

**INCLUSIVE PRACTICES, PARTICULARLY AUTISM SPECTRUM  
DISORDER (ASD) IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN NEW PROVIDENCE, THE  
BAHAMAS**

A Research Project  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree of  
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Faculty of Humanities and Education  
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In Public Schools in New Providence, The Bahamas

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## ABSTRACT

### Inclusive Practices, Particularly Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) In Public Schools In New Providence, The Bahamas

Tonia Ferguson

The purpose of this qualitative study was to effectively analyse connections between the needs of students diagnosed with ASD and accommodations made in the regular public school classrooms in New Providence, The Bahamas in addressing those needs. Furthermore, the purpose included determining whether the necessary training is provided for regular classroom teachers who are responsible for educating these students. Achieving this entailed exploring factors that influence the inclusive education programme implemented within the schools. Ten schools (five primary, three junior, one secondary and one senior high) were randomly selected. Consequently, the principals and teachers assigned to those schools were included due to their affiliation with the programme and the students with special needs. The qualitative research methodology findings led to data being classified into six themes, namely (i) provide teacher support, (ii) provide necessary resources, (iii) ensure quality education access, (iv) implement appropriate resources, (v) address behavioural concerns, and (vi) provide teacher training. These themes were used to discuss the findings. Findings revealed that (1) there is an urgent need to revise policy and properly implement inclusive practices; (2) the country's ministry of education provides minimal support to the schools; and (3) there is a severe lack of teaching and learning resources and appropriate training for teachers in the field of special education. The study then provides an analysis and interpretation of the results that informed the conclusion and recommendations of the research.

Keywords: autism; autistic; autism spectrum disorder; special education; special needs; inclusion; inclusive education; ASD.

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## **1.0 CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY**

### **1.1 Overview of Autism**

According to Brody (2012), autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is the inability to recognize familiar signals of human communication; it is a range of disorders that affect an increasing number of people. He continues, also describing autism as mystifying. He notes that the disorder is astounding scientists who are searching for causes and cures. He also noted that autism-related disorders have increased. While there is a greater understanding of the disorder, there is still much uncertainty. The disorder has also been defined as a permanent developmental disability (Autism Society, 2016). Further, it involves behaviours that include

- delayed or lack of spoken language
- repetitive use of language and/or motor mannerisms
- little or no eye contact
- lack of interest in peer relationships
- lack of spontaneous or make-believe play
- persistent fixation on parts of objects
- difficulty reasoning and planning
- poor motor skills
- sensory sensitivities
- language

The disorder affects individuals differently. Therefore, it is not likely that every individual would exhibit all or the same behaviours. Someone on the autism spectrum disorder can exhibit only a few of the behaviours. The disorder is considered treatable. However, it is necessary to recognize the signs and ensure steps to early intervention. 50,000 students are attending public schools within the Bahamas; it is probable that 4,000 to 5,000 of them have special academic needs.

As cited in Bergsma (2000), the World Health Organization (WHO) suggests that an estimated 10% of every population has special needs. In addition, studies conducted by Bergsma (2000) in Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Dominica stated that the student population diagnosed with ASD ranged from 8%

to 39% on those islands. According to the Bahamas' Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MOE, 2016), more than 50,000 students attend public schools throughout the Bahamas.

The increase of children with an autism spectrum disorder is presenting a challenge for classroom teachers who very often lack the necessary experience or training to teach children with the disorder. Teaching children with autism requires training. Busby, Ingram, Bowron, Oliver, and Lyons (2012) define autism as a neurological disorder that affects the normal functioning of the brain, which causes the need to enhance the skills of classroom teachers who teach children with autism. They posit that teaching students with autism require specialised instructional techniques, a unique curriculum, and coordinated services to ensure successful inclusion practices. In addition to the necessary training teachers need to better serve students with autism, the study indicated the need for teachers to feel competent about teaching children with autism. Ensuring teachers have numerous opportunities to observe and engage in successful inclusive education is essential. Preparing teachers for the task is paramount in motivating them and ensuring that they feel empowered to face challenges presented by children with this disorder.

Thus, this research study focuses on inclusive education within the public school system on New Providence Island, Bahamas. Deficiencies in The Bahamas Education Act revealed that the necessary provisions for services to students with special needs are lacking (Ministry of Education, Science, & Technology, n.d.). This study aims to look at the implementation of the identified necessary provisions to students with special needs. It was the knowledge of these requirements that became the foundation of the study's background.

## **1.2 Background of the Study**

The Bahamas' Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology's Mission Statement is "To provide opportunities all persons in the Bahamas an opportunity to receive a quality education that will equip them with the necessary beliefs, knowledge, attitudes and skills required for work and life, both in a democratic society guided by Christian values in an interdependent, ever-changing world"

(Ministry of Education, Science, & Technology, 2016, para. 3). The mission statement of the Bahamas' Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology makes no exemption. Hence, the statement is inclusive to students requiring special education. The is responsible for 67 preschools, 94 primary schools, 10 junior high schools (grades 7 - 9), and 21 senior high schools (grades 10 - 12) for 192 public schools in the Bahamas. According to the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (2016), the student population within the public school system in the Bahamas is more than 50,000. It was suggested (World Health Organization, as cited in Bergsma, 2000) that approximately 10% of every population can be described as having special needs. As aforementioned, with a population of more than 50,000 students attending public schools within the Bahamas, it is expected that 4,000 to 5,000 children are special needs students.

In the Bahamas, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology's Department of Special Services Unit is responsible for special education. And according to the MOE (2011), the role of special education is to educate students with disabilities. The Special Services Unit provides

- speech, auditory, and visual screening
- physical health intervention
- psychomotor evaluation
- diagnosis and remediation of learning and behavioural problems
- support for physically challenged students
- parental and family awareness
- teacher education

Access to the services provided by the Special Services Unit is granted to children who exhibit the following characteristics related to

- autism
- traumatic brain injury
- mental retardation
- emotional disturbance
- specific learning disability
- speech or language impairments

- hearing impairments including deafness
- visual impairment, including blindness and partially sighted
- orthopedic impairment
- other health impairment
- multiple disabilities
- developmental delay

The Special Services Unit of the MOE has two Senior Education Officers, one school psychologist, 128 special education teachers, and 44 teaching aides who are responsible for 16 self-contained classrooms (K-12), 10 resources/support programmes, 6 special schools, 8 alternative programmes, and one special education intervention center. However, the student population of students with autism within these classrooms is undetermined, (C. Hall-Knowles, personal communication, March 21, 2019).

### **1.3 Problem Statement**

Data regarding students affected with ASD within regular public school classrooms are lacking in New Providence, and according to a review of the literature, of the 50,000 Bahamian public school students, it is probable that 10% of the population is affected by ASD. The challenge regarding the undetermined number of children affected by ASD strongly suggests that there are undiagnosed students within regular public school classrooms who may not be receiving the appropriate instructions to efficiently meet their needs. This also means that they are not receiving the necessary assistance to enable them to reach their full potential; and undoubtedly, they do not perform at the required grade-level standard. This lack of knowledge of students who are affected by ASD presents a grave challenge to teachers who are tasked with teaching in this environment. The constant failure to note the presence and challenges posed by these students within the regular classroom environment sadly ignores the dire need to make the necessary curriculum adaptations.

### **1.4 Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to effectively analyse connections between the needs of students diagnosed with ASD and

accommodations made in the regular public school classrooms in New Providence in addressing the students' needs. It also investigated whether the necessary training is provided for regular classroom teachers who are responsible for teaching students affected by ASD. Through this study, it was also anticipated that the plight and concerns of these special needs students be promoted. It was also foreseen that the data obtained would instruct policymakers to make necessary policy changes and direct other stakeholders in providing the required teacher training programmes, equip teachers with vital resources to facilitate student learning, guide a review of curricula for primary through senior schools, and act as a guide to reviewing the deficiencies in The Education Act, Chapter 46 to include entitlements of appropriate special education instruction and services; thus ensuring them a smooth transition into life after senior high school and the opportunity of becoming productive citizens. As a result, the following research questions were formulated.

### **1.5 Research Questions**

How has the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology made available to students with ASD in the public school system the appropriate education and training that will equip them with the necessary beliefs, attitudes, values, knowledge, and skills required for work and life in an interdependent, ever-changing world?

#### **1.5.1 Sub-questions.**

- What accommodations if any, have been made to address the needs of students with ASD in the regular public school classroom?
- What changes have been made to the public school's academic/social/extra-curricula curriculum to adequately address the needs of students with ASD?
- Have public school principals and teachers received the necessary training to professionally identify and address the needs of students with ASD?
- What are the multiple ways the teacher presents content for students' varying abilities?

- How does the special needs students' social impairment affect the classroom environment?
- How has the provision of inclusive education influenced special needs students?

### **1.6 Significance of the Study**

The Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (2016) clearly indicates that the mission of the MOE is “To provide opportunities for all persons in the Bahamas to receive the education and training that will equip them with the necessary beliefs, attitudes, values, knowledge, and skills required for work and life in an interdependent, ever-changing world” (para. 3). According to MOE (n.d.), deficiencies that impede the learning process for students with special needs exist. Literature to determine whether special needs students are provided with these entitlements is lacking. Of the research conducted within the Bahamian classrooms, no study has addressed the practice of inclusive education or how these students' needs are being addressed. However, some studies have only addressed the teachers' perspectives on inclusive practices.

Tkachyk (2013) notes that although inclusive classrooms function to promote tolerance and acceptance, their success significantly depends on teachers and students receiving the necessary and full support. With the present innovation of inclusive education, it is necessary to properly identify and implement skills and strategies that will ensure the overall growth, development, and success of students. The findings of this study will be extremely beneficial to students affected with ASD because many challenges within the public school system can be overcome through planning and implementation strategies. The literature review indicates that the government has attempted to address the trending issue of ASD within the public schools, but their efforts are insufficient. Thus, this study will highlight areas that urgently need the attention and actions of the government and indeed all those concerned with the educational formation of students, particularly those requiring special needs. It will also foster an awareness of identifying symptoms of students affected by ASD. Additionally, it will reveal the need for adequate teacher training that will enable regular

classroom teachers to be trained and able to effectively deliver instructions to a diverse environment. Busby et al., (2012) strongly contend that specialized instructional techniques, a unique curriculum, and coordinated services are of paramount significance for successful inclusive practices.

This study was conducted to identify and address the deficiencies that exist within the inclusive education practices in Bahamian public school classrooms. Additionally, it includes the perspectives of multiple stakeholders who are the Minister of Education, Officers of the MOE and Special Education Unit, psychologists, principals, teachers, and students within the MOE, and parents of students with special needs.

It is extremely significant because the existing methods utilised have not been widely used within the country. Consequently, it will certainly yield pertinent methodological findings that can effect changes to the public school curriculum, special education training for regular classroom teachers, and how students with ASD are educated within our public school classrooms.

### **1.7 Rationale for Methodology**

As mentioned previously, multiple case studies, a type of qualitative research approach was implemented since it is best suited to investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its natural context using multiple sources. A qualitative research approach involves questions and procedures, data collection, data analysis, and the researcher interpreting the data (McMillan, as cited in Creswell, 2014). Multiple case studies offer intensive analyses and descriptions. The researcher serves as a decision maker and makes recommendations to address the case. Hence, this type of research is appropriate because it fosters an in-depth understanding of the issue of the implementation process of inclusive education.

Englander (2012) mentions that interviews represent the main data collection associated with qualitative research. They can also provide direct details. These were conducted with education officials at the MOE, school principals, teachers, students, and parents. Kvale (2006) notes that interviews can create a bond between the interviewer and interviewee. This bond can encourage

a level of comfort with the researcher, causing additional details to be shared that would not normally be shared when using another method.

Participant observations were also conducted since they are carried out in a natural environment and involve more than the researchers merely observing their targeted group. It requires critical thinking and evaluation on the part of researchers. Rock (1979) strongly argues that participant observation “is not an untrammelled technique which can be adapted to serve any of the dominant forms of sociology” and further insists that it is also an intellectual inquiry because: “It brings in its train a series of intellectual commitments” (p. 178). Similar to interviews, participant observations allow the researcher to establish a bond with children. Because of the foregone reasons, participant observation is ideal for this research as well as interviews, because they enable the researcher to gather data that cannot be easily obtained.

### **1.8 Nature of the Research Design**

As stated earlier, this qualitative research utilised a case studies approach. Case studies represent a type of qualitative research. According to Hancock and Algozzine (2017), multiple case studies involve the thorough analysis and describing of a single unit or system within a specific timeframe. The approach encompassed several components to ascertain the necessary data. Once the list of schools was obtained from the MOE Special Education Unit, the school districts were identified. There are four primary school districts - northeastern, northwestern, southeastern, and southwestern. High schools in New Providence are divided into junior and senior schools. They are further divided into north and south districts. Schools that were included in the sample consist of one from each level, primary, junior, and senior from each of the districts. The Director of the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology approved my written request to conduct observations within the public school classrooms and complete interviews with principals, teachers, students, and parents (those willing to participate). A second component involved the distribution of letters for parents via students. Teachers were relied upon to encourage the parents to assist. This was done by speaking one-on-one with parents and via WhatsApp groups through

text messages. Parents received consent forms to participate in the study and questionnaires to complete. Additionally, parents willing to participate in the study were sent the appropriate letters to release their child's records that involved screening, an individual education plan, report cards, and any other files about their child's education and diagnosis. Unfortunately, none of the consent forms for the release of the records were returned by either of the parents at the schools included in the study.

During the data collection process, the researcher sought to obtain records from both private testing services in New Providence and the MOE Special Education Unit. However, it was discovered that only private school students requested psychoeducational testing at the private centres; whereas, students within the public school system received evaluations at the MOE Special Education Unit.

Students displaying symptoms of learning or behavioural challenges were reported to the guidance counselor by the teacher or parent. The student would be recommended for screening at the MOE Special Education Unit. Once screened, psychologists placed the students within a school appropriate for their learning needs.

The expected timeline of the data collection was four weeks. However, due to the researcher's work obligations, the four weeks requested were denied. As a result, adjustments were made to the timeline, and the data collection process occurred within eleven days. The first week was spent attempting to gain access to the schools. Week Two of the data collection process was spent observing the self-contained classes in the schools and meeting and completing interviews with principals and teachers. During the week of observations, telephone interviews were also conducted with parents by the researcher. Additional time was required and requested to complete the observations. One additional day was granted and was used to complete classroom observations in the remaining three schools.

In compliance with the Examiners' Reports at the University of the West Indies' request, I extended the study to include participation from the students, encourage more parents' responses, and incorporate more classroom observations.

Again, approval to conduct research within the public schools in New Providence was granted by the Department of Education. An additional three weeks were added. Two additional schools were included in the research – a primary school and a junior school for a total of ten schools. Parents' responses increased by eighteen. Interviews were conducted with ninety-eight students out of a population of one-hundred-ninety-one. Students not included within the study either was not given consent to do so, or did not have the cognitive ability to respond with the latter being the prevalent reason.

### **1.9 Definitions**

Autism Society (2016) defines autism spectrum disorder (ASD) as a group of development disabilities due to a problem with the brain.

United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2005) defined inclusion/inclusive education as the following: inclusion/inclusive education – a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children. (p. 28)

### **1.10 Assumptions**

Assumptions regarding the research included

- teachers who will be willing to participate and answer the interview questions honestly.
- the institutions will be accommodating in permitting the observations and research to be conducted.
- parents once provided with details of how the study will enhance assistance to their child with an autism spectrum disorder, will be open to the process.

- the instruments and methodology used are appropriate. Hence, the findings will be reliable and valid.

It is further assumed that ineffective inclusive practices hinder academic success for students with special needs. It is also assumed that the needs of students who are improperly diagnosed or not diagnosed at all are not being met. Further, teachers who are professionally trained to teach students with special needs are an effective way to promote academic success for those students.

### **1.11 Limitations**

Limitations are vulnerabilities within a study are predominantly outside the researcher's control. Joyner, Rouse, and Glatthorn (2013) explain that the limitations of a study are the boundaries placed on the methodologies. One such limitation was that it was conducted on only one island (out of approximately thirty inhabited islands) within the Bahamas. A second was the recruiting of participants. The recruitment, because it depended exclusively on volunteerism, it was not well represented as expected. For example, parents were approached indirectly and by way of a letter requesting their participation. This impersonal approach did not solicit a desire by parents to assist. However, as a leader noting the possible risk, an appeal was made to classroom teachers, which increased the number of participants. The second attempt included sending home the questionnaire, which did increase the parents' responses.

Although limitations were unavoidable, as a leader, the strong determination to seek the answers to the research questions persisted and alternative methods were sought. Due to this ministry of education's lack of implementing policies related to mandatory psychoeducational evaluations for students exhibiting learning challenges, the researcher expected that students with ASD would be in the mainstream public school classrooms undiagnosed. This was not confirmed during the study. As initially planned, the five local psychoeducational testing centres were contacted to obtain records of students in the public school system with ASD. There were no records at any of the centres regarding public school students as patients. Their patients all attend private

schools. This could be due to costs of the services at the centres. Other limitations included

- the scheduling of observations and interviews with the teachers, which did not allow for an extended time to dialogue with the researcher
- scheduled observed lessons may not be a true reflection of a typical lesson

Planning and strategising resulted in successfully addressing a myriad of challenges. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011) insist that careful planning is essential to ensure a research is conducted meticulously and ethically; a substantive one. Hence, the researcher scheduled all interview appointments and observations to ensure the necessary data was collected to promote the study's credibility.

### **1.12 Delimitations**

Joyner et al., (2013) note that delimitations are limitations that have been imposed by the researcher to limit generalization. These are important because they present to you the reader parameters that the research was conducted. Delimitations of the study refer to the nature and size of the sample, the setting's uniqueness, and the period in which this study was conducted. It was done chiefly to arrive at a holistic approach of the education system to identify factors posing a challenge to the successful implementation and practice of inclusive education. Schools of all levels in all districts of New Providence were selected.

