

**ATTITUDES OF PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS TOWARDS
INCLUSIVE EDUCATION
IN BELIZE: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW**

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ABSTRACT

For the last three decades, the remarkable practice of inclusive education has been supported and carried out in many countries across the world. Belize however, continues to face many challenges in implementing inclusive education, making the process very slow in its development. The aim of this qualitative systematic review was to determine the attitudes held by Belizean primary school teachers towards inclusive education in general education classrooms. The study utilised the PRISMA guidelines for conducting systematic reviews, document and thematic analysis as the research methods for collecting and analysing empirical data relating to Belizean primary school teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education. A total of four documents were included in this review. According to the study's findings, primary school teachers in Belize have varying attitudes towards the inclusive education of children with special needs. Such results provide many implications for further development in inclusive practices in the country. However, a few teachers indicated negative or neutral attitudes towards the process. The latter attitudes were influenced by various factors related to the student, teacher and educational environment. The findings also indicate chief challenges that hinder the implementation of quality inclusive education such as the lack of knowledge by the teachers, the lack of educational resources and the lack of parental involvement in the children's education. The author concludes that primary school teachers in Belize have varying attitudes towards including students with special needs into their classrooms. There is still much more work to be done in improving the attitudes of some teachers and creating more effective inclusive educational environments.

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DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed.....

Date.....

STATEMENT 1

This dissertation is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MA in Education (Innovation in Learning and Teaching)

Signed.....

Date.....

STATEMENT 2

This dissertation is the result of my own independent work/investigation, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

Signed.....

Date.....

STATEMENT 3

I hereby give consent for my dissertation, if accepted, to be made available for photocopying and for inter- library loan, and for the title and summary to be made available to outside organisations.

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Date.....

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the study

Education acts as a unique instrument which is utilised to influence the world as it endorses social transformation among different societal groups. Education today is therefore, widely recognised as a fundamental right to every person, regardless of his or her aptitudes or incapacities (Paramanik et al., 2018). For the last three decades, global dialogs have commonly focussed on the inclusion of learners with disabilities into regular classrooms (Pit-ten Cate et al., 2018). The term inclusion “embodies the concept of all children being educated in common settings with their age-matched peers” (Sokal and Katz, 2015, p.43).

Inclusion of students with special needs in Belize

Belize, formerly known as British Honduras, is a small English speaking country in Central America. It attained its independence from Great Britain in 1981 (Robson. 1997), but held onto many British culture, traditions and even certain aspects of the educational system. At the onset, schools in Belize did not cater to students with special needs, however, as the leaders in education around the world began to show more concern about the education of children; Belize signed onto declarations like the “Rights of the Child” and the “World Conference on Education for All” (UNESCO, 2007, p.3).

These international meetings helped the Belizean leaders in understanding the rights of children; especially in regards to getting an education. Later on in 1991, the Ministry of Education made an effort to fulfil its commitment to these conventions, and started up the “Special Education Unit (SEU)”. This unit of the Ministry of education assisted in educating children with disabilities in various parts

of the country (UNESCO, 2007, p.5; UNICEF, 2012). Although the introduction of the SEU demonstrated great initiative from the Belizean leaders; this unit acted in total segregation of the other sectors of the Ministry of Education. Additionally, the children in these special schools were not involved or mixed with the students in regular schools (UNESCO, 2007).

Later on, in 1994, Belize was represented at the “World Conference on Special Needs Education” by education leaders who signed onto the “Salamanca Act” and consequently developed regulations for inclusive education (UNESCO, 2007, p.3). These new regulations mandated the “Special Education Unit” (SEU) to successively undergo substantial changes. In 2007, the SEU was changed to the “National Resource Centre for Inclusive Education” (Magnusson et al. 2017, p.409). This change in name also came with other significant changes such as the allowance of children with disabilities into regular classrooms with the close supervision of the personnel from the National Resource centre for Inclusive Education. .

1.2 Purpose of the study:

Currently, the educational system in Belize is relatively sluggish in the implementation of quality inclusive education (McKay, 2012). This signifies that the development of policies that mandate the process of inclusion and the adoption of inclusive practices are not absolute sureties that applicable and consistent practices are followed within the classrooms of Belize. Moreover, since the initiation of inclusion in Belize, only a few studies have been carried out in this particular area; which leaves a wide gap that generally calls for exploration.

This study has therefore emerged due to the researcher's genuine concerns for students with special educational needs who are placed into general education classrooms, as well as to provide assistance to the various stakeholders in education such as teachers, parents, administrators, the Ministry of Education and other researchers; in understanding the glitches that negatively affect the progress of inclusive education.

Firstly, the students with special needs, who face many difficulties in the mainstream classroom would benefit because the knowledge provided would allow educational leaders to provide for teachers, the necessary support and adequate resources which would allow them to tailor educational services to meet the individual needs of these students.

Secondly, this study is significant because it would provide insight into views of teachers who are at the forefront as the key facilitators of inclusion. The study would assist the teachers with knowledge that could make inclusion a more favourable and practical exercise.

Next, the parents of learners with special needs would also benefit because this knowledge gained by all stakeholders would allow their children to experience less barriers in school such as discrimination and seclusion within the classroom.

Additionally, educational leaders, the Ministry of Education and policy makers would benefit from the study by gaining a general understanding of the attitudes that teachers hold towards the inclusion of students with special educational needs; as well as the reasons why those attitudes exist.

