

**PRE-SERVICE EDUCATORS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION**

**Andile Mdikana,  
Sibusiso Ntshangase  
and**

**Tokozile Mayekiso**

*University of the Witwatersrand*

*The inclusion of learners with special educational needs in general education is becoming more prevalent. As a result various special education researchers have begun to examine the success of inclusion, as well as the attitudes and beliefs of general educators towards the inclusion of learners with disabilities in the general education classroom. In the present study, preservice educators' attitudes towards inclusive education were investigated. The participants are full time students of the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. These students are registered for the Post Graduate Certificate in Education, B.Phys.ed) and B.A (Ed) and they are all in their final year of study. The students are mainly English-speaking. The sample comprises of 22 students seven males and fifteen females. Convenient sampling design was employed. A questionnaire developed by Choles (1997) was adapted and was used as a measuring instrument to record the responses of the research respondents. The adapted questionnaire comprised of the following sections: Biographical details, Attitudes towards inclusive education, Requirements for competency, Requirements for successful inclusion and Attitudes towards learners with Special Needs. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The research participants were generally found to have positive attitudes toward inclusive education. The results of this investigation are significant in the sense that the understanding of pre-service educators' attitudes is critical for the successful implementation of inclusive education (Mowes, 2000; Elloker, 1999; Gadium, 2002; Dover, 2002; & Mckeskey & Waldrom, 2002).*

The inclusion of learners with special educational needs in general education is becoming more prevalent (Crawford, Almond, and Tindal & Hollenbeck: 2002). As a result various special education researchers have begun to examine the success of inclusion, as well as the attitudes and beliefs of general educators towards the inclusion of learners with disabilities in the general education classroom (Ivey & Reincke, 2002; Avrandis, 2001; Van Reusen, Shosho & Barker, 2000; Choles, 2000; Gordon, 2000; Kgare, 2000; Bothna, 1998; Van Staden, 2001; Hyan, 2001; Makunga, 2002; Siebalak, 2002).

South Africa has begun a process designed to transform its education system from an exclusive education system to an inclusive education system as demonstrated by the Education White Paper 6 (2001). According to Naicker (2002), the South African national ministry of education system is committed to shift to an inclusive education. demonstrates this commitment in particular. White paper 6 articulates strategies for developing new knowledge, a new paradigm, and new strategies in the movement towards inclusion. Educational reform in the dispensation has inspired commitment to a single, inclusive education for all (Education White Paper 6 (2001).

The South African authorities have taken the initiative in terms of applying the recommendation of the Salamanca *Framework for Action* (UNESCO, 1994). According to this framework inclusive schools must recognize and respond to the diverse needs of their learners, accommodating all learners, regardless of any difficulties of learning differences. The introduction of White Paper 6 (2006) is a good example of the government's commitment towards inclusive education.

It is worth mentioning that special education researchers such as Julie and Ivey (2002:2) acknowledge that policy dealing with inclusion has had a major effect on how children with special educational needs are accommodated, but they also contend that a lot of work needs to be done in terms of understanding and transforming the attitudes of educator's towards inclusion. They maintain that attitudes cannot be legislated. The attitudes of teachers are critical for the successful implementation of inclusive education (Mowes, 2000; Elloker, 1999; Gadium, 2002; Dover, 2002; & Mckeskey & Waldrom, 2002).

Choles (1997) also argues that the success of facilitating inclusive education lies in the pivotal role of educators. The implication of his argument is that a transformed education system needs to actively involve educators and their concerns. If inclusion is to be successful, teachers' attitudes are one of the most important factors to consider (Baker & Gottlieb, 1980)

The studies by Davies and Green, 1999; Gordon, 2000, Dada and Alant, 2002; Van Reusen, Shosho & Barker, 2000; Agran, Snow and Swaner, 1999, indicated that teachers are positive towards inclusive education. A study by Downing (1997) identified both agreement and some differences in perception of inclusive education across professional role and level of implementation.