### **1.13 Summary**

The promotion and sustaining of inclusive practices are complicated (Villa and Thousand, 2003). The implementation process of inclusive education has presented significant challenges to the public education system in New Providence. The diverse learning challenges of students with special education needs compound the process of inclusive practice. The MOE is faced with the challenge of diagnosing students, the appropriate placement of students, providing trained educators and proper resources for special needs students, and constructing environments conducive to ensuring their learning is comfortable. Despite the daunting challenges, the MOE must ensure all students are provided the opportunity to education, training, and skills that will enable them to be

independent citizens (The Bahamas Education Act, 2001). This chapter provided an overview of inclusive education. It also covered the background of the problem. The research questions and the significance of undertaking this study were also identified in this chapter.

As noted by MOE (n.d.), the deficiencies regarding the proper laws to address the implementation of inclusive education must be addressed. Hence, all stakeholders must be made cognizant of their responsibilities to affecting positive change to effectively meet the requirements of students with special needs. A key factor in achieving this outcome is to work collaboratively to identify and address those deficiencies that exist within the legislation. Further, provide support where it is needed.

#### **1.13.1 Summary and organization of the remainder of the study.**

In Chapter Two, the literature review focuses on the conceptual and theoretical framework of the study. The research methodology is discussed in Chapter Three. It details the research approach, research design, and data analysis strategies. Chapter Four addresses the presentation of data collected from interviews, questionnaires, observations, and archival records. Finally, in Chapter Five, a summary of the findings is provided; the study is also concluded and recommendations are made.

## **2.0 CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

### **2.1 Introduction**

There is limited information documented on the existence of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and in particular, of students with ASD who attend public schools in New Providence, The Bahamas. Further, evidence describing any accommodation or relevant adaptation practices within public school classrooms that will enhance the learning process for students affected by ASD is lacking. Research, according to Sugita (2016), has indicated that there has been a dramatic increase in people affected with ASD within the past twenty years.

This Literature review discusses an overview of inclusive education, the impetus to its implementation in Bahamian public schools, its definition, and its role; the requirements for teaching students who have ASD in an inclusive classroom; and successful inclusive education practices.

This study conducts extensive research into how the public school system is addressing the needs of students with ASD. It will also examine the process from the assessment of students with ASD in how the public school classrooms in New Providence are addressing those needs. Specific focus is also devoted to how different teachers implemented various strategies to accommodate students with ASD.

### **2.2 Background of the Problem**

In 1994, the Bahamas was among the ninety-two governments and twenty-five international organisations that signed onto the Salamanca Statement on Principles, Policy, and Practice in Special Needs Education and a Framework for Action. The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (1994) stipulates that those countries develop inclusive schools. Additionally, their policies should ensure children with disabilities could attend their neighbourhood school. By 1999, the Bahamas established its first autistic unit, which was a self-contained classroom attached to a local primary school in New Providence. Then, in 2008, units were introduced to neighbouring junior schools to accommodate these students on their completion of primary school education (Ministry of Education, 2013). In the subsequent years, additional units in numerous schools were

established throughout New Providence. However, they are all self-contained units that segregate the students from others and most teachers.

Consequently, teachers can promote a sense of belonging for special needs students through good instruction (Schwartz, 2015). Planned, intentional instruction builds a student's confidence and competence. According to the author, the benefits of inclusion are

- membership - It improves how we interact with others - groups, school, community.
- relationship - It improves how the child interacts on a one-on-one basis.
- skills e.g. math - It allows the child to share and better utilise their skills.

Finally, Schwartz (2015) relates the significance of inclusion; it is a celebration of diversity. She insists that we do something to ensure inclusion becomes a reality.

Svidal (2015) posits that inclusive education is necessary. He notes that inclusive education involves more than merely understanding the child, but also how the child's environment influences them. To promote inclusion, it is necessary that teachers be provided with training and support. It is imperative that classrooms promote the further development of special needs students. Therefore, it is necessary to provide teachers with the necessary training to foster regular communication with students, direct instruction, remediation, classroom structure, and homework.

### **2.3 Conceptual Framework**

Additional research literature supported the claim of benefits for both students with and without special needs in an inclusive education classroom; both groups of students learn more (McManis, 2017). The author noted that students without disabilities demonstrated positive attitudes concerning inclusive classrooms. Those with disabilities improve in core subject areas such as math, reading and writing, and their communication skills. Successful inclusive education practices should include training and support for regular classroom teachers to implement inclusive education with ease and success and implementing various instructional formats and strategies (McManis, 2017). The benefits of inclusive education are supported by Education Review Office (2015),

who note successful practices comprised positive attitudes about including special needs students; schools building effective partnerships with parents; and the implementation of systems, guidelines, and practices for the support of their special needs students. Mitchell (2016) reports that collaboration involving special education teachers, classroom teachers, paraprofessionals, special needs advisers, educational psychologists, therapists, other specialists, technology consultants, and parents is necessary when teaching students with special education needs. However, Saggars (2016) although an advocate for inclusion, warns that it is not recommended for all special needs students, and implementing inclusive practices must be individualised for each student's specific needs.

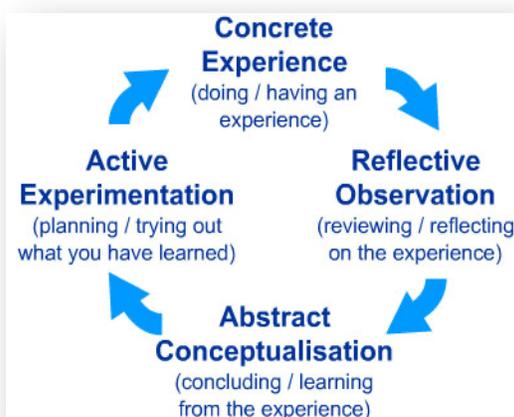
#### **2.4 Theoretical Framework**

Kerlinger (as cited in Cohen et al., 2011) recognises theory as “a set of interrelated constructs [concepts], definitions, and propositions that presents a systematic view of phenomena by specifying relations among variables, with the purpose of explaining and predicting the phenomena” (p. 9). Fourie (as cited in Mwelumbini, 2014) notes that theory helps to describe, interpret, understand, evaluate, and predict phenomena. The theoretical literature consists of work by David Kolb and Russian psychologist, Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky established the Sociocultural Theory of Cognitive Development (Psychology Notes HQ, 2018). According to Cherry (2018), the sociocultural theory posits that human learning is predominantly a social process, which is influenced by parents, caregivers, peers, and culture. Combined, these aspects promote the development of higher-order functions. In this theory, Vygotsky claimed that the development of children occurs because of collaborative dialogues between more knowledgeable members of the society. These include parents, teachers, and their peers. Thus, the environment that a child is placed in significantly influences personal characteristics and social skills. Hence, the school, where the child spends the majority of their day has a significant role in influencing development.

On Vygotsky's sociocultural theory regarding education, Ivic (2000) notes that the school represents both a source of development and a system of social relations between students and teachers and among students. More importantly,

the system should create social relations between the school and its surroundings. It is expected that the school system promotes the child's full development by providing the necessary tools, techniques, and intellectual stimulation.

David Kolb's experiential theory was established in 1984 and involves two levels: a four-stage cycle of learning and four separate learning styles (McLeod, 2017). According to Kolb's theory, learning happens because of new experiences.

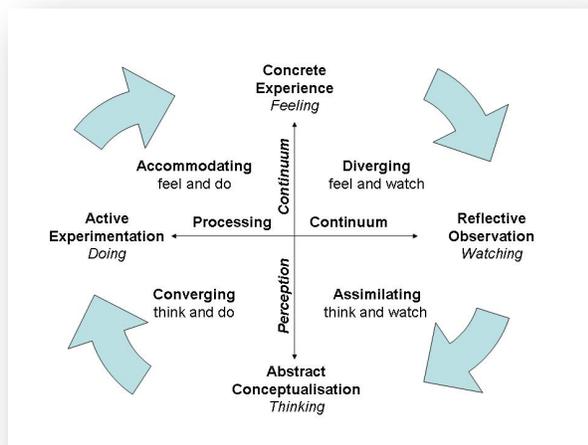


*Figure 1.* Kolb's Experiential Theory McLeod, S. A. (2017, October 24). Kolb - learning styles and experiential learning cycle. Simply Psychology. <https://www.simplypsychology.org/learning-kolb.html>. Reprinted with permission.

A description of each stage in the cycle is provided below.

1. Concrete Experience – An action occurs.
2. Reflective Observation of the New Experience – The learner thinks about the occurrence/experience.
3. Abstract Conceptualisation – At this stage, an existing concept is modified or a new one developed.
4. Active Experimentation – Newly formed ideas are applied to situations.

Kolb developed four distinct learning styles based on the experiential learning theory, which are identified in Figure 2.



*Figure 2.* Kolb's Learning Styles McLeod, S. A. (2017, October 24). Kolb - learning styles and experiential learning cycle. Simply Psychology. <https://www.simplypsychology.org/learning-kolb.html>. Reprinted with permission.

Kolb's learning cycle and styles are designed for teachers to evaluate the learning process accessible to students, and develop more appropriate learning opportunities. The theory presents all teachers with key insights and practical applications from cognitive and behavioural psychology (Healey & Jenkins, 2000).

## 2.5 Literature Review: Inclusive Education

Burstein, Sears, Wilcoxon, Cabello, and Spagna (2004) define inclusive education as involving the practice of teaching students with disabilities and the necessary supports and accommodations in a general education classroom alongside students without disabilities. Gilhool (as cited in Ford, 2013) defines inclusive education as the educating of students with and without disabilities in a general education classroom. Ainscow and Miles (2009) provide additional definitions of inclusive education. They are

1. specific emphasis on groups of learners who may be at risk of marginalization, exclusion or underachievement;
2. a process - a movement to improve ways to address diversity;
3. a focus on the identification and removal of barriers; and

4. concerns related to the presence, participation, and achievement of all students.

Providing a more succinct definition is UNESCO (2005), which submits that inclusion addresses the diverse needs of all learners through increasing their participation in the learning process and reducing exclusion from and within education. The background of this definition is that the goal of a learning environment where teachers and students embrace and welcome both challenges and benefits of diversity are achieved.

Saggers (2016) suggests that inclusion is a proactive approach to identifying barriers experienced by learners; then removing those barriers in an attempt for students to access opportunities for quality education. Saggers (2016) continues, inclusion is about meeting the needs of all students, ensuring they receive a quality education and the opportunity to reach their full potential. A noted caution is assuming that inclusion means placing students with special needs in mainstream classrooms at all times because some may be unable to adjust appropriately. Therefore, proper considerations must be made to the various types of inclusion.

### **2.5.1 Types of inclusion.**

Mutepfa, Mpofu, and Chataika (2007) identify three types of inclusion. These include

1. Locational inclusion - Students identified with severe disabilities and are taught the curriculum, but in isolation or segregated classrooms.
2. Inclusion with clinical remedial instruction - Students are taught the curriculum in a regular classroom and meet with a learning support teacher about an hour a week, for targeted assistance regarding their specific educational needs.
3. Unplanned or de facto inclusion – Students with disabilities are placed in a regular classroom, exposing them to the national curriculum. There is no notation of their disabilities. Undoubtedly, they are taught without consideration and very little accommodation is provided to support their learning challenges.

The principal role of inclusive education is to promote respect for individual differences and to appreciate diversity (Moreno, Jaén, Navío, & Moreno, 2015). These differences are notable due to social, educational, and cultural factors. They continue that the intent of promoting inclusive classrooms is to cause a transformation of the classroom where the educational process will occur in all contexts with no exceptions. Moreno et al., (2015) state:

Inclusive education should be based on four premises - inclusion as a human right; inclusion as a way to achieve educational equality; everyone has the right to be educated among peers and in the cultural context they live in; and lastly society must guarantee all children's rights, including their inclusion in a normalized school framework. (p. 107)

McManis (2017) mentions that there has been an increased focus regarding inclusive education and inclusive classrooms due to the extent of research-based evidence that suggests that there are benefits. The most significant benefit is the academic improvements of students with ASD who receive instruction in a regular classroom alongside students without ASD; another benefit is that of students without disabilities whose attitudes reflect a positive approach to inclusion.

## **2.6 Requirements for Teaching Students with ASD**

Due to the complexity of ASD, teaching affected students within the regular classroom can pose a challenge for classroom teachers who are not properly trained to teach special needs students. LePage et al., (2010) note that teachers should be familiar with the characteristics of various disabilities. Further, having a bank of strategies for basic disabilities is also suggested. Some of these disabilities include ASD and Asperger's. LePage et al., (2010) also contend that classroom teachers should possess an awareness of the process for assessment purposes for all the various types of disabilities. It is expected that teachers are knowledgeable about how to implement their student's Individualised Education Plan (IEP). Not only are these standard expectations, but LePage et al., (2010) note that laws and policies of the United States exist and compliance is anticipated.

Despite the laws, policies, and expectations, some teachers still grapple with the concept of the implementation of inclusive practices. A study conducted by Hunter-Johnson, Newton, and Cambridge-Johnson (2014) highlights those Bahamian classroom teachers' attitudes regarding inclusive education practices and their implementations are somewhat negative. Some factors that have resulted in these observed negative perceptions regarding teaching students with ASD include the lack of teacher training, lack of resources, and large class sizes within New Providence public schools. To be effective in teaching students affected with ASD, requirements such as specialized instructional techniques, unique curriculum, and coordinated services must be implemented (Busby et al., 2012). In addition, students with ASD require a learning environment that has minimal restrictions. Busby et al., (2012) also note that the Individual with Disabilities Education Act mandates that each state (of the United States of America) establishes procedures to ensure that children with disabilities are educated alongside children who are not disabled. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (as cited in Busby et al., 2012) also stipulates "special education, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability is such that education services cannot be achieved satisfactorily" (p. 29).

In another study conducted by Busby et al., (2012), the needs that have been identified to teach students affected with ASD also include ascertaining more information about the process, procedures, and practices for teachers and families to effectively collaborate; new teachers need additional experiences; and access to best teaching practices and strategies for teaching children with ASD. The authors noted that the most important requirement for teaching students with ASD is the quality of teacher preparation programmes. Persons with Disabilities Act (as cited in Fraser, 2014) supports this requirement, noting that special education teachers and those involved with the development of training programmes in special schools must be adequately trained. For this reason, teachers should receive the necessary knowledge and training to equip them for the challenges faced when teaching students with ASD. In support of the

importance of teacher preparation programmes, Hernandez, Hueck, and Charley (2016) posit promoting teacher self-efficacy. According to Hernandez et al., (2016), teachers with low self-efficacy could sometimes possess a negative attitude towards inclusion and make little or no effort to implement the necessary strategies to effectively assist students with ASD. Self-efficacy is one's belief in their ability to achieve goals. Someone who possesses self-efficacy persists in accomplishing that goal. Undoubtedly, teacher self-efficacy can be boosted through effective teacher training programmes.

Acedo (2011) indicates the need for teacher training, and identifies the demands of inclusive education as significant challenges for teachers, carefully noting that there has not been much focus in this regard. Yet, training teachers for inclusive education has been deemed as an essential component for future development. To foster the improvement of inclusive practices, teachers need to be more flexible with their teaching approach and schools need to encourage building on existing teacher expertise. "A whole-school approach to school improvement has proven more effective in establishing the change in schools, than the training of a few of the staff" (Husan, Halder, & Debnath, 2018, p. 3). According to Kreck (2014), it is required by some states in the United States of America to train teachers and their aides. While the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (2011), which is responsible for special education within the Bahamas provides learning opportunities for students with special needs, there is no training conducted by this unit for regular classroom teachers in the public schools. Thus, the existing challenge of inclusive education is further compounded.

At the 48th International Conference on Education, Inclusive Education: The Way of the Future (UNESCO IBE, 2008, as cited in Acedo, 2011) the following for teacher education and development were encouraged

- improve working conditions for teachers
- equip teachers with the necessary skills and materials
- encourage the training of teachers for inclusive education at the tertiary level

- promote research regarding inclusive education
- equip school administrators with necessary skills regarding student diversity that will promote inclusive education at their schools.

Training teachers with the use of effective methods and successful inclusive practices, providing them with essential classroom materials, along with support from administrators, will certainly promote and complement self-efficacy to enhance inclusive education in schools. While teacher training would prove effective, teachers also require the necessary tools and classroom materials to effectively execute their roles competently and professionally. In this regard, Ferry (2012) suggests the use of tools that teachers should have to teach special needs students. These tools include sensory-based items, reading trackers, timers for ease of transition, posted expectations, reward systems, and the use of technology. Failure to address these areas will result in continued challenges and negative attitudes about inclusive education practices and would only continue to complicate the process.

Husan et al., (2018) recognize that successful implementation of inclusive practices requires schools to make changes. These changes are necessary to ensure students diagnosed with ASD are respected and the educational context is made relevant. These requirements include policy development, curriculum development, teacher training, and 'local capacity building and community involvement. Local capacity building and community involvement refer to garnering support from the community to support efforts that will promote inclusive practices in classrooms. It focuses on improving the quality of education for all students by supporting educators. Support for educators may include teachers' aides or trainers who provide specialized training for educators. Husan et al., (2018) note that few countries have created policies for this particular group of children. Also noted was the responsibility of particular groups of children being placed on institutions rather than the Ministry of Education. This act warrants the creation and implementation of policies, which is necessary to (1) ensure accountability by the government for this group of children, and (2) provide this group of children with equal rights to their peers.