Furthermore, the study is significant to me as the researcher, because it contributes to my professional development as a mainstream educator and an

aspiring teacher-specialist in social and emotional disorders. The study will allow me as the researcher to recognize and make known, the strengths and weaknesses of the inclusive educational system in my country; in an effort for all stakeholders to build on those strengths and make improvements to those weaknesses.

Lastly, upon completion, this study would meaningfully contribute important insights into the current debates surrounding the challenges of inclusive education within the region of the Caribbean and beyond. Also, reviewing the available data on teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education in Belize can provide guidance to practice and future studies.

This study assumed that most teachers in Belize would have negative attitudes towards the inclusion of students with special educational needs into mainstream classrooms.

1.3 Research Aims:

This dissertation aims to provide a systematic review of the attitudes held by Belizean primary school teachers towards inclusion. It is important for those in education to address current research gaps in an effort to provide quality inclusive education in the country. Additionally, the study seeks to investigate the factors that influence teachers' attitudes towards the education of students with special needs alongside other students in mainstream classrooms. The findings of the study will make available a foundation for the reinforcement of both in- service and pre-service teacher programs and also the other educational support services in Belize.

1.4 Research Objectives:

The objectives of the study were to:

1. Examine the attitudes held by Belizean primary school teachers towards inclusive education.
2. Identify the factors that influence primary school teachers' attitudes towards inclusion.
3. Identify the challenges of implementing Inclusive Education in Belize.

1.5 Research Questions:

This dissertation was guided by the following questions:

1. What attitudes do Belizean primary school teachers hold towards inclusive education?
2. What factors influence the attitudes of Belizean primary school teachers towards inclusion?
3. What are the challenges of implementing Inclusive Education in Belize?

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction:

The literature review is a very important portion of conducting academic research. The literature review process allows researchers to critically evaluate other studies that relate to their topic of interest, while putting their study's outcomes into perspective (Winchester and Salji, 2016). This chapter therefore deliberates on the theoretical literature encompassing inclusive education. It is organised in the following themes which were derived from the aims of the research: inclusive education; the importance of implementing quality inclusive education; teachers' attitudes towards inclusion; and factors that influence teachers' attitudes towards inclusion.

2.2 Inclusive Education

The term inclusive education has been defined by many scholars and experts in education. However, one of the most common descriptions that gives complete meaning to the term inclusion is written in the Salamanca statement which states that; "those with special educational needs must have access to regular schools which should accommodate them within a child centred pedagogy capable of meeting these needs" (UNESCO, 1994, p.viii).

Inclusion is argued to be a remarkable phenomenon that allows all students to attain preliminary experience of the real world, which is beyond what they experience at home. This trending practice is expected to offer several benefits where students gain new knowledge, connections and attitudes that are not fully attained in a segregated educational system (Paramanik et al., 2018). Additionally, inclusive education is likely to assist in shaping a more suitable culture for citizens

of the world since all children in school are learning about equality and the acceptance of human diversity (Paramanik et al., 2018)

While the benefits of inclusive education are seemingly bountiful, several drawbacks impede the success of the inclusive process (Salovita, 2019). For instance, many educational institutions have very small numbers of educators and specialists that are qualified to cater to students with special needs (Suc et al., 2016). A recent study carried out in Ghana, by Opoku et al. (2016) indicated that teachers in general education classrooms are particularly unprepared for inclusive education. Also, many schools also lack instructional assets to meet the needs of all the special learners (Paramanik et al., 2018). A typical consequence to these flaws in inclusive education is that teachers in general education often become overwhelmed with the different demands of teaching. Consequently, the perspectives, attitudes and performance of these teachers are often likely to be affected (Tiwari et al., 2015).

2.3 The Importance of Implementing Quality Inclusive Education

The need for the implementation of quality inclusive education has become apparent for quite some time now. This is because of the realization that simply placing students with disabilities or learning disorders into mainstream classroom does not indicate that their needs are going to be exclusively met. According to the World Bank (2018), approximately 15% of the worlds' populace has some type of disability; and students with disabilities, even if enrolled in school, experience problems relating to their learning and individual needs. Furthermore, despite the on-going efforts that many countries have been making to provide accessible

education for every child; some children are still facing major obstacles to their education, while in inclusive settings (Magnassum et al., 2017).

These barriers that children face in inclusive settings are caused by varying factors; however, can be principally teacher associated (Sibagariang, 2017). Take for instance, a study conducted by Tiwari et al. (2015), which found that educators in India were simply acknowledging the theoretical ideas of inclusion but were not providing any tangible indication that it was successfully being achieved. This shows that for inclusive education to be effective, several necessary arrangements and measures needs to be in order (Bhatnagar and Das, 2014). For example, there needs to be more educational support systems which eradicate learning barriers such as the lack of pertinent skills by educators; which in turn add to further marginalization of children due to their disabilities (Stankovska, 2015). Additionally, there needs to be active efforts which seek to identify and emulate approaches and strategies used by countries that have proven to effectively achieve inclusive education.

