. This paper focuses on the experiences of primary school teachers regarding implementation of inclusive education. The findings from the study suggest that despite various attempts aimed at successful implementation of inclusive education in schools; not much has been achieved in this regard. The findings also suggest that there were problems emanating from the lack of sufficient training on the implementation of IE including the implementation of the SIAS (screen, identify, and support) Policy which requires teachers to screen, identify, and support learners. However, teachers were only trained to do baseline assessment and were not fully trained on SIAS. The paper recommends that there is need for teachers to get continuous training and support on the implementation of IE particularly on aspects of SIAS. Qualified educational psychologist should be utilised for the crucial role of implementing the SIAS Policy.

Keywords: implementing inclusive education, SIAS Policy, learning disability, experiences, primary schools

Introduction

Global international and national legislations have increased the focus on ideologies of inclusion and inclusive schooling, as emphasised in the UNESCO's *Salamanca Statement* (UNESCO, 1994). Inclusive education (IE), which is used as a potent mechanism to afford learners with either physical or learning impairments an opportunity to be educated, is regarded as one of the most serious issues facing developing countries.

Teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education

Campbell et al. (2003) indicate the importance of a teacher, in that teachers have the potential to either improve the quality of life of a learner with disabilities or adversely affect and even harm it. If a teacher develops and displays a negative attitude towards a learner with disabilities, the learner's quality of life can be seriously affected, sometimes for the rest of their life. When teachers are prepared to teach in an inclusive classroom attitudes towards inclusion improve; conversely, when teachers are not prepared for this instructional model, negative attitudes prevail (Jones, 2010). Teachers are principal agents in the execution of IE; therefore, it is important to enhance their skills in teaching diverse groups of learners, which include those with special educational needs (Malak, 2013). Research suggests that

the effectiveness of a teacher in terms of his/her preparedness to work with learners predicts his/her attitude and willingness to teach in inclusive contexts and is an indication that s/he holds more positive attitudes (McHatton & Parker, 2013). Furthermore, Gill (2010) argues that for inclusion-related reforms to take place and be implemented successfully, the goodwill of teachers who are at the coalface of inclusion, integration policies and policy implementation, is vital. Nel et al. (2011) contend that for learners with special needs, to be successfully included in regular classrooms, teachers in those classrooms must change their attitudes from negative to positive, as regards learners with special needs. Research studies showed that most teachers had negative feelings about inclusion due to inadequate educational facilities, like the size of the class especially in developing countries, South Africa included, leading to the conditions which are not conducive to the successful implementation of inclusive education (Cagran & Schmidt, 2011).

Teacher training and development in inclusive education

UNESCO (1994) contends that teacher training programmes are supposed to incorporate inclusion. Further, Buell et al. (1999) note that a lack of efficacy is a concerning factor for teachers who need to implement inclusive education. This is because of insufficient training and education they received on inclusion. Further, Forlin et al. (2014) posit that teacher educators are facing challenges in transforming their views and practices with respect to teacher preparation, because schools and systems are shifting towards making environments more inclusive. Allday et al. (2013) interviewed teachers who reported a paucity of inclusive training among general education teachers as part of their pre-service preparation. Allday et al. (2013) observed 10,560 teachers in their survey and found that only a quarter to a third of teachers reported having had sufficient training to carry out inclusion successfully. When South Africa's first democratic government was sworn in 1994, it had a significant impact on the education system, most especially on those learners experiencing barriers to learning. The introduction of the new constitution in 1996, which included a bill of rights, ensured that every South African's right to basic education was considered. This led to the introduction of Education White Paper 6 (hereafter referred to as EWP6): *Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusion Education and Training System* (DoE, 2001), where the main focus is on affirming that no learners, irrespective of the disabilities or barriers to learning which they face, should be denied access to equal education (Engelbrecht et al., 2006; Lebopa, 2018).

Theoretical framework – the Theory of Planned Behaviour

Underpinning this study is the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), which is an extension of the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen, 1991). The TPB theory is widely used to determine behaviour arising from attitudes and has been utilised in research involving attitudes towards individuals with disabilities with the aim of understanding behaviour by looking at the relationship between attitudes, subjective norms and behavioural intentions. The model suggests that attitudes toward behaviour may be influenced by past experiences, previous knowledge and newly acquired knowledge.

Problem statement: Many factors continue to affect the implementation of inclusive education in South African schools owing to the lack of training and continuous support to teachers.

Research aims: To establish the views of primary school teachers regarding the implementation of inclusive education.

Research questions: What are the views of primary school teachers regarding the implementation of inclusive education?

Methodology

This is a qualitative study located within the constructivist paradigm. To explain the challenges of full-service school's teachers better, case study design was employed, and data was gathered using various methods including observations, focus/semi-structured interviews and document reviews. These methods were deemed to be relevant in collecting qualitative data. In terms of study sample, 43 teachers and 4 principals from four schools were identified using purposive sampling, because they were already teaching in full-service schools, as that was the criteria laid down for selecting participants.

Data analysis

Approaches for qualitative data analysis were used and the process of data analysis was carried out at the same time as data collection in an iterative process. Transcription, analysis, chronological organisation of interviews as well as data exploration and reduction were done. In terms of research validity and reliability (or research quality and trustworthiness), issues relating to rigor and quality were addressed – for example, triangulation was made of data sources and research methods. Also, mixed research methods were used.

Results & Discussion

This section presents and discusses the themes that emerged from the findings and these are as below. Teachers of the four participating schools gave the feedback on the challenges they were confronted with when implementing inclusive education.