Curriculum accommodations and adaptations are other aspects necessary for promoting inclusive education. Mitchell (2015) discusses accommodations and modifications to the curriculum that will support inclusive education. He mentions that an accommodation involves a change to the teaching procedure for students to access information. A modification is a change to what is expected of the student to learn or demonstrate. He outlines four common modifications that are used. These include

- assigning the same task, but the number of items is lessened,
- only emphasising the key points of a concept or skill,
- presenting the same activity to the class, but additional components are added to include IEP objectives or skills, or
- allowing students to work on an incomplete assignment in another class.

Otukile-Mongwaketse, Mangope, and Kuyini (2014) report that teachers in Botswana viewed curriculum adaptations as merely remedial work. In essence, teachers considered it work that could only be achieved outside of the regular classroom's instructional time. Achieving learning objectives within the stipulated period with these learners was considered impossible. This does not reflect the definition of an inclusive classroom. Mugambi (2017) posits that a curriculum must allow every child the ability to acquire the basic academic content and cognitive skills along with life skills that will foster a balanced and healthy lifestyle, good social relations, and the capacity for critical thinking and non-violent conflict resolution. Husan et al., (2018) also recognize that a major barrier for inclusive practice is the curriculum. A reason that has been identified by the authors includes a rigid curriculum design, which causes it to be challenging to make necessary adaptations in the classroom. Making changes to the curriculum that complement the local community is crucial to inclusive education practice. This notation made by the authors implicates that changes to any curriculum for the accommodation of students affected with ASD should be influenced by the local culture. Mutepfa et al., (2007) report that schools in Zimbabwe are provided with four options of curricula for students with disabilities that include various forms of inclusion. The school utilises the most appropriate option for their

environment. Appropriate changes to the curriculum based on the needs of the school environment should be made a common practice for all countries that have implemented inclusive classrooms.

In addition to curriculum adaptations, Mitchell (2015) suggests that there could be some changes to the national or state assessment process. Two types of adaptations to the assessment process include

- assessments with accommodations, which consist of changing the process, not the content, and
- alternating assessments that represent a compilation of teacher observations, samples of students' work during classroom instruction, and standardized performance tasks.

It is necessary that the assessment content is a reflection of adaptations made to the curriculum.

## **2.7 Inclusive Education Practice**

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] (2018) strongly proposes that countries ensure that children with disabilities have access to inclusive, qualitative, and free primary and secondary education on a basis equal to students without disabilities in their communities. To achieve this, schools have implemented inclusive practices. Stubbs (2008) posits that two aspects must be considered if all students who risk being excluded benefit from inclusive practices. These aspects include identifying barriers to inclusion in the local culture, in policies, and practice. A lack of resource such as transportation can be a barrier that prohibits a child with ASD from attending school. Hence, ensuring students have access to school must be considered. The second aspect includes focusing on the students who are most likely to be excluded by ensuring they receive the support and resources in their families, communities, and learning environments. In addition to ensuring the successful implementation of inclusive practices are positive attitudes about accommodating special needs students; schools building effective partnerships with parents; and the employment of systems, guidelines and practices that support these students. Further, it was noted that all schools in New Zealand also included students with

special education needs in activities outside the classroom. Some of these activities are swimming, sports, camps, and Riding for the Disabled and Special Olympics. McManis (2017) encourages the use of numerous instructional formats. She also identified several strategies that can be implemented in an inclusive environment. These entail the use of pair-work, cooperative grouping, peer tutoring, student-demonstrations, technology, large print, allowing oral and written responses, and teacher demonstrations. Mitchell (2016) notes that collaboration is necessary when teaching students with special education needs. This collaboration should exist between many people - special education teachers, classroom teachers, paraprofessionals, special needs advisers, educational psychologists, therapists, other specialists, technology consultants and parents. According to Education Review Office (2015), practices that have been implemented in New Zealand comprise positive attitudes about including special needs students; schools building effective partnerships with parents; and the implementation of systems, guidelines, and practices for the support of their special needs students. Additionally, it was noted that schools in New Zealand also included students with special education needs in activities outside the classroom. Some of these activities include swimming, sports, camps, and Riding for the Disabled and Special Olympics. McManis (2017) encourages the use of numerous instructional formats. She also identified several strategies that can be implemented in an inclusive environment. These include the use of pair-work, cooperative grouping, peer tutoring, student-demonstrations, technology, large print, allowing oral and written responses, and teacher demonstrations.

Stuart, Collins, Toms, and Gwalla-Ogisi (2017) noted the use of mindfulness, effective practice for students with learning disabilities that have shown a reduction in stress and anxiety. Germer (2004) notes mindfulness allows an individual to focus on the task and what is occurring now. He contends that being mindful promotes energy, joy, and a clear head. Mindfulness is characterized as a behavioural intervention development (Crane et al., 2017). Interest in the programme has grown significantly because of its evidence-based improvements.

In a case study conducted by Mackey (2014), findings indicated that successful practices for inclusive education was a result of teacher preparation, positive teacher attitudes, clear expectations, adequate planning time, collaboration with other teachers, in-class support for teachers, and instructional strategies that incorporated predictability of structure and sequence of classroom activities.

Scanlan and Tichy (2014) reported on a practice utilised by the Catholic school education system - the learning consultant model. This practice was chosen due to the institution's limitations of resources due to tuition fees. This is an attractive consideration for financially challenged governments. The learning consultant model involved an educator with special education training who worked with classroom teachers. The consultant assisted the classroom teacher with understanding the specific special needs of their students and how to implement the necessary accommodations and modifications. The use of the instructional accommodations model reflects best practices in providing accommodations for special needs students in the regular classroom (Scanlan & Baker, 2012). This model included three phases - preparation, provision, and evaluation. The study also revealed that classroom culture must be hospitable for the implementation of the model to be successful.

Evidence suggests that significant efforts have been made to promote the inclusive practice, namely implementing policies and enacting the law; designing curriculum; and the implementation of inclusive education practices in classrooms. However, the evidence of teacher training is minuscule. This necessary component has not received as much support, as it requires. Although teachers are expected to ensure successful implementation of inclusive practices, the results they are expected to deliver are not matched by the support that is provided. Support should include teacher-training, provision of the process of identifying and ensuring assessment of students who may be affected by ASD or other learning disability, resources, and access to successful practices involving the most effective strategies of inclusive education.

## 2.8 Leadership in an Inclusive Environment

According to Schwartz (2015), inclusion is about belonging, and it is a celebration of diversity. The implementation of an inclusive programme in a regular school setting within the public school sends the message that students with differences belong among us in our environment. Schwartz (2015) continues by noting that in addition to sending a message of belonging, the students with ASD show greater improvement in an inclusive classroom where the instructions are planned and intentional. With such a positive outcome, how can school leaders promote effective inclusive practices within their schools? Tkachyk (2013) posits that fully supporting teachers and students significantly influences the success of an inclusive classroom. Sharma, Loreman, and Forlin (2012) note that teachers also have a role to play. This involves the need for teachers to 1. design their classrooms where all students' needs are met, 2. create an environment where students feel safe, and 3. become competent in dealing with adults, parents, and healthcare professionals relating to the students' special needs. School success relies on the success in an inclusive classroom, which involves the teachers' attitude regarding their competence. The more confident teachers feel in their ability and with a positive attitude to an inclusive classroom, the better the teacher is apt to perform.

In another case study conducted by McLeskey and Waldron (2015), strong, active leadership was a component necessary for an effective inclusive school. This involves principals identifying, communicating, and adhering to core values. The study also recognized that to ensure an effective inclusive school, building a trusting relationship with teachers and supporting them were pertinent. Earning the teachers' trust included recognition by the teachers that the principal was dependable, which would demand the principals demonstrating a genuine concern for their teachers and shared decision-making. Villa and Thousand (2003) suggest a systems approach to implementing successful inclusive education. A systems approach comprises a connection with other organisational best practices; visionary leadership and administrative support; redefined roles and relationships among adults and students; collaboration; and additional adult support when

needed. When administrators lead the vision of inclusive education, teachers' attitudes toward inclusive practices are improved. To ensure student success, internal accountability systems to monitor student progress and determine the effectiveness of interventions are also needed. Villa and Thousand (2003) recognize that promoting and sustaining successful inclusive practices is complicated. Hence, it is necessary for leaders to take initiative and support all components that contribute to a successful inclusive environment. It is noteworthy that successful school improvement relies on the school's ability to adapt to change (Evans & Cowell, 2013). The change is influenced by effective leadership, which is promoted by an institution's commitment. Katz (as cited in Northouse, 2016) suggests "effective administration (i.e., leadership) depends on three basic personal skills: technical, human, and conceptual" (p. 43). Skills are what leaders can accomplish. These skills pertain to a leader's competencies, individual attributes, leadership outcomes, career experiences, and environmental influences; attributes a leader can and should develop to improve their efficiency.

## **2.9 Summary**

Inclusive education functions to address the diverse needs of all learners through increasing their participation in the learning process and by reducing exclusion (UNESCO 2005). According to Burstein et al., (2004), inclusive education involves teaching children with disabilities alongside children without disabilities in a general classroom setting with the necessary accommodations and adaptations.

Through strategic planning, educators can effectively promote a sense of belonging for autistic students. Education can promote this sense of belonging by delivering good instruction (Schwartz, 2015). Due to benefits associated with inclusion, namely the positive attitudes of students without disabilities and the academic gain for students with special needs mentioned by McManis (2017), strategic planning should be a priority. Understandably, appropriate training and support are also pertinent to the process Svidal (2015). Mitchell (2016) purports that essential to the process of inclusion is collaboration among stakeholders. It is

by this process that individualised planning is achieved for each student, instructing the ideal type of inclusion.

The theories of David Kolb and Lev Vygotsky support the benefits of inclusive education and its effective instruction. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory of Cognitive Development claims that the development of children occurs because of collaborative dialogues between more knowledgeable members of society. Examples are parents, teachers, and peers. Moreover, Kolb's experiential theory postulates that learning occurs due to new experiences. To promote these new experiences, the Kolb learning styles provide teachers with effective strategies for the teaching process.

LePage et al., (2010) recommend that teachers possess a repertoire of appropriate teaching strategies for special needs students that align with their IEPs. Other aspects also promote the successful teaching process for students with special needs. One includes qualitative teacher preparation programmes. According to Persons with Disabilities Act (as cited in Fraser, 2014), special education teachers and those involved with the development of training programmes in special schools must be adequately trained. Another aspect involves a teacher's self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is one's belief in their ability to achieve goals. Hernandez et al., (2016) note that teachers with low self-efficacy could sometimes possess a negative attitude towards inclusion and make little or no effort to implement the necessary strategies to effectively assist students with ASD.

In addition to training and teachers possessing positive self-efficacy, UNESCO IBE (as cited in Acedo, 2011) recommends (1) improving working conditions for teachers, (2) equipping teachers with necessary skills and materials, (3) encouraging training of teachers for inclusive education at the tertiary level, (4) promoting research regarding inclusive education, and (5) equipping school administrators with necessary skills regarding student diversity that will promote inclusive education at their schools.

Furthermore, to promote the successful implementation of inclusive education, schools are expected to make the necessary changes, Husan et al.

(2018). These changes involve policy development, curriculum development, the assessment process, and teacher training; garnering support from the community to support efforts that will promote inclusive practices in classrooms is also recommended.

These anticipated changes require strong, active leaders to play a significant role by fully supporting teachers and students (McLeskey & Waldron 2015). Leaders are also expected to identify, communicate, and adhere to core values. Villa and Thousand (2003) suggest implementing a systems approach, which comprises collaborating with other organisational best practices; visionary leadership and administrative support; redefined roles and relationships among adults and students; and additional adult support when needed.

Chapter 3 of this study discusses the research methodology for the inclusive education process in New Providence public schools. It outlines the purpose of the study, the research methods utilised and their appropriateness, the research design, and its appropriateness, the target population, sample and location, ethical considerations, and data collection techniques, which discusses instrumentation that was implemented. Also included in this section are the data analysis strategies.

### **3.0 CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter examines the research methodology of the dissertation. The research methodology is defined as the approach used to thoroughly resolve the identified problem (Mishra & Alok, 2017). Detailed in this section, the author outlines the purpose of the study, the research methods utilised and their appropriateness, the research design, and its appropriateness, target population, sample and location, ethical considerations, and data collection techniques, which discusses instrumentation that was implemented.

#### **3.2 Statement of the Problem**

The increasing number of students with ASD is posing a challenge for educators, particularly those educators who are untrained and lack the necessary experiences to teach them. As noted in Chapter 1, autism is a neurological disorder that affects the brain's normal functions (Busby et al., 2012). Another problem affecting the implementation of inclusive education is the improper diagnosis of students with learning challenges. These challenges negate the delivery of the appropriate strategies that will address their learning requirements. Further, they forfeit the opportunity to learn. These challenges and others must be addressed to ensure special needs students are afforded the same opportunities as their peers with no learning challenges, to enable them to become productive citizens.

#### **3.3 Research Questions**

The research questions guiding the research are listed below. How has the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology made available to students with ASD in the public school system the appropriate education and training that will equip them with the necessary beliefs, attitudes, values, knowledge, and skills required for work and life in an interdependent, ever-changing world?

##### **3.3.1 Sub-questions.**

- What accommodations if any, have been made to address the needs of students with ASD in the regular public school classroom?

- What changes have been made to the public school's academic/social/extra curricula curriculum to adequately address the needs of students with ASD?
- Have public school administrators and educators received the necessary training to professionally identify and address the needs of students with ASD?
- What are the multiple ways the teacher presents content for students' varying abilities?
- How does the special needs students' social impairment affect the classroom environment?
- How has the provision of inclusive education influenced special needs students?

### **3.4 Research Methodology**

Cohen et al., (2011) note that the purpose of the methodology is to provide an understanding of the process of scientific inquiry. This inquiry refers to the various approaches incorporated to gather data that are used to infer, interpret, explain, and predict for educational research. Provided below is the research approach and research design to the study of inclusive education related to autism spectrum disorder in the public school system in New Providence, Bahamas. Participants included the Bahamas' Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology Minister of Education, psychologists, a Special Education Officer, public school principals, special education teachers, mainstream classroom teachers, students, and parents. This methodology also outlines the various data collection approaches that were incorporated into the study. They include

- interviews
- questionnaires
- participant observations
- retrieval of archival documents

### **3.5 Research Design**

The research utilised a qualitative method, which comprised multiple case studies. This case study approach encompassed several components to ascertain

the necessary data. Once the MOE Special Education Unit identified the list of schools, the schools' districts were also determined. There are four primary school districts - northeastern, northwestern, southeastern, and southwestern. High schools in New Providence are divided into junior and senior schools. They are further divided into north and south districts. The study includes a school from each level within the districts. In some instances, more than one school was included in a district.

The Director of the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology approved my written request to perform observations within the public school classrooms and conduct interviews with principals, teachers, students, and parents (those willing to participate). A second component involved the distribution of letters for parents via students. Teachers were relied upon to encourage the parents to assist with the study. This was done by speaking one-on-one with parents and via WhatsApp groups through text messages. Parents received consent forms to participate in the study and questionnaires to complete. Additionally, parents willing to participate in the study were sent the appropriate letters to release their child's records that involved screening, an individual education plan, report cards, and any other files about their child's education and diagnosis. All parents declined to do so. When participating parents were asked about their refusal to have their children's records released, they indicated that they feared their children being victimised. While I was able to confirm my commitment to confidentiality, I could not assure them of the MOE's role.

### **3.5.1 Gaining entry.**

Accessing the necessary personnel and classrooms required proper protocol. First, permission was attained from the Director of Education. Then, principals were contacted and appointments were made to visit the schools, meet the special education teacher, and make plans for observations. District Superintendents were also engaged to make contact with principals who were reluctant to accommodate my visit. Once the necessary arrangements were made, interview schedules, observation dates, and participant letters and questionnaires

were distributed to either the principal or the teacher for further distribution to other teachers and parents.

### **3.6 Population and Sample Selection**

The population included what the MOE terms ‘special self-contained classes,’ which comprises seven primary schools, six junior schools, one secondary school, and one senior high school. The sample selected included ten schools involving five primary schools, which represent the four primary school districts on the island of New Providence – northeastern, northwestern, southeastern, and southwestern. The sample also included three junior schools, which represent the two districts for high schools – north and south. Finally, the sample included the only secondary and only senior schools with special self-contained classes. The age range of the students included 5 to 18 years old. The ethnicity of the population included Haitians and Bahamians. At the primary school level, there were seventy-three students within the observed classes. Within the junior schools, there were thirty-five students observed; and the secondary school has a population of twenty-three students. The senior school has a population of twelve students. Of the total population of students within these self-contained classes, only eight students are being integrated within the mainstream classes. At the primary level, two students have been placed in the mainstream classes. Combined, the secondary and senior levels have six students who are integrated into mainstream classes.

Students within the preschool level were excluded because according to the Bahamas Education Act, the MOE is responsible for students aged 5 – 17 years old.

### **3.7 Trustworthiness**

Pilot and Beck (as cited in Connelly, 2016) posit that trustworthiness in qualitative studies refers to the level of confidence in the data, interpretation, and methods used to support the quality. To ensure a high level of trustworthiness, interview responses were written and provided to the respondents for their confirmation. During telephone interviews with parents, written notes were read to interviewees when the interview was completed.

### 3.8 Credibility

Creswell (2012) notes that credibility is when the researcher validates the findings of their research. Throughout this research, I attempted to heed that advice and maintain credibility at all times. The strategy utilised in the study is triangulation. This process includes the use of more than one method for the collection of data (Spaulding, 2014). Walsh (2013) also notes that triangulation presents different aspects and a detailed analysis of the research outcome. Therefore, this study utilised triangulation to optimise its credibility. According to Denzin (as cited in Danny, 2014), methodological triangulation is the use of more than one method to gather data, such as interviews, observations, questionnaires, and documents. As a means of triangulation, this study incorporated various data collection methods - observations, interviews and questionnaires, and archival documents.