2.4 Teachers' Attitudes towards Inclusion

Some studies argue that it is important to investigate the attitudes of teachers, since this aspect of the teacher largely influences their performances in inclusive settings. Looking at this from an international perspective; several researches have indicated that teachers have mixed views towards inclusion. Dordevic et al. (2018) for instance, examined how educators in Serbia and Norway felt about inclusion. They revealed that educators and others in education expressed optimistic views towards the process of inclusion. Likewise, Bhatnagar and Das (2014) found that teachers from New Delhi, India also depicted affirmative perceptions of the inclusive process. Bhatnagar and Das (2014) further highlighted

that the males who were new to the teaching profession showed the most supporting views towards the inclusion in that region.

This very favourable outlook on inclusion is certainly not seen everywhere in the world however; as Opoku (2016) conversely established that in the country of Ghana, educators had very undesirable attitudes when it comes to having students with special educational needs in their classrooms. Another study that adds to that viewpoint was conducted in Dubai and Abu Dhabi by Dev and Kumar (2015). They similarly revealed that educators that region exhibit the same type of negativity towards the process of inclusion.

As a final point, these mixed views about inclusive education indicate that the mere advocacy for inclusive education by leaders around the world does not ensure that the process will be exclusively accepted by those on the front line (the teachers). Furthermore, the undesirable attitudes by some teachers towards inclusion may cause further dilemmas to a child's education. This point is reasonably uttered in a study conducted by Tiwari et al, (2015) who found that teachers who had negative views on the inclusive process generally overlooked the students with special needs and frequently exempted them from course work.

2.5 Factors that Influence Teachers' attitudes towards Inclusion

The review of several studies conducted in various countries has shown that legislature single-handedly, does not guarantee the success of inclusion.

Furthermore, reviews conducted on studies done with solely in-service teachers reveal that teachers hold varying attitudes towards the process of inclusion and there are diverse variables which influence these teachers' attitudes on inclusive education (Saloviita, 2019).

There are many factors that may influence how teachers view inclusion. These factors can be associated with the general educational environment or can be totally related to the educator or the student (Sibagariang, 2017). A common student associated factor relates to the severity of the disability of the children with special needs; whereby teachers exhibit more affirmative attitudes if the children's incapacities are mild (Sibagariang, 2017). On the other hand, the teacher associated factors relate to how much knowledge and experience educators have with children with special needs (Salovita, 2018), as well as their confidence in dealing with children with disabilities (Song et al., 2019). When teachers lack knowledge, experience and self-confidence, the chances of successful inclusive education is largely minimised (Suc et al., 2016).

2.5.1 Teacher knowledge and preparedness:

Several studies have examined whether educators with more understanding of inclusive concepts depict more positive views of the inclusive process (Dev and Kumar, 2015; Gathumbi, 2015; McCrimmon, 2015; Abbas et al., 2016; Zagona et al., 2017). It is commonly argued, that educators' knowledge of inclusive concepts is largely related to their views of inclusive education and that teachers with greater knowledge of the process are more positive about it (Abbas et al., 2016). An investigation that backs this idea was conducted by Zagona et al. (2017) in the United States. These scholars found that there was a notable association between educators' willingness to include students with disabilities and whether the educators were trained for inclusive education. Their study revealed that educators with knowledge acquired from training were much more ready for and comfortable with inclusion; in comparison to their fellow colleagues who didn't get any type of training (Zagona et al., 2017). Similarly, Dev and Kumar (2015) found that

educators who earned more than a graduate degree and who had prior associations with students with special needs expressed more affirmative views towards inclusion than educators with less experience or lower academic degrees.

On the contrary, the author McCrimmon (2015) disagrees with the idea of having higher university exposure being linked to more positive attitudes. He highlighted that many teachers in Canada generally have positive attitudes towards the process; but a common problem exists in the country because the universities fail to support pre-service teachers with the necessary training for inclusion.

McCrimmon (2015, p.236) specifically mentions that “many Canadian teachers struggle with the application of inclusive principles in their classrooms and find the education of children with exceptional learning needs challenging.” Similarly, Gathumbi et al. (2015) indicated that the teachers in Kenya are unprepared for teaching students with special needs because of their lack in educational groundings in the specific area.

These studies clearly indicate that when adequate training for special educational needs are not attained or acknowledged by the teachers; consequential struggles in inclusive classrooms are unavoidable. However, these problems in inclusive education can be addressed and tailored by the provision of the necessary pedagogical training for educators which would develop their confidence and readiness for teaching students with disabilities and special needs (McCrimmon, 2015).

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter defines the methodology underlying the dissertation. It explains how the data that was used to address the research objectives and questions were collected and analysed. Justifications for the usage of the research design, instruments, data presentation and analytical techniques are also given. The chapter concludes with the ethical considerations of the paper.

3.2 Research Design:

This study utilised a systematic literature review to investigate the attitudes held by Belizean primary school teachers in regards to inclusion. The systematic review method is vital in the accumulation of existing evidence that relates to a particular topic of interest. This method gathers existing evidence and reports on research that are found to be appropriate according to an inclusion criterion; which seeks to respond to specific research questions (Snyder, 2019). Although categorised as a type of desk research, systematic reviews are as significant as other research methods; since they follow a laborious strategy which is analogous to other research approaches (Puljak and Sapuna, 2017). The systematic approach also curtails predispositions and the outcomes are considered to be consistent and trustworthy; making them dependable to draw deductions and judgments (Moher et al., 2009).