The discussed is framed according to the following themes:

- Training and development of teachers;
- Teachers' support on issues of inclusion; and
- Lack of infrastructure/resources consistent with IE.

These themes are discussed in turn in the following paragraphs.

Training and development of teachers

Throughout this study, the recurring theme was that teachers face a myriad challenge that emanate from inadequate training and insufficient development which do not address those skills that are imperative when teaching in inclusive schools. All the participants identified a strong need for intensive teacher training and ongoing development on issues concerning inclusivity. The participants in this study felt that in order for them to work confidently in IE settings and contribute positively

towards helping SEN learners, they need comprehensive training. The above view is corroborated by Mukhopadhyay et al. (2012), who mention that in their study they found that teachers complained of not receiving adequate training to manage children with special needs. The participants highlighted the areas they see as fundamental for the proper implementation of IE in their schools, and stressed the importance of proper, sufficient, intensive and relevant training and development. Participants suggested that their training should cover the following aspects:

- Lesson planning; and
- Strategies on how to screen identify and support (SIAS) learners with barriers to learning.

Lesson plan for inclusive education

The teacher participants complained about not knowing exactly how to design a lesson plan for an inclusive class due to its diversity, the fact that learners learn differently, each at a different pace, and are at different levels of development. To show that there is a need for training in this specific area, T3 from Koti Primary indicated that she desires formal training on IE, since her educational background has not prepared her to work with SEN learners. Most of the participant teachers were trained to teach and interact with learners in a mainstream school, with ordinary barriers to learning. In the absence of a well-considered lesson plan teachers are sure to leave out important components. Through document reviews, all four full-service schools' teachers presented their lesson plans which did not clearly outline pertinent strategies for dealing with barriers to learning. Also, observations suggest that there was no evidence indicating how learners with learning disabilities were accommodated in the lesson plan (Lebopa, 2018). More information to this effect may be garnered from Lebopa (2018). To show the sensitivity of this matter, another teacher, T3 said:

Most of the challenges facing us educators are that almost all of us are not trained to work with learners who are having problems or difficulties... we are just going astray, not knowing how to help these learners.

From the review of document, it was also found that all the four schools presented lesson plans which did not clearly outline pertinent strategies for dealing with barriers to learning, nor was it evident, from the observations, how learners with learning disabilities were accommodated. Maryati & Susilowati (2015) corroborate this view, noting that preparation is a key element and vital for effective teaching and learning to take place (Lebopa, 2018).

Strategies to screen identify and support learners (SIAS)

The findings of this study borrow from Lebopa (2018). This study found that the SIAS policy requires teachers to screen identify and support learners, yet they were only able to do a baseline assessment, having not been fully trained. The study participants were of the view that qualified educational psychologists and other experts should do in-depth assessments, because their training covers a wide spectrum of learners with diverse needs. Affirming this view is one of the recommendations tabled in BRIDGE (2014), a report stating that teacher development should focus on supporting interventions aimed at SEN learners, and should include screening and identification. All these processes should be aimed at helping SEN learners achieve to the best of their abilities (Lebopa, 2018).

Teachers' support on issues of inclusion

Apart from training required, teachers also noted a need for continuous support on issues of inclusion. The participants mentioned that district officials, as representatives of the DoE, fail to provide adequate support to teachers. Even though such officials visit schools, they are mainly concerned with monitoring, rather than providing support if problems are encountered. Several cases were mentioned to strengthen their concerns, and some cases had been referred to the district officials, but such were not attended to, and some were solved but not amicably. A case in point is the post-provision model (PPM) at a primary school, where the remedial teacher must teach other classes. To date, nothing has been done about this, almost three years down the line and that affects the implementation of IE in that school. Some learners await district approval to be placed in special schools, however the district drags its feet until those learners are promoted to the next grade due to the age cohort policy, and that has a barring in the implementation of IE and puts teacher under pressure.

Contrary to the district officials, participants indicated that they were satisfied with the support they receive from parents. Parents are responsible for signing an intervention form to show that they agree that their child proceed to the next class and commit in helping children at home with schoolwork however, under a teacher's guidance. Where problems are identified on the side of the learner, parents are involved, and they respond positively by coming to school where they are updated and taught relevant skills to support the child at home. Parents were brought on board in terms of keeping them abreast of developments taking place in the school.

Lack of relevant infrastructure

By lack of relevant infrastructure, the participants meant infrastructure consistent with learners with learning disabilities. Inadequate infrastructure emerged as a main concern without which if not addressed and resolved, teachers' efforts might not be successful, even if they were passionate about practicing IE in their schools and classrooms. The response by the principal from school A supported the above statement, when saying:

We do have ramps, but they are not complete as they don't have rails, to protect the learner using a wheel chair not to roll over... I will not say our school is 100% user friendly and accessible because even the school yard is not entirely paved. The toilets are not adjusted for a wheelchair to can go in.

Confirming these views, Donohue and Bornman (2014) and Chimwaza (2015) cite poor infrastructural development as one of the major factors hindering the successful implementation of IE.

Recommendations

This study has highlighted that most participants are in favour of inclusion being practiced in their schools, however, the challenges that they are facing in practicing IE will render them incompetent if not addressed by the DBE and district office. The study recommends that a coordinated and integrated approach to teacher training be effected and such training should be focused on lesson planning and strategies

required on how to screen identify and support (SIAS) learners with barriers to learning. In addition, there is need for adequate resourcing of schools for IE.

Conclusion

While teachers generally have positive attitudes to IE however, research findings suggest that there are serious challenges facing teachers from the inclusive schools due to the lack of sufficient training and support for teachers. In addition, lack of infrastructure consistent with inclusive education hampers the implementation thereof.

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