As previously mentioned, observations were conducted in ten public schools at the primary, junior, and senior levels. Interviews were also performed related to the study with the MOE officials, psychologists, principals, teachers, students, and parents. Questionnaires were administered to some education officials, principals, teachers, and parents. Questionnaires were supplemented when interviews were not feasible because of scheduling challenges between the researcher and participants.

Triangulation allowed the researcher to collect and compare various perspectives of the phenomenon so that data presented would be as accurate as possible and with reduced bias. The different methods filled gaps that otherwise would have been presented without the use of all of the methods combined - interviews, observations, and questionnaires. This was useful in corroborating. As cited in Creswell (2012), triangulation is also the process of corroborating evidence from different individuals in descriptions and themes in qualitative research. This research conducted interviews and questionnaires with MOE officials, psychologists, principals, teachers, students, and parents, which allowed the evidence to support a theme. This, Creswell (2012) adds, ensures the study's

accuracy because the information is collected from multiple sources of information, individuals, or processes.

### **3.9 Transferability**

Transferability relates to whether the findings can be applied to other settings (Pilot & Beck as cited in Connelly, 2016). To promote transferability, this study presents detailed descriptions for the methodology, data collection process, and rich, detailed observation notes of the context, environment, and people studied, thus providing a vivid image that will adequately inform readers.

### **3.10 Dependability**

Due to the phenomenon being studied, aspects of the study are likely to change. One aspect includes classroom activities. Behaviours of students with learning challenges have been known to cause class disruptions. Additionally, students who are medicated may also behave differently when their medications have not been administered. Hence, these factors can influence their conduct in the classroom and disrupt the classroom setting. While it is not anticipated, the occurrence is possible.

### **3.11 Confirmability**

Pilot and Beck (as cited in Connelly, 2016) note that confirmability addresses whether the findings are neutral and could be repeated. Notes taken during this study were reviewed by a colleague and discussed to prevent researcher biases.

### **3.12 Data Collection and Management**

Data collection refers to related activities that focus on gathering the useful and necessary information to enable the researcher to answer questions posed (Creswell, 2014). Data collected during the study was retrieved via classroom observations, interviews, and questionnaires. Additionally, archival documents were also collected from the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, Special Education Unit.

### **3.13 Participants**

Participants for this study included special needs students who were observed in their classroom and enrolled in the public school system at the primary, junior, or senior school level. Participants also included the Minister of Education, Science, and Technology, Special Education Officers at the MOE, psychologists, principals, teachers, and parents. The schools included in the study were among the list that engaged in inclusive education. However, due to time constraints, schools were selected according to their district, so that each district and a school at each level would be represented in the study.

One hundred sixty-two individuals were included in the questionnaire and interview processes of this study. From this number, twenty-six participants were randomly selected. These included parents who were invited and responded to participate in the research.

### **3.14 Data Collection Instruments**

The instruments included semi-structured interviews, participant observations, questionnaires, and an observation form that are included in the Appendices. Interviews were chosen and preferred because they promote a personal connection. According to Kvale (2006), interviews can encourage a bond between the interviewer and interviewee. An observational form was also created and utilised for use within the classrooms. This form of data collection involves gathering information first hand. An advantage of this collection process was that it allowed the observer to study the actual behaviours of the students who may be challenged with communicating their thoughts. The participant observations involved watching and recording the behaviours of teachers and students, and activities within the classroom. Forms requesting parents' permission to participate in the research and provide access to their child's files were also distributed. Finally, intended interviews were emailed as questionnaires due to conflicting schedules and time constraints between the researcher and participants. Questionnaires were sent home with students for their parents to complete due to their apparent reluctance to contact the researcher for an interview.

### **3.14.1 Semi-structured interview for principals. Appendix C**

It was anticipated that the inclusive programme had recently been implemented in the schools. Hence, the questions focused on an overview, reflection, and guidelines for repeating the process at another school. Additionally, to determine the successes of the programme, the last item asks the principal to identify impressive or significant areas of the inclusive programme.

### **3.14.2 Semi-structured interview for teachers. Appendix C**

The instrument includes seven items. Four were divided into subsections as a follow-up to the prior question. They sought to determine the teachers' level of experience, the support that is provided by the school and the ministry of education. Further, it was used to determine how the teacher manages the students' various needs in the learning environment.

### **3.14.3 Semi-structured interview for parents. Appendix C**

This instrument that contains four items also includes six sections. These items sought to determine the parents' knowledge of appropriate provisions and ways of managing the child in the learning environment. Item '4' was included to determine the parent's understanding of the child's impact on others or benefits/disadvantages of the present environment – regular classroom or self-contained class.

### **3.14.4 Semi-structured interview for students. Appendix C**

Upon the request contained in the Examiners' Reports of the University of the West Indies' to include students, the questions were formulated. The purposes of the questions were to ascertain whether students were cognizant of their clinical diagnosis or learning challenge, determine their school experiences, and their overview of their classroom environment. The final item sought to induce if their learning inspired future hope of employment.

### **3.14.5 Semi-structured interview for psychologists. Appendix C**

Two of the psychologists included in the study are attached to the local psychological testing centres within New Providence. They were selected because of their professional affiliation and experience with children and their learning challenges. Attempts were made to arrange face-to-face interviews.

However, due to their busy schedules, neither of the psychologists was able to commit to an interview. As a result, the questions were emailed to both psychologists, and they returned their responses within two weeks.

#### **3.14.6 Semi-structured interview/questionnaire for the minister of education. Appendix C**

Attempts were made to interview with the Minister of Education. However, due to the minister's travel commitments and a busy schedule, the researcher was unable to secure an appointment in a timely manner. Hence, the questions were emailed and responses from the minister's office were received within two weeks.

#### **3.14.7 Self-designed participant observation form and guide. Appendix D**

Noting that autism spectrum disorder can manifest in numerous ways, a form was created to document events observed in the real-life setting. Additional information contained on the form was utilised to substantiate the location of the school, the level of the school, class size, whether an aide assisted the classroom teacher, and the type of learning environment – inclusive or self-contained. Questions were also used as a guide during the observation process.

#### **3.14.8 Interviews.**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted as a part of the data collection process with MOE officials – a Special Education Officers, a psychologist, teachers (regular classroom teachers and special education teachers), students, and parents of students with special education needs. Conducting interviews with these stakeholders provided a wider scope of the inclusive programme within the schools because of the differing perspectives the individuals provided due to their diverse roles. Interviews with ministry officials were conducted at the MOE headquarters on Thompson Boulevard, New Providence in the officials' respected offices. Each interview lasted a minimum of 40 minutes. Before each interview, communication was engaged either via email or telephone conversation to inform the purpose of the interview and arrange the appointment. The researcher did the recording of the data manually.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers in their classrooms on the school's campus. These were done during their breaks or non-teaching periods. The duration of the interviews ranged from 15 – 30 minutes. Five teachers were interviewed face-to-face. The remaining teachers were unavailable during my visits. Hence, they completed questionnaires. Parent interviews were conducted via telephone. Those who had received the participant's letter signed and returned it to their child's teacher. The signed forms were copied and returned to the teacher for redistribution to the appropriate parents. The participant's consent form distributed included the University of the West Indies' email address and my cellular telephone contact. Parents either contacted me, or I contacted them after receiving the completed form. Each parent interview lasted a minimum of 30 minutes. The information provided by the parents was handwritten on an interview form and read to them after the interview.

#### **3.14.9 Participant observations.**

This occurred over a period of six weeks. The first two weeks included initial visits to schools to meet with the principal and teachers to present the letter permitting me to conduct the observations. During these visits, the researcher visited the classes to become familiar with the students. Schedules for classroom observations were organised before their lunch periods: 12:05 pm in the primary schools and 1:10 pm in the high schools. Additionally, times, when autistic students joined sessions in the regular classrooms, were included. The constrictive schedules and the wide distances between the locations presented a challenge. An additional challenge was scheduling interviews with the principals and teachers. Obtaining the data from the participant observations was a priority. Hence, the schedules and routes were meticulously planned to ensure the necessary data was acquired.

#### **3.14.10 Questionnaires.**

Due to time constraints, questionnaires were submitted to the Minister of Education, two psychologists, nine principals, and twenty-two teachers. Numerous appointments were sought with the Minister of education.

However, he was unable to accommodate the researcher within the necessary period. This was due to his travel commitments within the recent months and other ministerial duties. Two of the ten principals accommodated the researcher and allowed an interview. Seven other principals completed and submitted the questions that were emailed or hand-delivered. Of the twenty-four responses received from teachers, twenty-two were questionnaires. This was also due to time constraints. During my visits, teachers were unavailable due to their teaching schedules.

### **3.15 Primary Schools**

#### **3.15.1 Northeastern district.**

Two schools in this district were observed. The first will be referred to as Northeastern Primary-a and the second as Northeastern Primary-b. Northeastern Primary-a includes two self-contained classes. The first class includes a bathroom. The second class that was created to accommodate the increased student population is without a bathroom. This fixture is a necessity because the additional classroom has a student who is confined to a wheelchair and unable to use the bathroom on her own. The classroom teacher changes the physically disabled student's undergarments. This is done inside the classroom behind bulletin boards erected by the classroom teacher because the regular facility does not provide the necessary accommodations for her. These two classes at the school were divided based on the students' mental and physical abilities. There are twenty-four students between the two classes. There are also two trained special education teachers. Both classes have one aide each. There were three visits made to the school for a total of ninety minutes. Data recorded were completed manually during the observed lessons, and the teachers, along with the researcher reviewed the notes.

Northeastern Primary-b comprises a self-contained special needs class that is located at the far north of the school less than 500 meters from the main office in a gated area. There is one teacher along with an aide. The student population is fifteen with ages 5 – 11 years. Within the class are bathroom facilities for students and teachers. There is a storage area for teachers and a

kitchen area that is equipped with a sink, kitchen cupboards, and a refrigerator. In the teaching area, there are cupboards that are filled with a large variety of hands-on activities for the students. Although the classroom is equipped with a SMART board and LED projector, neither of these items is operable. Also, a desktop computer was not visible. The teacher possesses a laptop, which is her personal property. This air-conditioned room is spacious with adequate seating area and an area for the students to engage in active learning on a carpeted space at the rear of the room. The walls are attractively decorated with instructional charts and students' worksheets. The class was visited on three separate occasions and observed for approximately three hours and thirty minutes. During the visits, students were interviewed. Handwritten notes were taken during and after the observation process.

### **3.15.2 Southeastern district.**

This primary school has one self-contained autistic class. There is one special education teacher assigned to the class along with an aide. There are ten students within the class between the ages of 6 – 12 years. The room is located along the last block of the school campus among other classrooms. The classroom is equipped with bathroom facilities. The classroom is furnished with a laptop (the teacher's), a printer and copier, and a video projector. The room comfortably seats the students with a designated area as a computer station that can house four to five desktops. The class was visited four times for approximately two hours. Handwritten notes were taken during and after the observation process. Then they were shared with the classroom teacher. During these visits, students were also interviewed.

### **3.15.3 Southwestern district.**

This school includes four classes with a total of forty-nine students, four trained special needs teachers and six assistants. There is one male teacher, which is the only male at the primary level. The classes are located at the western end of the school, away from the campus's busyness. The rooms are air-conditioned and a playground is isolated for the students' usage. Bathrooms are contained within the various sections to allow ease of use for the students. The

school was visited four times. Observations were made in three classrooms – an inclusive classroom and two self-contained autistic classrooms. This school has an autistic student assigned to a regular classroom. He receives all of his core subjects within a regular setting. Approximately two hours were spent observing the students in these three classrooms. An hour and twenty minutes were spent in the regular classroom. Forty minutes were spent observing students in the two self-contained autistic classes. Only two classes were observed as the other classes were for preschool-aged students. Handwritten notes were taken during and after the observation process. The remaining time was spent interviewing students in the autistic centre along with the autistic student assigned to the regular classroom.

#### **3.15.4 Northwestern district.**

This school has one self-contained special education class. There is one special education teacher and one teacher's aide assigned to the class of eleven students. The students range in ages 8-11 years. Of the ten students, it was noted that only three have been identified as being on the autism spectrum. The class is located in what appears to be a garage or storage area because of the roll-up shutter located near the entrance. To access the class, one must exit the gate that surrounds the general school building. The area that has been transformed into a classroom is equipped with air-conditioning and bathroom facilities. Technology in the room includes a SMARTboard, a laptop, and a video projector. The laptop and video projector are the personal properties of the teacher. Three visits were made to the school and lasted two and a half hours. The classroom area is very spacious and well lit. The room is attractively decorated with instructional charts and students' work covering the walls and bulletin boards. Handwritten notes were taken during and after the observation process. These were also shared with the classroom teacher. On the last visit, students cognitively competent were interviewed.

### **3.16 Junior High Schools**

#### **3.16.1 North district.**

This school has one prevocational class. The class has fourteen

students ranging in ages 12 – 17 years. Two of the students have cerebral palsy and are confined to wheelchairs. One student has a rare disease, Cornelia de Lange syndrome, the only person in the country affected with it. Another has an obvious challenge with her ability to walk. The classroom has one trained special education teacher and two aides. The classroom area is very cramped. There are minimal windows, but air-conditioning is provided. The classroom is located near the school's gymnasium where muffled sounds of activity within the gymnasium were heard during the observation. Because the space within the classroom area is so cramped, movement is difficult. The room includes bathroom facilities. The school was visited three occasions and lasted for one and one half hour. Handwritten notes were taken during the observation process. Then the notes were shared with the teacher. During one of these visits, student interviews were conducted with all cognitively competent students.

### **3.16.2 South district.**

Two schools were also observed in this district. For the purpose of this study, the first school within this district will be referred to as Junior-a and the second as Junior-b. The school, Junior-a has one self-contained prevocational class. There are twelve students within the class, which has a special education teacher and one aide. The students' ages are 11-17 years. Three visits were made to the school lasting two hours. The class is located near a hallway. No other classes are nearby. The room, which is a temporary class for the students, is severely cramped and dimly lit. There is minimal wall space. No instructional charts or students' work are mounted anywhere in the room. The students' designated class is being completed. It is located at the rear of the school and has its play area and bathroom facilities. It is very spacious and is expected that the area will be completed within several weeks. Handwritten notes were taken during and after the observation process. The notes were shared with the classroom teacher. Interviews with students were conducted on the final visit.

Junior-b is a newly opened self-contained classroom that has ten students, a special education teacher, and an aide. The students' ages are 12 – 15 years old. The classroom is within the general population and within close

proximity of the main office and students' bathroom facilities. The classroom is equipped with a mounted 32" television, a water cooler, refrigerator, microwave, desktop computer, color printer and copier, a stand fan, and a cable modem. The students' tables and chairs appear to be new. The classroom is captivating with numerous instructional charts, students' worksheets, and crafts. The room is spacious. There is no air conditioning and most of the windows on the pathway are kept closed to avoid distractions. The students are seated in small groups. There is a designated table at the back of the class where students engaged in group activities during their lunch period. One student within the class is confined to a wheelchair. The classroom was visited three times for approximately two hours. Students were interviewed during the visits. Handwritten notes were taken during and after the observation process, and discussed with the homeroom teacher.

### **3.17 Senior Schools**

#### **3.17.1 North district.**

This school has one self-contained autistic classroom. There are eleven students assigned to the class, a special education teacher and an aide, both males. The homeroom is located among the general population. However, it is near an entrance gate, which becomes busy and noisy. Most of the students' chairs are broken. The class has minimal instructional charts draping the walls. Three visits were made to the school. During those visits, four different classes were observed for a total of two hours and fifteen minutes. Observations were conducted in the students' homeroom, art, and social studies classes. One of the classroom observations included the integration of one of the autistic students into a cosmetology class, which is an optional subject. Option classes are selected based on students' interests and the class's availability. Handwritten notes were taken during and after the observation process, and discussed with the relevant teacher. Interviews with the students were conducted on the final visit.

#### **3.17.2 South district.**

The school has two self-contained autistic classrooms. There are

thirty-five students between the two classes. In the first class observed, there are two teachers and two aides. In the second class, two teachers are assigned. However, neither of the teachers are special education teachers. According to the teachers, the assigned special education teacher is on medical leave. These classrooms are located in an isolated section of the school and the general student population is forbidden from entering. Both classrooms are air-conditioned. The bathrooms are conveniently located outside the classrooms for the exclusive use of the special needs students. Observations were conducted for approximately two hours and forty minutes. During this period, an inclusive class was observed. A student from one of the self-contained autistic class attends reading sessions within a regular classroom setting. The other observations were done within the autistic classes. Details from the observations were handwritten. Interviews were conducted with competent students during the researcher's final visit.

### **3.18 Ethical Considerations**

Cohen et al., (2011) detail the importance of providing informed consent. They outlined the following guidelines that involve

- a thorough explanation of the intended procedures
- risks and potential uneasiness involved
- details of benefits
- sharing of appropriate alternative procedures
- providing clarity of the procedures and study
- Informing participants that they are free to withdraw their consent.

For these reasons, the guidelines were incorporated into the study. First, the researcher completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI). Through the University of the West Indies, permission was requested to gain access to participants. Once granted, the Director of Education was contacted and a letter was provided approving permission for the study to be conducted among students with special learning needs in New Providence public schools. Superintendents of the schools were contacted, and they informed the principals within their districts of the approval granted to the researcher. Principals informed

teachers, and letters were sent home to the relevant parents inviting them to participate.

Another ethical consideration includes confidentiality. Participants must be assured of the researcher's confidence. It is also a priority that the names of students and teachers remain anonymous. In this study, the names of schools have also remained anonymous. Information shared with the researcher detailing the students' details have been kept secured and the contents confidential to only the researcher and those involved with the study.