In an effort to strengthen the argument for conducting systematic reviews for research, Snyder (2019) articulated that the significance of any investigation is highly contingent on; how the research was done, what its findings were, and the transparency in its reporting. This scholar further expressed that “for a review to

become a proper research methodology, as with any other research, proper steps need to be followed and action taken to ensure the review is accurate, precise, and trustworthy” (Snyder, 2019, p.334). This design was therefore considered suitable for this dissertation because it allowed the researcher to identify, appraise and integrate the results and views of other previous empirical research that are related to the specific research topic (Sargeant and O’Connor, 2014). It further provided the basis for a comprehensive examination of the study’s problems, like no sole investigation could have (Snyder, 2019).

This systematic review initiated with an unambiguous research problem followed by a reliable research method, data gathering and analysing technique (Puljak and Sapunar, 2017). Furthermore, it was written using the PRISMA recommendations for carrying out systematic reviews. According to Moher et al (2009) the PRISMA guidelines assist scholars to conduct and report systematic reviews and meta-analyses. These guidelines however, do not act as tools for assessing the quality of the reviews. Moreover, the analysing technique in systematic reviews is usually in the form of a meta- analysis that incorporates the findings of the documents used (Snyder, 2019). However, for this dissertation, the data from the studies are synthesized, integrated and interpreted through a qualitative analysis (narrative form) rather than a meta-analysis (statistical form) since the studies were heterogeneous.

3.3 Data Collection Method

This dissertation was based exclusively on secondary data. Panchenko and Samovilova (2020) describe secondary data as information that is gathered by persons other than the primary researcher and often with different research

questions in mind. Secondary researchers are able to search and collect credible data relating to their investigations from various reliable sources including databanks, public libraries and archives (Bowen. 2009). These secondary researchers should ensure however, that the search procedure in systematic reviews are structured and exhaustive of both published and unpublished studies; in order to cover grey areas and reduce biases (Wilson and Lipsey, 2001).

In an article written by Chen and Phillips (2014), the pros and cons of using secondary data were described. They pointed out that secondary data can be obtained very quickly and easily at little to no cost. However, they also expressed that; the data gathered may not directly address to the problems or assumptions of the secondary research; the privacy of participants may not be secured; and the secondary researchers may not be aware of drawbacks in the primary research stage, causing some misinterpretation of data (Cheng and Phillips, 2014).

In this study, the strategy employed to collect the pertinent secondary data relating to inclusive education in Belize, was document analysis. Bowen (2009), described document analysis as a method used in qualitative research for gathering data by the revision of existing documents. The documents may be in the form of hard or soft copies and can include newsletters, journals, meeting notes and so on. Bowen (2009) expressed that there are many advantages to using document analysis. For instance, the documents are normally an ideal source for contextual information and are unobtrusive. On the contrary, he adds that document analysis also has some drawbacks. For example, the information may be scattered, unobtainable, out of date, selected from a biased position or not directly applicable to the current research (Bowen, 2009).

The use of document analysis allowed for triangulation to be achieved for this study, since the data used are from different document sources which utilised either qualitative or quantitative methodologies. The convergence of the data gave the researcher a better understanding of teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education and further validates the results of this study due to the cross-corroboration of data from the different methodical approaches.

3.4 Sampling Strategy

For this research, the author conducted manual internet searches using the databases ERIC and Springer (which are significant to the social sciences) and the Google and Google Scholar search engines to find reputable documents such as; books which entailed academic research, previous studies, government policies and organizational reports pertaining to inclusive education in Belize. The searches were made for documents written between the years 2000 to 2020, which is the timeframe that inclusive education was realised and practiced in Belize. Explicit keywords such as 'inclusion', 'disabilities' and 'Belize', their synonyms and several combinations utilizing Boolean operators were applied in the search.

The search of the two databases along with the Google search engines produced 102 documents that underwent title and abstract screening. The researcher then grouped the documents based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria (see table 3.1) which set the boundaries for this study. A total of 98 documents were excluded (see figure 3.1) because they investigated or discussed topics other than inclusive education in Belize. Finally, a total of 4 documents (see table 3.2) were pooled which met the inclusion criteria. From this number, one document was

utilised to provide a summary for the introduction of this dissertation. The other three documents were further scrutinised through full text revision, which ensured that they were able to answer the investigation’s research questions.

Table 3.1
Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discussed inclusive education in Belize - Investigated primary school teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion - Available in English - Discussed challenges to inclusive education in Belize - Discussed Belizean government policies on inclusion - Issued between the years 2000 and 2020 (timeframe that inclusion was realised and practiced in Belize) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discussed topics other than inclusive education in Belize - Issued outside the inclusion date

Figure 3.1
PRISMA Flowchart – applying inclusion and exclusion criteria

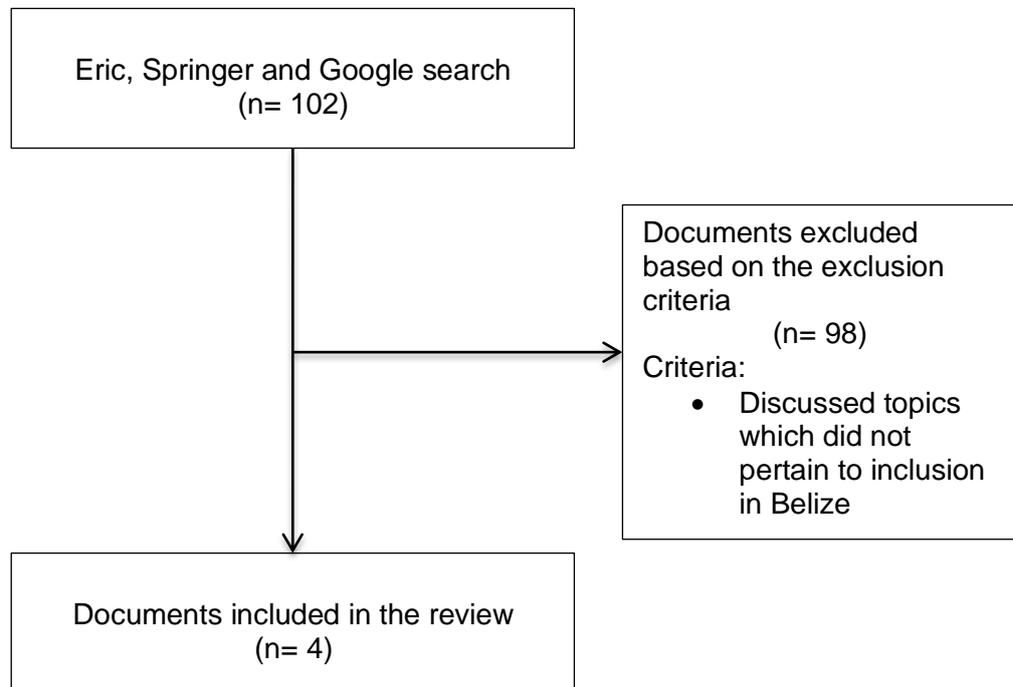


Table 3.2

Documents included in the review

Title of Document	Author(s)/ Year
The Perspective of Teachers in Belize in Relation to Working with Visually Impaired Pupils in Mainstream Schools: An Exploratory Study	Azueta and Kamenopolou, 2018
Factors Influencing Belize District Primary School Teachers' Attitudes Toward Inclusive Education	McKay, 2012
Belize Report on Inclusive Education	UNESCO, 2007
The Situation Analysis of Children with Disabilities	UNICEF, 2012

3.5 Data Analysis

The qualitative data that was gathered was analysed using a thematic approach. This approach was chosen because “unlike many qualitative methodologies, it is not tied to a particular epistemological or theoretical perspective” (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017, p. 3352). The researcher utilised a top-down analysis framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2013) which suggests several steps for data analysis. Firstly, the collected data was read and re-read several times in order for the researcher to become familiar with the data. The researcher then kept reflecting on the research questions as codes were manually developed from the data and later categorised in themes.

3.6 Ethical Concerns

Ethical approval was not obligatory for this research since it did not involve the collection of primary data (Tripathy, 2013); however, I ensured that ethical concerns were always being considered throughout the investigation. Tripathy (2013) articulates that if the documents or studies included in the review were openly accessible on the web and were free of cost; it then implies that further examination and usage is allowed. “However, the ownership of the original data

must be acknowledged” (Tripathy, 2013, p.1478). With this in mind, I ensured that credit was given to the original authors for the use of the data from their articles. Lastly, I carefully reviewed the documents to ensure that those included did not consist of any identifying information that could cause potential harm to any participant from the primary studies (Tripathy, 2013).

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

The findings of the study are presented in this chapter. The thematic analysis produced three themes from the data collected. These include; teachers' feeling towards inclusion; influential factors on teachers' attitudes towards inclusion and the challenges to inclusive education. These themes reflected the study's research questions which were presented in chapter one. This chapter concludes with a summary of the findings.

4.2 Teachers' feelings towards inclusion

This theme reflects research question one, which sought to find out the attitudes that primary school teachers held towards inclusive education. Two of the documents included in this systematic review discussed how primary school teachers feel towards inclusion. The data shows that primary school teachers in Belize generally have varying attitudes towards the process as Azueta and Kamenopolou (2018) found that teachers were mainly positive and agreed that students with special needs should be included in the normal school setting; while McKay (2012) found that teachers had varying views (ranging from positive to neutral to negative) towards inclusive education. The findings of this dissertation are very similar to those of the studies examined in the literature review (Dordovic et al., 2018; Opuku, 2016; Dev and Kumar, 2015; Tiwari et al., 2016).

It can be argued however, that the results of the larger study which was conducted by McKay (2012) had some limitations since her study utilised a quantitative survey as the instrument to ascertain the attitudes of teachers towards teaching students with special needs. "Attitudes have traditionally been measured

through Likert scales, but limitations of this approach are increasingly recognized” (Carrasco and Lucas, 2015, p.167). Thus, the use of surveys to determine the attitudes of teachers is not completely reliable as teachers may fabricate their responses and exhibit completely different attitudes towards students with special needs inside the classroom.

On the other hand, the smaller study which was conducted by Azueta and Kamenopolou (2018) utilised qualitative semi-structured interviews and field observations methods for determining teachers’ views towards teaching students with disabilities. Although their study entailed a much smaller sample size than the study of McKay (2012), they applied a different, yet more dependable approach to ascertain how teachers feel about teaching students with disabilities.