### **3.19 Summary**

The use of the data analysis process incorporated was consequential to the data reduction derived from the sources within the study. The benefits of the boxed display provided ease in coding and categorizing the text. Combined, the processes contributed to the promotion of emerging themes. The use of triangulation has increased credibility and reliability as proven in the themes constructed.

Additionally, an external validation process was incorporated. This involved the researcher involving a colleague to code the results to compare themes for validity and reliability. The external validation process identified similar themes, indicating no personal bias by the researcher.

## **4.0 CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The objective of this study was to carefully determine whether the Bahamas MOE has effectively implemented and facilitated an inclusive programme, particularly geared for children with autism in New Providence public schools. It was designed so that the findings could be used to appropriately inform effective implementation and teaching practices. It is critical because of the increase in the number of schools engaged in inclusive education practice and the number of students who are being diagnosed. According to information obtained from Dr. Lanae Rivers, a psychologist who participated in the study, autism is not on the increase. However, more students are being diagnosed. This chapter discusses in detail the findings derived from the study, which are an aggregate of notes obtained during interviews, questionnaires, and classroom observations.

### **4.2 Setting**

This study was conducted on the island capital of New Providence, The Bahamas. The Bahamas is an archipelago that includes 700 islands and 2,000 rocks and cays stretching over 100,000 square miles of ocean. It lies 50 miles off the eastern coast of Florida, USA (The Islands of the Bahamas, 2018). According to Ministry of Finance, Department of Statistics (2017), the recorded population in 2010 for the country was 351,461, and they inhabited 20 islands and cays. The island of New Providence, which is where you will find the nation's capital city of Nassau, recorded a population of 246,329, just fewer than 75% of the country's population.

### **4.3 Participants' Demographics**

One hundred sixty-two participants were successfully recruited for this study. Of this number, thirty-three were educators, teachers, and principals; twenty-six were parents and/or guardians; ninety-eight were students; two were psychologists with private practices, and the remaining three were MOE officials, inclusive of the Minister of Education. The technique used to recruit them was purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is when the researcher intentionally

selects individuals or sites to study, (Creswell, 2012, p. 206). It was appropriate for purposeful sampling to be used for both the participants and the sites because they had to have an affiliation with inclusive education, particularly autism. This sampling technique intended to help develop a detailed understanding while establishing many perspectives. For this reason, participants included as mentioned in the Methodology of this study, the Minister of Education, a Special Education Officer, and a psychologist at the MOE, child psychologists in private practices who perform psychoeducational analysis, principals and teachers assigned to schools that practice inclusive education, students, and parents of those students. The sites were selected because they engaged in inclusive education practices, which also included autistic students. Hence, the participants met the criteria: were special needs students, teaching in an inclusive environment in a public school, managed the implementation of inclusive practice at a public school, or involved with assessing students with special education needs. Additionally, the Minister of Education was selected because through his duty, he can further bring awareness to the needs of students with special needs.

Table 1  
*Demographics of Teacher Participants*

<b>Demographics of Teacher Participants</b>		
<b>Professional Title</b>	<b>Qualifications</b>	<b>Level Taught</b>
Special educator: 9	Bachelor's: 8 Master of Sc.: 1	Primary: 3 Junior: 3 Senior: 3
Generalist teacher: 9	Bachelor's: 9	Primary: 9
Specialization: 6	Bachelor's: 6	Primary: 1 Junior: 4 Senior: 1
Principal: 9	Bachelor's: 5 Master of Sc.: 3 Doctor of Education: 1	Primary: 4 Junior: 3 Senior: 2

#### **4.4 Data Analysis**

Data analysis refers to the process that involves itemising information that is collected; and it occurs during or after the data collection process (Creswell, 2012). The process of dissecting the data is necessary because this leads to the summarisation of the collected data. This paper provides a step-by-step description of the procedures used to conduct the data analysis. The key elements

of this assignment include the process by which raw data were prepared for analysis and then subsequently examined. Inclusive in this paper is also the use of the raw data that was collected during the research. According to Hamersley (as cited in Cohen et. al., 2000), relative to this process, qualitative data analysis includes an extensive range of techniques. Some of these include

1. coding of fieldnotes
2. content analysis
3. personal constructs
4. narrative accounts
5. seeking patterning of responses

#### **4.4.1 Coding of fieldnotes.**

All fieldnotes, which included data gathered from interviews, questionnaires, and participant observations were collected manually and transcribed by the researcher. Transcription is described as the process of converting fieldnotes into text data (Creswell, 2012). Using a computer, a table was created for each instrument. Appropriate headings were attached. These headings included questions asked, the responses provided, and the type of respondent. Additional columns were added as the coding and thematic analysis progressed. As the analysis was done, the research questions were reviewed concurrently and responses that informed the questions were color-coded, which entailed adding a mark to parts of the text that were either repetitive or similar in meaning. The highlighted data was collapsed into broad themes. Themes are labels and similar to codes, which consists of two to four words (Creswell, 2012). Deriving themes were accomplished via data analysis. Table 2 represents the codes and relative themes.

Table 2  
*Initial Codes and Themes from Interviews, Questionnaires, and Observations*

<b>Initial Codes and Themes from Interviews, Questionnaires, and Observations</b>
<b>Theme: Provide Teacher Support</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• support</li> <li>• human resources</li> <li>• effective strategies to improve students academically</li> <li>• implement inclusive practices</li> </ul>
<b>Theme: Provide Necessary Resources</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provide learning resources for students</li> <li>• improve inclusive policy</li> <li>• ensure proper implementation of inclusive practices</li> </ul>
<b>Theme: Ensure Quality Education Access</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ensure professional integrity</li> <li>• access to educational support</li> </ul>
<b>Theme: Implement Appropriate Resources</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• improve physical accommodations for students</li> <li>• provide physical resources</li> </ul>
<b>Theme: Address Behavioural Concerns</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• address behavioural concerns</li> <li>• implement behavioural plan</li> </ul>
<b>Theme: Provide Teacher Training</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• promote professional accountability</li> <li>• provide effective teacher training</li> <li>• provide training for teacher aids</li> </ul>

Following the coding of the fieldnotes, content analysis was conducted. According to Holsti (as cited in Stemler, 2000), content analysis is objectively and systematically making inferences with the use of appropriate tools to analyse the distinguishing aspects of information. GAO (as cited in Stemler, 2000) notes that researchers utilise this method to analyse large amounts of data in a somewhat simplistic manner.

Sharif (2019) presents three types of content analyses. Some of the main areas are conventional content analysis, direct content analysis, and summative content analysis.

1. Conventional content analysis is often used when a study's goal is to describe a phenomenon, especially when the research literature is limited.
2. Direct content analysis' goal is to validate or extend conceptually a theoretical framework or theory.

3. The summative content analysis uses a summative approach to identify and quantify particular words or content in the text.

#### **4.4.2 Conventional content analysis.**

This study utilised the conventional content analysis approach primarily due to the focus of the study, which concentrated on describing a phenomenon. It was also applied because of the limited research literature on the phenomenon. Sharif (2019) notes that an advantage of the conventional content analysis approach includes accessing direct information from the study without imposing preconceived categories. The categories are derived from data that has been collected.

#### **4.5 Descriptive Findings**

After examining the initial codes, themes were created. The diversity in participants provided varying perspectives related to inclusive education, particularly autism. Each participant represented a different category of stakeholders, each possessing different perspectives related to the inclusive programme. For this reason, the instrumentation used for each group differed. Findings from the interviews, questionnaires, and participant observations were aggregated and examined.

##### **4.5.1 Interviews and questionnaires.**

A total of one hundred sixty-two interviews and questionnaires were conducted. The diversity among the participants includes contributors to inclusive policies and implementing the inclusive programme, individuals operating the inclusive programme, those responsible for the delivery, benefactors of the programme, and parents and guardians of those children within the programme. Findings from policymakers and those responsible for implementing the inclusive programme, who include the Minister of Education, MOE officials, and psychologists revealed that there is an urgent need to revise policies and properly implement inclusive practices.

Data collected suggests that there is a need to implement legal, policy and programme changes to protect the rights of children with disabilities. León (as cited in Moreno, Jaén, Navío, & Moreno, 2015) notes:

“Inclusive education should be based on four premises - inclusion as a human right; inclusion as a way to achieve educational equality; everyone has the right to be educated among peers and in the cultural context they live in; and lastly society must guarantee all children’s rights, including their inclusion in a normalized school framework.” (p. 107)

Data collected from those charged with the operation of the programme (principals) indicated varying degrees of support from the ministry of education. Some responses suggest that the support consisted of the ministry of education establishing a vocational unit and trained teaching staff. Overall, responses indicate a disparity in the provisions afforded to the schools. It is evident that not all schools among the various districts are equally supported.

Deliverers of the programme, which consists of teachers, decried a need for teaching resources, training in the field of inclusive education, and assistance in addressing maladaptive behavioural challenges. Regarding training, fifty percent of the respondents claimed that the implementation of the programme was the introduction of the prevocational unit, which means that no discussion or preparations were made before the classes and students were added. Others expanded by stating that no formal implementation of the programme was done by the MOE. Thirty-six percent indicated that the Ministry of Education provided no training. Seven percent of the respondents indicated that they had special education training. The remaining seven percent indicated that they had had experience working with the group of students, “In my case, I have had previous experience with the students; being transferred from the Special Unit to the Language Department. No formal implementation was done by the MOE.” Fifty percent of this group noted behaviour as the most challenging with the students with ASD. One stated, “They can be disruptive at times.” Another stated, “Some students unable to keep still, which disturbs the class.”

Students enrolled in the programme are direct benefactors. Thus, their concerns are of significant interest. Due to the students’ cognitive challenges, of the one hundred ninety-one students observed only ninety-eight were able to provide their input. Responses by the students revealed an alarming

observation. Only one student was able to identify his clinical diagnosis. It was a primary school student attending the school in the Northeastern District. This could be the reason that many of the students are unaware why they are in a special needs class. Thirty-six of the students prefer a regular class and did not believe they were rightly placed. Recommendations made by the students regard aesthetic classroom changes, providing resources, e.g laptops and desktops, and improving classmates' behaviours. Responses revealed that all students have experienced some form of harassment or bullying. They have learnt how to deal with the negativity. Finally, more than 90% of the students possess a desire to become a productive citizen.

The parents' and guardians' remarks related to the programme included providing more resources (human and physical) and training for teachers and their aides. A need expressed by an irate concerned parent, was "a need for a speech pathologist;" also sharing, "the principal is not accommodating and does not take concerns or advice." One comment, which is considered an outlier is, "Hats off to the MOE for not isolating the kids; keeping them exposed and allowing them to learn like normal human beings." Despite the commendation offered, there is much more that still needs to be done to properly monitor and effectively educate students with autism.

#### **4.6 Data Analysis Procedures**

Data collected was retrieved via classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and questionnaires. Additionally, archival data was also collected from the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology Special Education Unit. The semi-structured interviews conducted as a part of the data collection process was completed with MOE officials - a Special Education Officer, a Special Education psychologist, teachers (regular classroom teachers and special education teachers), special needs students, and parents of students with special education needs. The classroom observation process was carried out over a total period of approximately six weeks with intermittent visits. Two weeks of classroom visits were used to organise suitable schedules to conduct the interviews with teachers and observations. Approximately four weeks involved

additional classroom observations and interviews with students. Classroom observations were conducted daily among the different schools. Questionnaires were incorporated. This was primarily due to time constraints because several attempts to schedule appointments with the ministry officials, principals, and teachers proved unsuccessful. When scheduling interviews with intended respondents proved challenging, the questions were either hand-delivered or delivered electronically. As shown in Table 3, of the four hundred twenty-four intended respondents within the public schools, there were one only hundred sixty-two, which is slightly above sixty percent of the population.

Table 3  
*The Study's Respondents*

<b>Category of Respondents</b>	<b>Expected Respondents</b>	<b>Total Responded</b>	<b>%Total Respondents</b>
MOE Officials	3	3	2
Psychologists (Private)	2	2	1
Principals	10	9	6
Teachers	29	24	15
Students	191	98	60
Parents/Guardians	189	26	16
<b>Total</b>	<b>424</b>	<b>162</b>	<b>62%</b>

While Table 3 demonstrates that there is a significant disparity among expected participants and actual participants, it is important to note that data was collected from all groups of respondents; thus, providing significant details of the diverse perspectives and not compromising the integrity of the research.

Regarding questionnaires involving teachers, the collected amounts of teacher respondent data were less than expected because there were fewer teachers at the schools involved with teaching students with special needs. The expectation was that the schools engaged in inclusive education, and several teachers, especially at the junior and senior levels taught students with and without special needs. At the majority of the primary schools, the special education homeroom teacher taught all subjects to the students. The only schools that involved regular classroom teachers instructing the special needs students were at the junior and senior high school levels located in the northern districts.

Although my expectations included the involvement of more teachers, it was flawed in the assumption of inclusive and not self-contained classrooms as encountered. It is evident that the teachers involved in this study included more than 50% of the teaching population of special needs students of the sample. Hence, this representation is an exceptional sample.

Missing data regarding the questionnaires involved the omission of a couple of responses by teachers. This only occurred twice, once by a high school teacher and another by a primary school teacher. There is no indication that the missing data has impeded the data analysis process as all other respondents provided feedback to the items. Further, the researcher was able to construct a theme. Teachers assigned to separate schools omitted the two items left unanswered; each of the schools has had the inclusive programme implemented for more than five years. The researcher has theorized, based on the unanswered item on the instrument, that the teachers' neglect to respond was because they were not yet assigned to the school during the implementation process of the inclusive programme.

A more significant type of missing data was the actual number of students with an autism spectrum disorder. Ministry officials and principals were unable to provide accurate information. Further, teachers were unable to conclusively provide details of students' assessments either. Hence, it remains unknown the special needs challenges within some of our self-contained classrooms. Consent forms that were sent out to parents requesting a release of the students' assessments were not returned. The initial research question focused on autism spectrum disorder. However, upon commencement of the study, knowledge gained indicated that inclusive education within the public school system involved a combination of learning challenges within the classes. This combination of learning challenges includes a range of mental and physical challenges, some appearing more challenging than others. Hence, it was necessary to make some minor adjustments to the initial research question to include all special needs students rather than specifically focusing on students with ASD.

Creswell (2014) recommends that qualitative researchers implement six steps, which is included in Table 4, to analyse their data. He further recommends that the analysis of qualitative data be viewed as following steps from the specific to the general.

Table 4  
*Analysing the Data*

1. Organize and prepare the data for analysis
2. Read or look at all the data.
3. Start coding all the data.
4. Use the coding process to generate a description of the setting or people as well as categories or themes for analysis.
5. Advance how the description and themes will be represented in the qualitative narrative.
6. Interpret the findings.

#### Analysing the data included

1. Organising the data - Handwritten notes were taken during classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and returned questionnaires were filed based on the groups of respondents. Interviews and questionnaires obtained from teachers, parents, psychologists were all filed separately. This was done to maintain confidentiality and anonymity. Groups that included only one respondent, Minister of Education were also kept separately.
2. Transcribing the data - This process involved converting fieldnotes into text data. Data collected was collected manually. The data collected was arranged in tables. The headings of the table included the questions asked, type of respondents, the responses, and the initial coding.
3. Analysing the data - A hand analysis of the data was conducted. This involved recording the responses on the computer. Duplicated responses were only recorded once. Once all collected data were recorded and grouped accordingly, the data were examined to develop codes.

4. Coding the data - This process involves making sense of the data, dividing it into texts, labeling the segments with codes, assessing for overlap and redundancy, and breaking down further into themes (Creswell, 2012). The data was reread to determine the underlying meaning of the information. Tesch (as cited in Creswell, 2014) outlines eight steps to be used during the coding process. A descriptive coding process was used. “Descriptive coding is a straightforward coding method used to assign basic, descriptive labels to data to provide an inventory of their topics. It summarises the data in a word or phrase (most often as a noun) the basic topic of a data-passage” (Hedlund-de Witt, 2013, p. 10). Some codes used during the analysis process include

- integration
- provision of physical structures
- provision of physical structures
- access to educational support
- lack of teacher training/preparedness
- address behavioral concerns
- adapt the curriculum to foster life skills

5. Reviewing the data - Creswell (2012) suggests another review of the data to identify possible new codes and to focus on specific quotes by participants.

6. Reducing the list of codes - This reduction allows the researcher to identify the data’s themes. Themes include five to seven descriptions resulting from combining the codes, which form a major idea.