Carrasco and Lucas (2015, p.168) helps to put this idea into perspective by expressing that;

‘qualitative survey designs are most useful for providing rich contextual subjective information about people feeling, emotions and perceptions. They can be used to examine people’s social practices or for understanding their behavioural responses to different stimuli. They are also useful for unpacking complexity and identifying processes. The evidence from such studies can be used to provide narratives and messages that can be easily communicated to politicians and other decision-makers.’

It can therefore be argued that since the research design utilised by Azueta and Kamenopolou (2018) was better suited to study this phenomenon; the results of their study is more reliable and are able to have more profound impact on policy changes in Belize. However, having such a small sample size of only eight in-service teachers impacts the ability to make complete generalizations that teachers in Belize have generally positive attitudes towards inclusion.

The results of the study the conducted by McKay (2012) also portray some degree of negative attitudes by teachers towards inclusion. These negative attitudes towards inclusive education cannot be disregarded as they may perhaps be associated with the perceptibly slow and unsuccessful inclusive practice in Belize (McKay, 2012). Furthermore, McKay (2012) points out that some teachers remained neutral on the topic of inclusive education. According to her, this may also be a consequence of teachers having very minimal knowledge and understanding of the concepts encompassing inclusive education (McKay, 2012); which further negatively impacts the success of the inclusive education in Belize.

4.3 Influential factors on teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion

This theme reflects research question number two, which sought to find out what factors were influential to the teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion. Various studies have revealed that there are several factors which may have positive or negative influence on teachers’ attitudes towards inclusive education (Salovita, 2019). From this review, two studies discussed the factors that influence the attitudes of Belizean primary school teachers towards teaching students with special educational needs (McKay, 2012; Unicef, 2012). It was found that the influential factors on teachers’ attitudes were linked to three general groupings; the student, the teacher and the general educational environment (see table 4.1). For this reason, these factors are presented and discussed according to those specific categories.

Table 4.1
Influential factors on teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion

Factor	Study	Variable	Effects
Student-associated	McKay (2012)	- Degree of disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teachers displayed negative views toward inclusion if the students’ disabilities were more serious. - Teachers indicated special education is best for students

			physical disabilities or other impairments
Teacher-associated	McKay (2012) Unicef (2012)	- Very little knowledge of; terminologies used in inclusive education; the Laws of Belize relating to Special and Inclusive Education; and various types of disabilities.	- Teachers expressed negative attitudes and a sense of fear and unwillingness to take on the challenges of teaching students with disabilities.
Educational Environment-associated	McKay (2012) Unicef (2012)	- Number of student with disabilities in a class - Class Size	- The number of disabled children within in the classroom affects the teachers' willingness to support inclusion. - Teachers had negative views if class sizes were large and they had student with disabilities.

4.3.1 Student- associated factors

This research identified only one student-associated factor which had influence on teachers' attitudes. This factor was the degree of the disability of the students with special needs. It was found that teachers displayed more negative views towards the teaching students with special needs, if the students' disabilities were more serious (McKay, 2012). Moreover, some teachers believed that students with more severe disabilities such as mental retardation should be placed into special education instead of being included into the mainstream classroom (McKay, 2012). The results suggest then, that primary school teachers in Belize are more positive and willing to accept the inclusion of students lesser degree of disabilities than those with severe conditions.

4.3.2 Teacher- associated factors

This study identified one teacher-associated factor that influenced primary school teachers' attitudes towards teaching students with disabilities. This broad teacher-related factor pertained to the teachers' knowledge and understanding of concepts that encompass inclusive education (McKay, 2012; Unicef, 2012). In her study, McKay (2012) revealed that primary school teachers have very limited knowledge

of the terminologies used in special and inclusive education, as well the regulations that mandate inclusion in Belize. Furthermore, she pointed out that the teachers also had very minimal knowledge of the varying types of disabilities that are possible in children (McKay, 2012). As a consequence, some teachers portrayed negative attitudes combined with a sense of fear and a general unwillingness to make any attempt to take on the role of teaching students with special educational needs (McKay, 2012).

4.3.3 Educational environment- associated factors

Two factors relating to the educational environment was found to have influence on the teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education. This was the number of students with disabilities in a class and the general class size (McKay 2012; Unicef, 2012). McKay (2012) expressed that teachers indicated more positive attitudes when there was a small amount of students with disabilities in the class. This factor associated with the educational environment is perhaps directly related to the teacher associated factor; whereby the lack of training, awareness and knowledge by teachers may consequently allow them to feel less competent in handling classes with larger numbers of children with special needs (CNS). Additionally, Unicef (2012, p.50) describes how teachers felt about having students with disabilities in classes with large amounts of students. They state that:

'there are some teachers and principals who don't want children with disabilities in their classes because their classes have thirty or more students. According to these educators, to give CNS the attention they need would cause neglect to the other students. They believe the CNS will contribute to a reduction in the school's average performance on standardised examinations (e.g., BJAT and PSE) and teaching CNS means more work for the teacher.'