Table 5  
*Interviews/Questionnaires with Principals*

Questions	Principals	Initial Coding
Goals for inclusive education within the school		
Support from the MOE		
Training provided by admin for staff and teachers		

Table 6  
*Interviews/Questionnaires with Teachers*

Research Questions	Teachers	Initial Coding
Implementation of Inclusive Education by MOE/School		
Challenges with Students		
Effective Strategies		
IEP		
Modification of Work for Students		
Recommended Changes		

Table 7  
*Interviews/Questionnaires with Parents*

Questions	Parents	Initial Coding
Expectations for learning at the school		
Recommendations for the MOE		
Challenges for child in the environment		
Appropriateness of a regular school rather than a special school		

Table 8  
*Interviews/Questionnaires with Psychologists*

Questions	Psychologists	Initial Coding
perspective on inclusive education in public schools		
recommendations regarding inclusive education practices that you would offer for the Bahamas' public education system		

Table 9  
*Interviews with Students*

Questions	Students	Initial Coding
learning challenges		
prior school experience		
attitudes and behaviours of others toward special needs students		
reason for leaving previous school		
recommended changes		
in-class disturbances within special needs classroom by classmates		
career goal		

Table 10  
*Analysing the Data-Interviews/Questionnaires with Principals*

Questions	Principals	Initial Coding
Goals for inclusive education within the school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• promote greater independence</li> <li>• provide an appropriate learning environment</li> <li>• promote inclusive education for all students</li> <li>• integration in regular classes with regular students</li> <li>• provide interaction with mainstream teachers and students to sensitize them to people with special needs</li> <li>• provide support for teachers</li> <li>• provide support for students' progress and success</li> <li>• promote differentiated instructions</li> <li>• ensure all students with disabilities are afforded opportunities as those without disabilities</li> <li>• provide each special education teacher professional development once a year</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• integration</li> <li>• support</li> <li>• equip</li> </ul>
Support from the MOE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• programme evaluations and assessments</li> <li>• very little</li> <li>• provision of an environment</li> <li>• access ramps</li> <li>• resources and technological devices</li> <li>• unsure</li> <li>• teacher</li> <li>• teacher's aid</li> <li>• limited professional development opportunities</li> <li>• resource teacher</li> <li>• Readiness, willingness, and availability of officers at MOE</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provision of physical structures</li> <li>• teaching resources</li> <li>• human resource</li> </ul> <p>*Negative report greater expectations</p>
Training provided by admin for staff and teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• training by REACH non-profit organization</li> <li>• international professional development courses related to children with special needs</li> <li>• emotional support</li> <li>• provision of resources</li> <li>• open communication</li> <li>• ensuring appropriate environment</li> <li>• ensuring differentiation</li> <li>• ensuring students from the class are involved in regular activities within the school - e.g. clubs, assemblies; attendance to specialist classes</li> <li>• in-school professional development involving special education teacher and regular classroom teachers</li> <li>• involvement in skill-based classes</li> <li>• Providing support from education officers from the MOE</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• outside sources/support</li> <li>• emotional support</li> <li>• guidance</li> <li>• promote professional accountability</li> <li>• ensuring professional integrity</li> </ul>

Table 11  
*Analysing the Data-Interviews/Questionnaires with Teachers*

Research Questions	Teachers	Initial Coding
Implementation of Inclusive Education by MOE/School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• professional development courses</li> <li>• allowing students to participate in vocational and life skill classes</li> <li>• provision of teachers' aids</li> <li>• none - computer</li> <li>• none - p.e.</li> <li>• none</li> <li>• introduction of the prevocational unit</li> <li>• special education workshop</li> <li>• adaptation of F.A.C.E.S</li> <li>• provision of a special education unit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provision of infrastructure</li> <li>• professional preparation</li> <li>• access to educational support</li> </ul> <p>*Negative report no consultation</p>
Challenges with Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• nil</li> <li>• behavior</li> <li>• transitioning</li> <li>• lack of accommodations - technology;</li> <li>• lack of aides to support students</li> <li>• structure of the environment</li> <li>• behavior</li> <li>• their slow work pace</li> <li>• repetition of task</li> <li>• keeping them focused</li> <li>• their anti-social behavior</li> <li>• their fidgeting behavior which disrupts the class</li> <li>• tantrums</li> <li>• difficulty to understand concepts</li> <li>• require a lot of attention</li> <li>• specialized attention that is required</li> <li>• adapting lessons to accommodate their learning needs</li> <li>• hyperactivity</li> <li>• finding appropriate teaching materials</li> <li>• age range is too wide for one class</li> <li>• ability range is too wide</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• lack of teacher training/preparedness</li> <li>• inappropriate accommodations</li> <li>• large student population</li> <li>• lack of appropriate resources</li> <li>• inappropriateness of student grouping</li> </ul> <p>Opposing perspective no challenges experienced</p>
Effective Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• cooperative learning</li> <li>• visual aids</li> <li>• tiered activities</li> <li>• consistency</li> <li>• repetition of activities for retention of information for students</li> <li>• seating arrangements</li> <li>• limiting distractions</li> <li>• allowing comfort objects</li> <li>• giving limited tasks</li> <li>• schedules</li> <li>• routines</li> <li>• use of technology</li> <li>• hands-on activities</li> <li>• modeling tasks</li> <li>• scaffolding</li> <li>• rote learning</li> <li>• speaking one-on-one with the student</li> <li>• using peer tutoring</li> <li>• partnering students</li> <li>• class discussions with topics familiar to students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• typical classroom organization</li> </ul>
IEP	<p>Yes; by teacher; small group and individual instruction No</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IEPs without all teachers input</li> <li>• No IEPs</li> </ul>

	<p>Yes; parent &amp; teacher; record data and achievement</p> <p>Yes; parent &amp; teacher; for assessment; planning; addressing child's needs</p> <p>Yes; parent &amp; teacher; for teaching</p> <p>No</p> <p>No</p> <p>No</p> <p>Yes; parent &amp; teacher; address the child's needs</p> <p>No</p> <p>Yes; HOD; for teaching</p>	
Modification of Work for Students	Yes-18 no-2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Modification is necessary</li> </ul>
Recommended Changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provide students with life skills</li> <li>• assign therapists to the schools to assist with behavioral challenges</li> <li>• access to specialist classes</li> <li>• modification of the curriculum- provide standard</li> <li>• provide structure within classrooms, e.g. work stations</li> <li>• implement a behavioral plan</li> <li>• integration of technology use</li> <li>• physical education specialist to assist students with wheelchairs</li> <li>• improve teacher-student ratio</li> <li>• more training opportunities for teachers in inclusive education</li> <li>• more inclusive education classes</li> <li>• more vocational activities for students - carpentry, agriculture, barbering, cosmetology</li> <li>• better management of special education students</li> <li>• provision of teaching strategies</li> <li>• learning resources for students</li> <li>• educate the educators about special education</li> <li>• additional classes to decrease numbers of student-teacher ratio</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• improve physical accommodations for students</li> <li>• address behavioral concerns</li> <li>• implement behavioral plan</li> <li>• provide effective teacher training</li> <li>• provide learning resources for students</li> <li>• design appropriate curriculum</li> </ul>

Table 12  
*Analysing the Data-Interviews with Students*

Questions	Students	Initial Coding
learning challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• math</li> <li>• focusing</li> <li>• reading</li> <li>• unknown</li> <li>• writing</li> <li>• none</li> <li>• comprehension</li> <li>• speech impediment</li> <li>• nonreader</li> <li>• science</li> <li>• memory</li> <li>• unsure</li> <li>• spelling</li> <li>• social studies</li> <li>• memory</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• most only identified subject challenges</li> <li>• most used no clinical terms to identify challenges</li> </ul>
prior school experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes-78</li> <li>• No-2</li> <li>• Don't recall-18</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• most with prior schooling</li> <li>• all levels of special education accessible</li> </ul>
attitudes and behaviours of others toward special needs students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• name-calling</li> <li>• teasing</li> <li>• negative comments</li> <li>• bullying</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• harassment</li> </ul>
reason for leaving previous school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• graduation</li> <li>• family relocated islands</li> <li>• recommended by a teacher</li> <li>• school too expensive</li> <li>• recent hurricane</li> <li>• moved by parent</li> <li>• no special education class available</li> <li>• behavior</li> <li>• bullying</li> <li>• unsure</li> <li>• "Ask my mommy."</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• graduation</li> <li>• family relocation</li> <li>• parent's decision to transfer</li> <li>• special needs education not provided</li> <li>• financial challenge</li> <li>• student's inappropriate behavior</li> <li>• bullying</li> </ul>
recommended changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• none</li> <li>• students' behavior</li> <li>• students' attitudes</li> <li>• more hands-on activities</li> <li>• computers</li> <li>• furniture</li> <li>• bigger class</li> <li>• seating arrangement</li> <li>• more displayed work</li> <li>• classroom door is too heavy</li> <li>• include a television</li> <li>• clean a/c vents</li> <li>• treatment by other students</li> <li>• more spelling games</li> <li>• change tablets to laptops</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• improve classroom aesthetics</li> <li>• provide resources for students</li> <li>• improve students' behaviors</li> <li>• none</li> </ul>
in-class disturbances within special needs classroom by classmates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• silly noises</li> <li>• inappropriate noises</li> <li>• talking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• in-class distractions</li> </ul>
career goal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• tire repairman</li> <li>• build robots</li> <li>• astronaut</li> <li>• mechanic</li> <li>• farmer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• students possess aspirations despite their learning challenges</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• artist</li><li>• neurologist</li><li>• teacher</li><li>• doctor</li><li>• scientist</li><li>• veterinarian</li><li>• singer</li><li>• chef</li><li>• toy maker</li><li>• police</li><li>• pilot</li><li>• nurse</li><li>• unsure</li></ul>	
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Table 13  
*Analysing the Data-Interviews/Questionnaires with Parents*

Questions	Parents	Initial Coding
Expectations for learning at the school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• assistance with a speech pathologist</li> <li>• better communication/information from the school, e.g. early dismissal</li> <li>• expect equality</li> <li>• fair treatment</li> <li>• acceptance</li> <li>• removal of the label 'special education'</li> <li>• an improvement in child's behavior</li> <li>• attendance to regular classes</li> <li>• child's vocabulary and comprehension to improve</li> <li>• child's potential to be maximized</li> <li>• child social interactions to be more appropriate</li> <li>• child's math and reading levels to improve</li> <li>• child to gain ability to read and write</li> <li>• provision of occupational therapy by the school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• available appropriate personnel resource</li> <li>• effective strategies to improve students' academically</li> <li>• inclusion practices</li> <li>• whole child development</li> </ul>
Recommendations for the MOE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provide a speech pathologist</li> <li>• ensure the availability of computers for students</li> <li>• teach life skills to students</li> <li>• can be commended for the programme - students are in normal environment</li> <li>• increase the amount of schools with the special education classes</li> <li>• provide more training for the teachers</li> <li>• provide training for teachers' aids</li> <li>• ensure classes are wheelchair accessible</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provide appropriate physical resources</li> <li>• adapt curriculum to foster life skills</li> <li>• increase amount of schools</li> <li>• provide training for teachers and aids</li> </ul>
Challenges for child in the environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child exhibits behavioral challenges</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• behavioral concerns</li> </ul>
Appropriateness of a regular school rather than a special school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• aids socialization</li> <li>• communication improved</li> <li>• is academically capable</li> <li>• not ashamed</li> <li>• builds the child's self-esteem</li> <li>• sense of support by the child</li> <li>• disagrees with the placement within regular school</li> <li>• children are cruel</li> <li>• discrimination is a negative</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• improves child's social behavior</li> <li>• feels included/normal</li> </ul> <p>Opposition            Negative effects in regular school</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● issue that is witnessed</li> <li>● prefers an autistic school</li> <li>● location is ideal</li> <li>● child has regressed*</li> </ul>	
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Table 14  
*Analysing the Data-Participant Observations*

Research Questions	Primary	Junior	Senior	Initial Coding
accommodations made by the ministry	<p>Southeastern District(SE): The provision of a classroom inclusive of private bathroom facilities; special education teacher and an aid are attached;</p> <p>Southwestern District(SW): Provision of a unit that encompasses 4 classrooms. These classrooms have their inner private bathroom facilities. The unit is fully air-conditioned and has an adjacent playing field. Each class is supplied with a special education teacher along with an aid.</p> <p>Northwestern District(NW): The class is conducted in what appears to be an enclosed parking garage. The room is spacious and has its indoor bathroom facilities. It has a SMART board. A special education teacher and an aid is attached to the class.</p> <p>Northeastern District(NE): NEP-a: The school has two autistic classes. Classroom I has a cement-constructed ramp to the entrance of the doorway; private bathroom facilities;</p>	<p>North District: supplied a special education teacher along with two aids</p> <p>South District: Junior-a: construction of a block for the special education classroom, which includes nearby bathrooms; special education teacher with an aid.</p> <p>Junior-b: located in a newly built classroom in a recently refurbished school; equipped with a special education teacher and an aide.</p>	<p>North District: the provision of a special education teacher along with an aid.</p> <p>South District: A designated area that includes two air-conditioned classrooms and nearby bathroom facilities. Each class is supplied with a special education teacher along with an aid. The classes share iPads.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● physical structure</li> <li>● human resource</li> </ul>

	<p>refrigerator and microwave oven; special education teacher and an aid are attached; Classroom II has a special education teacher and an aid attached. Dry-erase board, refrigerator</p> <p>NEP-b: This classroom was an addition to the campus. It is spacious and has bathrooms and a kitchen attached. Within the area, there are storage cupboards. A refrigerator is in the kitchen.</p>			
changes have been made to the public school's academic curriculum	<p>SE-adaptations to the primary curriculum by classroom teacher.</p> <p>SW-adaptations to the primary curriculum</p> <p>NEP-a &amp; NEP-b: adaptations to the primary curriculum</p> <p>NW-adaptations to the primary curriculum</p>	<p>North District: adaptations to the primary/junior curriculum based on students' academic levels</p> <p>South District Junior-a and Junior-b: adaptations to the primary/junior curriculum based on students' academic levels</p>	<p>North District: adaptations to the curriculum based on students' academic levels</p> <p>South District: adaptations to the curriculum based on students' academic levels</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>teachers improvise with personal materials</li> </ul>
training	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
multiple ways the teacher presents content	<p>SE-differentiated class assignments based on students' abilities</p> <p>SW-class discussions; demonstration /modeling of tasks; scaffolding for seat assignment</p> <p>NEP-a: Classroom I:small group instruction; one-on-one class assignment; use of teaching aids, e.g. counters, number chart</p> <p>Classroom II: whole group instruction; demonstration/modeling task; differentiated assignments</p> <p>NEP-b: use of cellular phone for sing-along songs; floor puzzles, counters, board games, flash cards, differentiated</p>	<p>North District: whole class discussion; group work; demonstration; differentiated activities; use of chalkboard for writing; demonstration/modeling of task</p> <p>South District: Junior-a: whole class discussion; dramatization; dry erase board task for students to complete activity; differentiation of seatwork</p> <p>Junior-b: whole class; small group; discussion; cut and paste activity; labeling drawings and diagrams</p>	<p>North District: video; whole class discussion; differentiated assignments</p> <p>South District: LED projector and laptop; whole class discussion; differentiated seatwork</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>dependent on personal resources</li> </ul>

	activities NW-use of LED projector and laptop; class discussion; differentiated individual assignments; demonstration/modeling of tasks; inclusion of art and craft activity			
special needs students' social impairment affect the classroom environment	SE-none observed SW-none observed NEP-a: Each class had one student who was a constant disruption to the teacher while she assisted other students NEP-b: constant disruption by two students while the teacher taught and worked with the remainder of the class NW-minor disruption due to the student's challenge with loud noises	North District: none observed South District: Junior-a: Due to some of the students' cognitive challenges, the teacher had to take their lunch orders during seatwork assignments while students were completing the given tasks Junior-b: none observed	North District: none observed South District: loud outburst that prompted discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>behavioral issues vary</li> </ul>

Table 15  
*Analysing the Data-Questionnaires with Psychologists*

Questions	Psychologists	Initial Coding
perspective on inclusive education in public schools	1. all children can learn; opportunity should be afforded 2. need for policy; important strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>programme is important</li> </ul>
recommendations regarding inclusive education practices that you would offer for the Bahamas' public education system	1. special education training for educators 2. research; ensure quality education; evaluate current inclusive practice;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>need for proper implementation</li> </ul>

Table 16  
*Analysing the Data-Interviews, Questionnaires, and Observations*

Initial Coding	Respondent	Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• integration</li> <li>• support</li> <li>• equip students</li> <li>• provision of physical structures</li> <li>• teaching resources</li> <li>• human resource</li> <li>• outside sources/support</li> <li>• emotional support</li> <li>• guidance</li> <li>• promote professional accountability</li> <li>• ensuring professional integrity</li> </ul>	Principals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provide teacher support</li> <li>• provide necessary resources</li> <li>• ensure quality education access</li> <li>• implement appropriate resources</li> <li>• address behavioral concerns</li> <li>• provide teacher training</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provision of infrastructure</li> <li>• professional preparation</li> <li>• access to educational support</li> <li>• lack of teacher training/preparedness</li> <li>• inappropriate accommodations</li> <li>• large student population</li> <li>• lack of appropriate resources</li> <li>• inappropriateness of student grouping</li> <li>• typical teaching management strategies classroom</li> <li>• IEPs without all teachers</li> <li>• no IEPs</li> <li>• modification is necessary</li> <li>• improve physical accommodations for students</li> <li>• address behavioral concerns</li> <li>• implement behavioral plan</li> <li>• provide effective teacher training</li> <li>• provide learning resources for students</li> <li>• design appropriate curriculum</li> </ul>	Teachers	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• recognize learning challenges</li> <li>• prefer special education class</li> <li>• special education at all school levels</li> <li>• various reasons for leaving prior school reported</li> <li>• bullying</li> <li>• harrassment</li> <li>• improve classroom appearances</li> <li>• provide student resources</li> <li>• improve students' behaviours</li> <li>• schools expect to achieve</li> </ul>	Students	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• available appropriate personnel resource</li> <li>• effective strategies to improve students' academically</li> <li>• inclusion practices</li> <li>• whole child development</li> <li>• provide appropriate physical resources</li> <li>• adapt curriculum to foster life skills</li> <li>• increase amount of special ed schools</li> </ul>	Parents	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provide training for teachers and aids</li> <li>• behavioral concerns</li> <li>• improves child's social behavior</li> <li>• feels included/normal</li> <li>• be patient</li> </ul>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• physical structure</li> <li>• human resource</li> <li>• teachers improvise</li> <li>• dependent on personal resources</li> <li>• behavioral issues vary</li> </ul>	Observations	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• programme is important</li> <li>• need for proper implementation</li> </ul>	Psychologists	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• need for policy</li> <li>• need for research</li> </ul>	Special Education Officer	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• policy</li> <li>• access</li> <li>• training</li> <li>• provide quality education</li> </ul>	Minister of Education	

Creswell (2012) describes the use of themes as an additional way of analysing qualitative data. Like codes, he adds, themes include labels consisting of no more than two to four words. Several types of themes listed include

- Ordinary themes: themes the researcher expects to encounter
- Unexpected themes: As implied, unexpected themes are a surprise to the researcher.
- Hard-to-classify themes: These themes are difficult to classify, or they overlap with numerous others.
- Major and minor themes: They represent both major ideas and secondary ideas.