4.4 Challenges to inclusive education

This theme reflected research question number three. From this review, two studies embarked on answering the question pertaining to the challenges of implementing inclusive education in Belize. It is evident from both studies that there are several hindrances that affect the successful implementation of inclusive education in the country. These blockages to successful inclusion are directly related to the factors that influence the attitudes of teachers towards the process. Both Azueta and Kamenopolou (2018) and Unicef (2012) revealed in their findings that primary school teachers face several challenges in inclusive settings. The teachers in their study described the lack of teacher training and preparedness, educational and financial resources and parental involvement as major challenges to the inclusive process. Unicef (2012, p. 49) expresses that “in some cases, the parents are not making the effort to send their children to school”. These findings are very conspicuous as they are similarly reflected in many other studies as the major limitations to successful implementation of inclusive education around the world (Dev and Kumar, 2015; Gathumbi, 2015; McCrimmon, 2015; Abbas et al., 2016; Zagona et al., 2017).

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

This investigation emerged due to the researcher's concerns for the students with special needs who are placed into mainstream classrooms; along with the researcher's intent to contribute to the growing knowledge and understanding of the various hindrances to successful inclusive education. The data that was collected for this study were guided around the study's aims which sought to; examine the attitudes held by Belizean primary school teachers towards inclusive education; identify the factors that influence primary school teachers' attitudes towards inclusion and identify the challenges of implementing Inclusive Education in Belize.

5.2 Discussion of the Study's Findings

A summary of the important parts of the study is presented according to the study's research questions and are discussed as follows;

Research Question one:

What attitudes do teachers hold towards inclusive education?

The study revealed that primary school teachers in Belize have varying attitudes towards inclusive education. Thus, the initial assumption of primary school teachers in Belize having mainly negative attitudes towards inclusive education is not supported. It can be concluded that since some of the teachers had generally positive attitudes towards inclusion; there is the indication that at least some teachers in Belize would normally be willing to tailor their teaching strategies to fully include students with special educational needs into their classrooms. Additionally, these positive attitudes towards the process of inclusion may

considerably increase the chances to achieve quality inclusive education in Belize. On the other hand, the study also revealed that some teachers showed negative and neutral attitudes towards inclusion. These negative and neutral attitudes of primary school teachers in inclusive settings in Belize were developed as a consequence of several factors which need to be swiftly and seriously addressed by all stakeholders in education.

Research Question Two:

What factors influence teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education?

The study found that various factors influence the teachers' attitudes towards inclusion. The factors which were revealed were in relation to the student, the teacher and the educational environment. The teachers expressed more negative attitudes towards inclusion due to factors such as; the severity of the disabilities of the students with special needs; the lack of training and knowledge on the inclusive process and concepts; and the general class size. Teachers indicated more positive attitudes towards the students if the disabilities expressed were milder and if the class sizes were smaller. They further expressed that if they were provided with training in inclusion and special education, then their attitudes towards the process would be more positive. Lastly, the study revealed that teachers expressed a sense of fear when dealing with students with severe levels of disabilities and when class size was larger.

Research Question Three:

What are the challenges of implementing inclusive education?

The findings indicate that teachers experience a number of challenges while attempting to implement inclusive education. These challenges included the lack

of resources in the schools for providing quality instruction and assessment for students with special needs; the lack of professional assistance from experts in the field of special needs; the number of students with disabilities in general education classrooms and lastly, the lack of parental involvement in the education of children with disabilities. These major deficiencies in the inclusive setting greatly reduced the teachers' self- efficacy to teach students with disabilities and further affect the students who are placed at a great disadvantage in such settings. These findings confirm that the factors which influence the attitudes of teachers also act as the major challenges that hinder the success of implementing quality inclusive education in Belize.

5.3 Limitations

There are several limitations were noted for this study. Firstly, the time frame for conducting the research was very limited for the researcher who worked as a fulltime teacher while conducting the research; especially during a global pandemic. Secondly, financial resources were also limited when conducting this research, therefore the purchase software and articles which could have added to the reliability of the results of the study was not possible. Thirdly, the scope of the discussions of this research paper is limited to the researchers' minimal knowledge of the research process and producing academic papers. Furthermore, more databases could have been explored during the search procedure which might have produced more documents related the objectives of this dissertation. Additionally, only published documents were found, therefore the grey areas were not covered, making the dissertation not entirely free of biases. Furthermore, this systematic review could have been more dependable if several persons were working on it. Lastly, the quality of the studies used in the review could have been

assessed to increase the dissertation's reliability. It can be argued however, the findings of this dissertation provide valued awareness of teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education.

5.4 Implications and Recommendations

Based on the results of this systematic review, there is an indication that teachers' attitudes can be more positive towards inclusive education if proper measures (on all levels) were in place and being followed. The study therefore, has many practical implications for all stakeholders in education in Belize.

Teachers in Belize are lacking the foundational knowledge about the types of disabilities that may exist in children and develop fear and a sense of reluctance to meet the needs of students with severe levels of disabilities. This implies that these attitudes and behaviours by teachers do affect the students with disabilities, and more so, the ones who are classed with more extreme cases of a disability.

Based on the findings of this dissertation, it is therefore highly recommended that:

- Policy makers in education provide directives for universities and educational institutions to provide training programs are for both in-service and pre-service teachers. These programs need to focus on developing the knowledge of teachers regarding; the country's legislations which mandates inclusive practices; the concepts encompassing different types of disabilities; the strategies for implementing inclusive practices in teaching and learning; and the methods for improving teachers' self-efficacy in managing students in inclusive settings.
- Other sectors of the Ministry of Education in Belize become more actively involved with NaRCIE (the governing body for inclusive education in Belize)

in an effort to work closer with schools, teachers and parents in providing more workshops and other mechanisms for spreading awareness and building knowledge about inclusion.

- Regular follow up visits are made by NaCIE to all educational institution in the country to make certain that the entire hierarchy of the school system are keeping informed of methods of adapting inclusive practices and strategies into the schools' curriculum.
- The government and school boards make available reasonable budgets and seek further avenues for funding in order to provide the necessary resources needed in schools.
- Educational financial opportunities are made available to prospective university students, teachers and other professionals who seek to develop themselves in the field of special and inclusive education. This would increase the amount of local experts who are able to work closely with teachers to meet the needs of the students with disabilities.
- Parents are assisted from an early stage with training and support that is needed in understanding and providing for children with disabilities. These can include learning sign language, reading braille etc. Parents would therefore be able to better communicate with educators regarding their child's disability and further be able to assist in their child's education.

5.5 Implications for future research

Inclusive education is a rather complex phenomenon to understand and explore.

Most of the factors that affect the process are interconnected and stems from areas beyond those indicated in this study. Therefore, there are many implications for future research relating to this specific subject.

- There is a need for more research in Belize regarding this topic which covers more extensive parts of the country (all the districts) and include more significant sample sizes to gain a more general understanding of Belizean teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education.
- Future research should also study the phenomenon through more mixed methods approaches which should give a clearer indication of teachers' attitudes towards inclusion and further assist in the triangulation of the data gathered in this area of study.
- Additionally, future research should also seek to find out if factors such as economic status, ethnicity, religious and political affiliations has any impact teachers' views towards inclusion in an effort to spread awareness and assist in normalizing having students with disabilities in general education.
- Furthermore, future research needs to include teachers at all levels of the Belizean educational system, since students with disabilities are included at the pre-school, primary school, secondary school and tertiary school levels in Belize. This should allow an ever deeper understanding of teachers' attitudes towards inclusion and the attitudes from educators at all levels can be recognised in order for them to be fully addressed.
- Lastly, in order to advocate for complete or general change in attitudes of educators and stakeholders at all levels of the educational system; future research should seek to investigate Belize's reality for implementation of inclusive education in terms of its readiness and determination to successfully provide quality inclusive education for students. Only with such knowledge will policy makers and all other stakeholders, including the

community at large; be able provide the essential assistance for the students with disabilities in our schools.

5.6 Summary:

Today Belize continues to lag behind in the implementation of quality inclusive education. It is the researchers' hope that this study will spread awareness of the challenges in implementing inclusive education in the country; as well as the importance of allowing every child equal access to education despite their incapacities. The preconceived and uninformed perceptions of persons with disabilities by educators, stakeholders and the wider society should no longer shape the attitudes held nor further hinder the probable achievements of students with disabilities. There needs to be significant change in the held attitudes towards person with disabilities on a societal level, therefore a good place to initiate this change can be through the imparting of first-hand knowledge about disabilities and inclusive education in all levels of our educational system.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Dissemination Plan

In order to achieve the study's goal of developing a general understanding of primary school teachers' attitudes towards inclusion and accordingly improve the quality of inclusive education in Belize, a plan for disseminating the findings of this research is crucial. The dissemination plan aims to use evidence to translate knowledge into practice; by making public the study's findings which can be utilised to benefit the teachers and most importantly, the students in inclusive settings. The dissemination plan is organised into two sections which are; the key audiences and the mechanisms of dissemination.

Key Audiences:

The key audiences or target groups for disseminating the findings of this research are outlined as follows: (i) School teachers, (ii) School administrators, (iii) National Centre for Inclusive Education (NaRCIE), (iv) The Education policy makers (Ministry of Education) and (v) Institutions of higher learning. These are some of the key stakeholders involved with inclusive education in Belize. It is important to convey the findings of this study to these audiences to initiate or continue the necessary dialogues pertaining to students' rights to equal education; which will eventually impact the hindrances such as stigma and a lack of training both inside and beyond the walls of schools. Additionally, the general awareness of the challenges that both teachers and students encounter in inclusive classrooms may be addressed by the governing stakeholders and the personnel at NaRCIE; who are responsible for funding and providing adequate training for teachers and administrator to improve their knowledge of and attitudes towards inclusion. Finally the universities in Belize which educate teachers can also utilise the findings as

support which can assist in the advocacy for the adjustment of their programs in implementing new modules that include concepts and trainings regarding inclusive education.

Mechanisms of Dissemination:

In an effort to address the aforementioned audiences, it is important that the researcher uses effective materials or vehicles to disseminate the findings the investigation. The researcher has identified the following instruments or activities for dissemination:

(i) Academic publications

In order to communicate and create record of the research paper, the researcher intends to publish the research paper in influential journals that can reach the targeted audiences and other researchers.

(ii) Newsletters and Press releases

This instrument will utilise print outs summarising the research findings for placement at the locations of the interested professional target groups. Similarly, press releases are very effective for making research public. The researcher will liaise with media houses to make press releases.

(iii) Direct Communication with stake holders

The researcher plans to approach school teachers, Ministry of education personnel and University personnel to make presentations of the findings. More specifically, the researcher can use her extensive network of pre-service teachers to assist in dissemination.

This dissemination plan offers extensive coverage since it aims to reach several key audiences and wider public in order to influence attitudinal and behavioural change regarding inclusive education.