Emerging themes from the data analysis were ordinary themes. Due to the researcher's professional experience of teaching students with an autism spectrum disorder, these themes were anticipated. The themes include

- provide teacher support
- provide necessary resources
- ensure quality education access
- implement appropriate infrastructure
- address behavioural concerns
- provide effective teacher training

#### 4.7 Summary

This chapter discussed findings resulting from the study, which included an aggregate of notes obtained during the semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and classroom observations. The study was conducted on the island capital of New Providence in The Bahamas. One hundred sixty-two participants were successfully recruited. Of the one hundred sixty-two, thirty-three were educators, teachers, and principals; twenty-six were parents or guardians; two were psychologists with private practices; ninety-eight were students; and the remaining three were MOE officials. Fieldnotes were coded and a conventional content analysis was conducted. As stated, the advantage of incorporating the conventional content analysis approach includes accessing direct information from the study without imposing preconceived categories (Sharif, 2019). Findings revealed six themes. As mentioned, these themes include (1) provide teacher support, (2) provide necessary resources, (3) ensure quality education access, (4) implement appropriate infrastructure, (5) address behavioural concerns, and (6) provide effective teacher training.

## **5.0 CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 Introduction**

As stated in In Chapter 1, Svidal (2015) defines inclusive education as an understanding of the child and the environment that influences them daily. A review of the literature has defined ASD as the inability to recognize familiar signals of human communication and a range of disorders that affect an increasing number of people (Brody, 2012). In Chapter 4, data collected revealed that ASD in the Bahamas is not on the increase; Rather more students are being diagnosed. This increase of ASD among children is presenting a significant challenge for classroom teachers, especially those who lack the necessary training, as indicated in the study's findings. To teach children with autism, it is required that the skills of classroom teachers be enhanced (Busby et al., 2012). In addition to enhanced teaching skills, there are other requirements. Busby et al., (2012) note that specialised instructional techniques, a unique curriculum, and coordinated services are required for inclusive practices to be successful.

This chapter comprises four major sections. First, findings in Chapter 4 are summarised and presented below. The summary is supported by the literature review and data collected from interviews, questionnaires, and participant observations as the primary data and secondary data. Second, a conclusion is provided. Third, the implications of the study and its findings are discussed. Finally, recommendations for future research and future practice are presented. Below, the problem of this study is restated.

### **5.2 Restatement of the Problem**

The researcher sought to identify the challenges influencing the effective implementation of inclusive education in public schools in New Providence, particularly the challenges faced by students with autism. Specifically, it aimed to answer the following questions:

1. How has the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology made available to students with ASD in the public school system the appropriate education and training that will equip them with the necessary beliefs, attitudes, values,

knowledge, and skills required for work and life in an interdependent, ever-changing world?

2. What accommodations if any, have been made to address the needs of students with ASD in the regular public school classroom?
3. Have public school administrators and educators received the necessary training to professionally identify and address the needs of students with ASD?
4. What are the multiple ways the teacher presents content for students' varying abilities?
5. How does the special needs students' social impairment affect the classroom environment?
6. How has the provision of inclusive education influenced special needs students?

### **5.3 Summary of Findings**

This section reports the findings from the previous chapter regarding inclusive education, particularly autism in public schools in New Providence. The summary of the findings is applied to its respective research question.

1. How has the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology made available to students with ASD in the public school system the appropriate education and training that will equip them with the necessary beliefs, attitudes, values, knowledge, and skills required for work and life in an interdependent, ever-changing world?

The study discloses that The Bahamas agreed to the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action at the World Conference on Special Needs Education, Salamanca, Spain in 1994. As a country consenting to the agreement, it was required that The Bahamas includes students with special needs in general education, provide training for relevant groups of people, prepare an appropriate budget, and adopt the principle of inclusive education as a matter of law or policy, and enroll all children in regular schools, unless there are compelling reasons for doing otherwise (The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action, 1994).

In 1999, the first special education self-contained class, specifically for students with ASD was opened at the Garvin Tynes Primary School located in the

southwest district of New Providence, (C. Hall-Knowles, personal communication, March 21, 2019). Presently, there are sixteen special education self-contained classes in fourteen public schools at the primary through senior high school levels. A primary, junior, and senior high school are located in each of the MOE's public school districts on the island. This suggests that inclusive schools at all levels are accessible to not only students with ASD, but also other special needs students. This is one aspect of ensuring inclusive education was implemented under the agreement. However, the Bahamas includes thirty inhabited islands, and New Providence is only one of those islands. Although it has a greater population, it cannot be assumed that there are no special needs students on the remaining inhabited islands.

In addition to implementing inclusive education practice in the public schools, the MOE has a Special Services Unit. As noted in Chapter 1, this unit provides education for students with all disabilities. It is staffed with two Senior Education Officers, one school psychologist, one hundred twenty-eight trained special education teachers and forty-four teaching aides for the sixteen special self-contained classrooms throughout New Providence. This unit is responsible for analysing a child's psychoeducational evaluation report and recommending the most favorable placement and support services in special education. This is one more critical component in promoting the success of inclusive education practices. With the support required for the evaluation and placement of special needs students, the present staff at the Special Services Unit is insufficient to meet the needs of the students, the schools, or the teachers requiring their services.

Another component necessary for promoting the success of inclusive education is a unique curriculum (Busby et al., 2012). Data collected from the interviews and questionnaires detail that the MOE has encouraged the use and modification of the Functional Academic Curriculum for Exceptional Students Curriculum (F.A.C.E.S). With the MOE encouraging teachers to utilise this curriculum, which was not created by the Bahamas government implies that none exists nor was created specifically for the Bahamas. As Busby et al., (2012) note a

relevant curriculum that effectively addresses the specific needs designed for these students is essential.

2. What accommodations if any, have been made to address the needs of students with ASD in the regular public school classroom?

The findings indicate a disparity among the ten schools observed concerning the accommodations made for the students. The details have been separated and discussed based on the schools' levels.

### **5.3.1 Primary schools.**

Of the nine classes within the five primary schools observed, eight of them were equipped with bathroom facilities for the exclusive use of the students within the special education self-contained classes; eight of the classrooms were also air-conditioned. The self-contained classroom located in the northwestern district appeared to be a modified garage that had been enclosed. The space had no windows, but the room was air-conditioned. It also included exclusive bathroom facilities for the students. The fifth classroom was a regular one, which means it had no bathroom facility and was not air-conditioned. Thus, it can be inferred that the classes that had been outfitted with bathroom facilities and air-condition units, advanced thought and planning were executed in preparing the spaces for the students. However, the classes where exclusive bathroom facilities were lacking and no air-condition existed suggest that less planning was involved in creating these spaces. The curricula used for the five classes were the MOE primary curriculum. Classroom teachers made the necessary modifications to the curriculum based on the levels of their students.

Presentation of instructional content ranged from differentiated assignments, class discussions, and technology use such as video projectors, YouTube videos, teacher-made games, and instructions given to students by the teacher from her desk. Each teacher displayed a different approach to engaging the students. The rapport with four of the five classes was positive and promoted student involvement. However, the students in the fifth class showed little motivation and engaged little with their classmates or the teacher who sat at her desk for the entire duration of my visits. As a veteran teacher, I am cognizant that

this style of teaching stifles the students' developmental growth, and it fails to promote their comprehension and overall skills. No interaction between the teacher and student was observed as the teacher introduced the lesson. Hence, there was no clarity on whether the students grasped the lesson's concept.

### **5.3.2 Junior schools.**

As mentioned in Chapter Four, there were three junior schools observed. Within the schools, three classrooms were observed. Two of the classrooms were modified spaces, and there was a lack of equity regarding these two facilities. The first school, which is located in the South District and identified as Junior South-a, was an enclosed space that appeared too small for the teacher and the aide to comfortably maneuver between the students' desks while assisting them during seatwork. Although this classroom was air-conditioned, there were no exclusive bathroom facilities. However, at the rear of the school, construction was underway for the students' permanent classroom. This area also included a spacious classroom, exclusive bathroom facilities, and a play area. According to the teacher interviewed, complete construction is expected by the new academic school year. The second junior classroom located in the North District was also a modified space that was too cramped for the students and teachers, especially because there were two students in the class confined to wheelchairs. The classroom was air-conditioned and included bathrooms only for the use of the students. However, the classroom was closely located next to the school's gymnasium. During the observation, noise from the activities in the gymnasium was heard, distracting attention from the teacher's instructions. It is evident that this was not the ideal location for students with learning challenges. It was revealed during a personal communication with the principal that plans to implement the self-contained class occurred one week before the opening of the academic school year. Hence, a makeshift room was identified to accommodate the students. Content taught during the observation of both classes was at the primary level, which the data from the teachers' interview confirmed that they modify the MOE primary level curriculum.

The third school, which is located in the South District and identified as Junior South-b, is an average sized classroom located along the bottom level within close proximity of the office. The class is furnished with seemingly new and suitable furniture, a refrigerator, microwave, water cooler, a mounted television, desktop computer, printer, and cable network. The classroom is attractively decorated and displays the students' work. An area of the tiled flooring is carpeted; a reading corner with crates of books is organized in a corner of the room. The countertops are lined with student activities. The teacher confirmed that she modifies and makes adaptations to the Ministry of Education's curriculum meeting the students where they are at academically.

Students in all three classes were very engaged during the presentation of their instructions by their teachers, primarily due to the instructional games and activities that accompanied each lesson. Teachers used hand-made games that required their students to apply thinking skills. The activities were a combination of cut and paste, match items, and labelling diagrams. The lessons also involved student movement as students were requested to organise themselves into groups, display their responses on the board, or to dramatize the responses at the front of the classroom. These activities seemed to have motivated the students tremendously because their attention was fixated on their teacher and responding to classmates. It also helped that the teacher's aide was motivating students and assisting with clarification of instructions and their responses. For the duration of the lesson, students were engaged in dialogue with each other and the teacher. This is the classroom atmosphere that I foster, where the students share their learning, and the atmosphere presents evidence of togetherness.

### **5.3.3 Senior schools.**

As indicated, two senior schools were observed. The first classroom, which was the students' homeroom, had many broken chairs. The teacher's desks were also broken. The walls lacked the luster of instructional charts. The class was located very near one of the general student population entry gates. Throughout the morning, students were busily passing the class; and with

each passerby, the students seated near the door lost focus to peer out. The class was supplied with only two ceiling fans. As a result, the door was kept open to promote a comfortable coolness in the room. However, as the students moved to other classrooms the rooms were more appealing with students' work adorning the walls. As the students moved among the general student body, several derogatory remarks were made. One student asked another, "Why are you looking at them? You wan' be in the special class aye?" The other student retorted, "You stupid aye bey? I look retarded to you?" At first glance, the students within the special self-contained class did not appear bothered. Yet, they remained huddled together and seemed more anxious to get into the classroom for their next lesson. Despite being in a self-contained classroom, it was obvious from this dialogue that students have a negative attitude regarding the special needs students. A successful inclusive practice would promote an understanding of the students, and such an assumption would not be made if the implementation process were effective. Schwartz (2015) notes that inclusive education sends a message of belonging; however, the self-contained classroom at this school negates the message of belonging, rather the students are discriminated against.

Three of the classes that were observed at this level used the regular curriculum with excessive scaffolding for the students. The teachers were very hands-on with the students and often gave prompts to assist the students with responses to the questions. The female student was the only attendee to the fourth class; this was an inclusive cosmetology session. The students engaged in roller-setting the hair of mannequins. The activity was not modified or adapted for the student. From the observation, it was not necessary. The teacher assisted all students in the same manner, demonstrating, prompting correct use of techniques, and encouraging as the need arose. It appeared that the student enjoyed this class as she made a couple of jokes and involved herself in asking and answering questions.

3. Have public school administrators and educators received the necessary training to professionally identify and address the needs of students with ASD?

Based on the data collected from interviews and questionnaires, no training has been provided to school administrators concerning the needs of students with ASD. Provisions that were noted from the MOE include assistance in creating an environment and other infrastructure, evaluations of the programme by Special Education Officers, resources, a trained special education teacher along with an aide, and limited professional development for special education teachers. Based on my experience with teaching students with special needs and those with autism, there should be a collaborative effort within the school where all relative teachers and administrators are cognizant of the students' challenges and needs and share effective teaching strategies to assist in their learning. The isolation of professional development provided to only the trained special education teachers, which occurs off-campus presents the training as segregated. Further, teachers in the junior and senior schools are also required to teach these students. Based on the Salamanca agreement, these teachers should receive the necessary training to enable them to be better prepared to effectively teach students with special needs (The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action, 1994). Requiring only the homeroom teacher to attend the professional development workshop without affording other teachers who are responsible for the students is a breach of the agreement. The exclusion of training for these teachers suggests that no special training is necessary for these students. However, Husan et al., (2018) contested this; Noted in Chapter Two, the authors deem teacher training necessary for successful implementation of inclusive practices within schools. It would suggest that the MOE made no consideration to train all teachers, but rather only saw it necessary to train special education teachers who already have experience in the field, unlike the regular classroom teachers who have little to no experience; yet they also have the responsibility of teaching students with special education needs.

4. What are the multiple ways the teacher presents content for students' varying abilities?

As mentioned in the previous chapter, data collected during the classroom observations include a range of instructional approaches. These include whole

class and small group discussions, videos via YouTube, matching games, picture sorting, demonstrations, PowerPoint presentations, and modeling to present a concept. The outlier among the presentations was the teacher who did minimal teaching and addressed the class from her desk located at the back of the room. The wide scope of observed instructional approaches is also due to the range of levels that were observed i.e. primary through senior classes. Smaller classes responded more favorably to these approaches whereas classes that included more than twenty-five students had fewer students participating. These were the inclusive classes, which suggests that smaller classes are best when engaged in an inclusive education programme.

5. How does the special needs students' social impairment affect the classroom environment?

During the observations, three students at two separate schools demonstrated disruptive behaviour in the midst of the learning process. First, the primary school in the Southwestern District the teacher who indicated that she had neither training nor information regarding how to meet the needs of the autistic student in her inclusive class would address the behaviour by warning that if it continued, he would be returned to the special education class. The strategy used by the teacher is evidence of an ineffective inclusive programme. Further to the teacher's statement is that the student had no individual education plan (IEP). Inclusion is about understanding (Svidal, 2015). Her statement demonstrates a lack of understanding concerning the behaviour displayed by the autistic student and how to effectively assist the student and demonstrate an understanding. More detrimental to the student and by extension the class is this teacher's lack of motivation to ascertain strategies to appropriately address the needs of this student. However, I contend that if an IEP had been completed, the teacher would have been better equipped to address the student's behaviour and his learning challenges.

The remaining two students were also observed in a primary classroom. This school is NE P-b located in the Northeastern District. According to the teacher, the students were too young for the classroom as they were first enrolled

in the preschool. However, after the preschool teacher had difficulty with their behavioural challenges, the students were placed in the special needs classroom. Additionally, the teacher noted that the students had not been given a psychoeducational evaluation. Hence, she could not determine their specific learning challenges. She had to constantly interrupt her teaching to address these students' behaviour. Although these students have not been diagnosed as special needs students, their placement indicates an anomaly within the programme. All students placed within the special needs classrooms have undergone a psychoeducational evaluation (C. Hall-Knowles, personal communication, March 21, 2019).

6. How has the provision of inclusive education influenced special needs students?

Data from the students' interviews reveal that they are provided with opportunities to appropriate education and training that can enable them to become productive citizens despite their learning challenges or ages. This opportunity that is provided complies with The Bahamas' Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology's Mission Statement which is "to provide opportunities for all persons in the Bahamas to receive the education and training that will equip them with the necessary beliefs, attitudes, values, knowledge, and skills required for work and life in an interdependent, ever-changing world" (Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, 2016, para. 3).

Additionally, to promote inclusivity four of the ten schools observed have involved special needs students in events, activities, and prefect appointments, and six of those schools engage in inclusive education where special needs students are integrated in regular classes. These classes include English language, literature, mathematics, art and craft, family life, music, and Spanish. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the primary school in the Southwestern District has a special needs student assigned to a regular class. According to parents' responses, the students exhibit a sense of belonging because of their interaction with 'regular' students in a 'regular' school. Teachers at four schools indicated that activities and events involve students within the special needs classes. These

include sports events that are adapted to the students' physical abilities; whole-school devotions that are conducted by the students; and their participation in cultural events. Junior and senior schools appoint prefects to students who meet the necessary requirements. During the researcher's visits, information gathered indicated that five of the schools allow the students to interact with the general population during their break and lunch periods.

From the students' future aspirations, the majority possesses a goal of becoming productive citizens. Several of their career goals require them to become professionals, example neurologist, veterinarian, pilot, teacher, nurse, astronaut, and a robot builder. Their responses are an indication that their learning challenges are no hindrance to their learning and achieving goals. They possess an expectation having been provided the opportunity to what they deem as regular education.

The special needs students are grateful for the opportunity of the provision of education in a regular school setting. When asked about the kindest thing their teacher has ever done for them, students identified teaching; ensuring they understand; and taking time with them. There are also teachers who have shown kindness outside the realm of educating. Students have stated teachers transport them to and from school, purchase their meals when they face lack, purchase uniforms, and even purchasing cellular telephone for a child's achievements. These acts undoubtedly have contributed to the students' sense of belonging and even love.

#### **5.4 Conclusion**

Inclusive education is not new. UNESCO (2005) succinctly describes it as "a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures, communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures, and strategies, with a common vision that covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children" (para. 1). Inclusive education has its benefits for both special needs students and those without

(McManis 2017). The benefits are the positive attitudes of students without disabilities and the academic gain for students with special needs. These benefits have caused a heightened focus on inclusive education practices. The principal role of inclusive education is to promote respect for individual differences and to appreciate diversity (Moreno et al., 2015). Moreno et al., (2015) state:

“Inclusive education should be based on four premises - inclusion as a human right; inclusion as a way to achieve educational equality; everyone has the right to be educated among peers and in the cultural context they live in; and lastly society must guarantee all children’s rights, including their inclusion in a normalized school framework.” (p. 107)

For the ninety-two governments and twenty-five international organisations that signed onto the Salamanca Statement on Principles, Policy, and Practice in Special Needs Education and a Framework for Action, they are required to develop inclusive schools. Additionally, their policies should ensure children with disabilities could attend their neighbourhood schools (The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action, 1994). This qualitative study analysed connections between the needs of students diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder and accommodations made in the regular public school classrooms in New Providence in addressing the students’ needs. It also investigated whether the necessary training was provided for regular classroom teachers who are responsible for teaching students affected by ASD.

Autism Society (2016) defines autism spectrum disorder as a group of developmental disabilities due to a problem within the brain. Due to this complexity, teaching affected students within the regular classroom can pose a challenge for classroom teachers who are not properly trained to teach special needs students. To promote inclusion, it is necessary that teachers be provided with training and support. It is imperative that classrooms promote further development of special needs students (Svidal, 2015). This process must involve an understanding of both the child and their environment. It must also include positive attitudes about including special needs students; schools building effective partnerships with parents; and the implementation of systems,

guidelines, and practices for the support of their special needs students (Education Review Office, 2015). Mitchell (2016) insists that collaboration involving special education teachers, classroom teachers, paraprofessionals, special needs advisers, educational psychologists, therapists, other specialists, technology consultants, and parents is necessary when teaching students with special education needs.

Vygotsky's and Kolb's theories support the concept of inclusive education. According to Cherry (2018), Vygotsky's sociocultural theory posits that human learning is predominantly a social process, which is influenced by parents, caregivers, peers, and culture. Vygotsky claimed that the development of children occurs because of collaborative dialogues between more knowledgeable members of society. Kolb's experiential theory claims that learning occurs due to new experiences. To promote these new experiences, Kolb's learning styles provide teachers with effective strategies for the teaching process (McLeod, 2017).

In 1994, the Bahamas was among those ninety-two governments and twenty-five international organisations that signed onto the Salamanca Statement on Principles, Policy, and Practice in Special Needs Education and a Framework for Action. The first autistic unit, which was a self-contained classroom attached to a local primary school in New Providence was established in 1999. Since then, the Bahamas boasts the establishment of sixteen autistic units within fourteen public schools in New Providence. The Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology Special Services Unit provides education for students with all disabilities. In addition to screening, this unit is also responsible for analysing a child's psychoeducational evaluation report and recommending the most favorable placement and support services, which may include special schools, special contained classes, or one of their alternative programmes. Students with moderate disabilities are placed in self-contained classes in regular schools. It is expected that the students would participate with their peers for subjects such as music, physical education, and other special programmes.

Findings from this study are contrary to the programme's intent. It was discovered that only six of the ten schools observed had engaged in inclusive

activities with special needs students alongside their peers without disabilities. Further, findings indicated a disparity among the ten schools regarding the accommodations made for the students. Some of the provisions show inequalities that include the convenience of bathroom facilities for the students, technology devices, appropriate furniture, and differences in the classroom location and size that promote a comfortable learning environment. Another area concerning the learning process is the teachers' training and delivery of curriculum content. Regular classroom teachers lack the necessary training for special need students. Findings from interviews indicated that no training was provided by the MOE. The classroom observations revealed a range of instructional approaches to deliver curricula content. These approaches included whole class and small group discussions and activities, videos via YouTube, matching games, picture sorting, demonstrations, PowerPoint presentations, and modeling to present a concept. From the data collected, it was discovered that the MOE has not designed curriculum specifically for its special education self-contained classes. Rather, it has encouraged the use and modification of the Functional Academic Curriculum for Exceptional Students Curriculum (F.A.C.E.S); its origin has not been determined.

In compliance with the Salamanca Statement on Principles, Policy and Practice in Special Needs Education and a Framework for Action, the Bahamas has formally introduced inclusive education to public schools in New Providence. Within each of the school districts, students attending primary, junior, and senior schools can do so in their neighbourhoods. Notwithstanding this implementation, the Bahamas has yet to comply with other aspects of the Salamanca Statement. These include placing high policy and budgetary priority to improve education services; enrolling all children in regular schools, unless there are compelling reasons for doing otherwise; involving organisations with disabled people and other relevant stakeholders in the planning and decision-making processes; and providing in-service teacher training that focuses on inclusive education.

The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action were designed to ensure the successful implementation of inclusive education and to achieve the

principle of inclusion, Education for All. Consequently, the following implications and recommendations have been proposed.

#### **5.4.1 Implications.**

##### ***5.4.1.1 Theoretical implications.***

The study sought to determine whether Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and Kolb's experiential theory regarding education could be proven true. However, due to the insufficient amount of data, it remains ambiguous.

##### ***5.4.1.2 Implications for policymakers.***

Research has revealed that a need exists for appropriate legal, policy, and programme guidelines. Data gathered indicated that there exist deficiencies regarding the standards for inclusive education. The purpose of this study included determining whether special needs students are provided with the appropriate entitlements. The study's findings reveal that the Bahamas has not fully complied with the Salamanca agreement that was signed in Salamanca, Spain in 1994. Students with special needs are not enrolled in general education as stipulated; the required training for the relevant groups of people was not honoured, and adopting the principle of inclusive education as a matter of law or policy has not been realized. This revelation suggests that policymakers should ensure compliance of the agreement. In doing so, it is expected that success with the programme becomes evident.

##### ***5.4.1.3 Implications for educators.***

Educators have indicated various challenges with the implementation of the inclusive programme at the schools. Among the challenges indicated, include training. Noted in Chapter One, good instruction can promote a sense of belonging for special needs students, (Schwartz, 2015). It was also noted that planned intentional instruction builds a student's confidence and competence.

To this end, it is vital that teachers receive the necessary training that would enable them to address the challenges faced by students with special needs and foster their ability to deliver good education in inclusive classes.

#### **5.4.1.4 *Future implications.***

The study, being of an exploratory nature introduces several opportunities for future research. Because this study is a pioneer, there are many opportunities for further research in this area to get the perspectives of students. Additionally, due to the prevalence of special needs individuals in any given society, expanding the study to other islands within the Bahamas should be explored.

#### **5.5 Limitations of the Study**

There are a few limitations associated with this study. The first involves the conflicting time schedules between the researcher and participants that caused interviews to become questionnaires. As a professional leader, the time to conduct the study was minimal and did not allow me to arrange interviews as preferred. My time constraints were compounded by the participants' schedules that interfered with my work obligations and the study's classroom observation appointments. Another weakness was not being able to ascertain appropriate records from the Special Services Unit regarding the number of students evaluated and those placed in the regular public schools. Data collected during the interview process with a Special Education Officer revealed that it is unknown how many students were assessed and the numbers currently in the regular public school classroom. One reason is that providing a placement letter does not guarantee that the child has enrolled in the assigned school. Additionally, it was noted that some students evaluated at the Special Services Unit also include private school students.

#### **5.6 Recommendations**

##### **5.6.1 Recommendations for future research.**

To extend this current study, one recommendation is to include public schools in the other inhabited islands within the Bahamas. Conducting such a study could be used to form a comparative study to explore the implementation process of schools in those islands with schools in New Providence.

Further, an investigation into the psychoeducational evaluation process that involves the recommendation of students to the MOE Special Education Unit

should be explored. According to data collected from interviews with and questionnaires from principals, no proper training has been conducted or criteria given to enable teachers or guidance counsellors to identify students with special needs that will guide the referral process.

A final recommendation is incorporating changes to the recruitment process that will cause an increase in the sample size of all participants, particularly parents.

### **5.6.2 Recommendations for future practice.**

Based on this research the following recommendations are presented:

- Ensure that the implementation and practice of inclusive education comply with the Salamanca agreement. These include
  - Placing high policy and budgetary priority to improve education services
  - Enroll all children in regular schools, unless there are compelling reasons for doing otherwise.
  - Collaborate with countries with inclusive education.
  - Involve organisations with disabled people and other relevant stakeholders in the planning and decision-making processes.
  - Provide in-service teacher training that focuses on inclusive education.
- Make the necessary policy changes to ensure that the rights and entitlements of special needs students are protected.
- Design and implement appropriate curricula.
- Provide effective teacher training that will foster appropriate strategies for a diverse learning environment.
- Provide appropriate resources for teachers and students to enhance the teaching and learning processes.

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## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A: SITE AUTHORIZATION LETTERS



DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
P. O. BOX N-3913/4 NASSAU, BAHAMAS  
Telephone No: (242) 502-2700/3 Fax: No: 328-8970

Ms. Tonia Ferguson  
Nassau, N.P. The Bahamas  
Date: 19<sup>th</sup> February, 2019

Your reference:  
Our reference: EDU/A/2058

Dear Madam:

**RE: Dissertation Research –Inclusive Practices in Public Schools**

Approval has been granted by the Department of Education for you to conduct a research study among students with special learning needs in New Providence Public Schools that have Autistic and Pre-Vocational Units attached to them.

It is understood that you will observe these students in the school setting during their regular classes for the remainder of this 2018/2019 Academic Year. It is further understood that should you wish to conduct any individual interviews with students, or obtain personal information on individual students, you will first seek and obtain written parental permission.

The Department of Education looks forward to receiving a final report of your research findings. A copy should be made available to the office of the Director of Education and a presentation of the findings made to relevant technical officers of the Department.

Please feel free to contact Ms. Sharmaine Sinclair, Assistant Director of Education, to discuss any concerns and/or challenges regarding these conditions. The telephone contact is 502-8213.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'M.C. Taylor'.

M. C. Taylor  
Director of Education



DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
 P. O. BOX N- 3913 NASSAU, N.P., THE BAHAMAS  
 Tel: (242) 502-2700 Fax: (242) 322-8491

Ms. Tonia Ferguson  
 Nassau, N.P., The Bahamas  
 Date: 21<sup>st</sup> October, 2019

**Your Reference:** Research Study

**Our Reference:** EDU/A/2058

Dear Ms. Ferguson:

**Re: Continuation of Research Study: Inclusive Practices in Public Schools**

Approval has been granted by the Department of Education for you to continue your research study from November 4 to April 30, 2019 among students with special learning needs in Public Schools on the Island of New Providence that have attached Autistic and Pre-vocational Units.

It is understood that the Principal at each school will approve your scheduled visits for observations, conducting interviews and viewing records. Individual student records will be accessed and student interviews conducted, with the written approval of parents. It is further understood that instructional time will not be interrupted in order to conduct these interviews observations and/or obtain additional information from students and teachers.

Teachers and Parents are free to give their consent to participate in your research study, as outlined in your request.

The Department of Education looks forward to receiving a final report of your research findings. As indicated in the previous letter, a copy should be made available to the Office of The Director of Education and a presentation of these findings made to relevant technical officers of the Department.

Please feel free to contact Ms. Sharmaine Sinclair, Assistant Director of Education to discuss any Concerns and/or challenges regarding the terms set out in this letter. The telephone contact for ADE Sinclair is 502-8213 and email address is [sharmaine.sinclair@moe.edu.bs](mailto:sharmaine.sinclair@moe.edu.bs).

Sincerely,

M. C. Taylor  
 Director of Education

## APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT'S CONSENT FORM

My name is Tonia Ferguson. I am from the University of the West Indies, Open Campus, and I am requesting that you assist by participating in a research study. Research studies are conducted to learn more about how the world works and why people act the way they do. In this study, we want to learn about the accommodations made for students with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in the public school system.

What I am asking you to do:

I am asking you to give permission for me to collect data related to evaluation that determined your child has ASD and reports related to their academic performance and behavior. I am also asking that you permit me to observe your child during instructional time in the classroom.

Purpose of the Study

In this study, we want to learn about the accommodations made for students with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in the public school system. If you agree, your child will be asked to participate in the observational part of the research.

What is my child going to be asked to do?

If you allow your child to participate in this study, they will be observed during regular teaching time at school. This study will occur over a period of one week with a frequency of at least twice a week.

Your child will be audio and/or video recorded.

What are the risks involved in this study?

There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this study.

What are the possible benefits of this study?

Your child will receive no direct benefit from participating in this study; however, there may be societal benefits such helping us learn more about the needs and address those needs of students with ASD in public school classrooms.

Does my child have to participate?

No, your child's participation in this study is voluntary. Your child may decline to participate or to withdraw from participation at any time. Withdrawal or refusing to participate will not affect their relationship.

No, your child's participation in this study is voluntary. Your child may decline to participate or to withdraw from participation at any time. Withdrawal or refusing

to participate will not affect their relationship with school. You can agree to allow your child to be in the study now and change your mind later without any penalty.

What if my child does not want to participate?

In addition to your permission, your child must agree to participate in the study. If your child does not want to participate, they will not be included in the study and there will be no penalty. If your child initially agrees to be in the study, they can change their mind later without any penalty.

Will there be any incentives for participation?

Neither you nor your child will receive any type of incentive for participating in this study.

How will your child's privacy and confidentiality be protected if s/he participates in this research study?

To maintain confidentiality, no personal identifiers will be placed on any study documentation. Documents will also be stored in a secured locked and undisclosed location.

If it becomes necessary, the Institutional Review Board may need to review the study records. If this happens, information that can be linked to your child will be protected to the extent permitted by law. Your child's research records will not be released without your consent unless required by law or a court order.

If you choose to participate in this study, your child will be audio and/or video recorded. Any audio and/or video recordings will be stored securely and only the research team will have access to the recordings. Recordings will be kept for three years and then erased.

Whom to contact with questions about the study?

Prior, during, or after your participation you can contact me at 427 1444 or [tonia.ferguson@my.open.uwi.edu](mailto:tonia.ferguson@my.open.uwi.edu) for any questions or if you feel that you have been harmed.

Signature

You are making a decision about allowing your child to participate in this study. Your signature below indicates that you are 18 years or older and have read the information provided above and have decided to allow them to participate in the study. If you later decide that you wish to withdraw your permission for your child to participate in the study, you may discontinue his or her participation at any time. You will be given a copy of this document.

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Printed Name of Child

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Printed Name of Parent(s) or Legal Guardian

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Date

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Signature of Investigator

---

Date

Form adapted from

[https://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:qk3Bczb6pTMJ:https://research.nd.edu/assets/199858/parental\\_permission\\_form\\_for\\_children\\_s\\_participation\\_in\\_research.doc+&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=bs](https://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:qk3Bczb6pTMJ:https://research.nd.edu/assets/199858/parental_permission_form_for_children_s_participation_in_research.doc+&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=bs)

## APPENDIX C: INTERVIEWS/QUESTIONNAIRES

### Minister of Education

1. What are the MOE's goals regarding inclusive education within the public school system?
  
2. What are the steps/model that will guide the implementation process (if a plan exists)?
  
3. What are the expected challenges in creating inclusive classrooms in the public school system?
  
4. What is the contingency plan to mitigate these challenges?

### Principal

1. What are your goals/vision regarding inclusive education within your school?
  
2. What support have you received from the ministry of education?
  
3. What support have you provided for teachers with students with ASD in their classrooms?

### Teachers

Specify your qualifications:

Generalist                      Special Ed.                      Other \_\_\_\_\_  
 Level: Bachelor's      Master's      Doctorate      Other \_\_\_\_\_

1. How has your school/Ministry of Education implemented inclusive practices within the traditional classroom for students with an autism spectrum disorder? E.g., Training?
  - 1a. What have you found most challenging when working with students with ASD in the mainstream classroom?
  
  2. What are some of your most effective strategies used when assisting students with an autism spectrum disorder (learning challenges)?
  
  3. Was an individual educational plan created for the student?    Yes                      No
  
  - 3a. If so, by whom?

How do you use the information?

4. Is the work that is given to the student modified?                      Yes                      No

4a. What are some changes that might be useful to the autistic/prevocational programmes?

Parents

1. What are your expectations of the learning environment your child is in presently?

2. What comments can you provide regarding the Ministry of Education's provisions for students with an autism spectrum disorder?

3. What advice would you give

- other parents?
- future teachers who may have your child?
- Minister of Education?

4. Why do you think it is appropriate to have your child in a regular classroom rather than a specialized school?

Educational Psychologists

1. What is your view regarding inclusive education?

2. With the increase of autism spectrum disorder cases, what are some recommendations that you would offer to the Minister of Education, the Director of Education, principals, teachers, and parents regarding inclusive education practices within our public school system, e.g. mandating parents ensure children who display symptoms are diagnosed; implementing the practice in schools?

Students

1. What learning challenge(s), or what subject is hard for you to understand?

2. You are in a prevocational/different/special/autistic class. Would you prefer to be in a regular class?

3. What classes at this school do you have with other students?

4. Were you attending another school before this school?

5. Why did you leave?

6. If you could change anything about your class, what would that be?
7. Sometimes people are mean to others for no reason. Has anyone at this school ever been mean to you? Explain.
8. I noticed that there are students in your class with different challenges. Do they make learning difficult?
9. What is the best thing a teacher ever did for you?
10. What do you want to be when you grow up?



**Observation Guide**

1. The room structure as a whole—how are areas divided? How is the furniture used?
2. How are materials organized in the instructional areas?
3. What is the daily schedule like? How long are the times for activities?
4. What types of visual supports are being used?
5. What type of instructional strategies is being used in the classroom?
6. How is large group material stored and organized?
7. Can you tell what skills are being targeted in each area? How can you tell? How does that compare with what you do in your classroom?
8. What types of behavioral supports are in place? Do students have behavior plans? What do they look like and how are they implemented?