#### *Educator's attitudes towards inclusive education*

Although the movement for *inclusive education* is part of a broad human rights agenda, many educators have serious reservations about supporting the widespread placement of pupils with special educational needs (Florien, 1998). Bowman (1986), in her fourteen nation UNSESCO study of approximately 1000 teachers' with experience of teaching children with special educational needs, reported a wide range of difference in teacher opinions regarding integration. The countries surveyed were Egypt, Jordan, Columbia, and Mexico, Venezuela, Botswana, Senegal, Zambia, Australia, Thailand, Czechoslovakia, Italy, Norway and Portugal. The teachers were found to favour different types of children for integration into ordinary classes.

Although educator responses varied in terms of their educational systems in general and of special education in particular, there was a general hierarchy of conditions that were regarded as possible for inclusion. Severely intellectually challenged were all considered least favourably, while medical and physical conditions were seen as most easy to manage. Overall, about a quarter of teachers felt that children with sensory impairments could be taught in mainstream classes, while 10 percent held this view for children with severe intellectual challenges and multiple challenges.

Interestingly, Bowman noted that in countries, which had a law requiring, inclusion, educators expressed more favorable views (ranging from 47 to 93 per cent). Teachers from countries which offered the most segregated educational provision were less supportive to integration (ranging from 0 to 28 per cent).

Leyser, Kapperman and Keller (1994) undertook a cross-cultural a cross study of teacher attitudes towards inclusion or integration in the United States, Germany, Israel, Ghana, Taiwan and the Philippines. Their findings showed that there were differences in attitude to inclusion between these countries. Teachers in the United States and in Germany had the most positive attitudes. Positive attitudes in the United States were attributed to inclusion being widely practiced there as a result of Public Law 94-1423. Teachers in Germany exhibited positive attitudes to inclusion, though at the time of the study, Germany had no special education legislation, their teachers were not provided with special education training, their children eighth special educational needs were educated in segregated settings, and integration was being practiced only on an experimental basis.

Teacher attitudes were less positive in Ghana, the Philippines, Israel and Taiwan. The authors reasoned that this could probably be due to limited or non existent training for teachers to acquire integration competencies. Also, there were very few opportunities for integration in these countries.

Other attitude studies have suggested that general educators have not developed an empathetic understanding of disabling conditions (Berryman, 1989; Horne & Barton, 1992; Hayes & Gunn, 1988). Center and Ward's (1987) study with regular teachers indicated that their attitudes to integration reflected lack of confidence both in their own instructional skills or management skills on the part of the teacher. Thomas ( 1985) in a comparative study in Devon, England and Arizona, USA, found the balance of opinion was against the integration of children with intellectual difficulties (they moderate learning difficulties) in England and the educable mentally retarded (EMR) in the USA. Also in this

study attitudes were more positive towards integration when the contact special educator also held positive attitudes towards integration.

The above studies suggest that teachers, who are the prime targets of implementation of the policy, are often not prepared to meet the needs of students with significant difficulties and are more reluctant than administrators and policy makers

However, a study by Heller (1988) supported a wider positive view of integration by those in the front line-mainstream teachers. Heller investigated six primary schools in the Tayside region of Scotland where children with severe learning difficulties were being integrated. The results revealed that these teachers who had direct experience of integration held exceptionally positive attitudes towards it. Similarly, a study by Shimman (1990) which investigated the attitudes of 126 British further education college staff demonstrated that the overwhelming majority of the staff saw the presence of students with learning difficulties in their college as a positive development, both for the students themselves and for the college as a whole.

Another UK study by Clough and Lindsay (1991) investigated the attitudes of teachers towards integration and to different kinds of support. Their research provided some evidence that attitudes had shifted in favour of integrating children with special educational needs over the past ten years or so. This study also revealed that although the respondents appeared more supportive towards integration, they varied in their views regarding the most difficult need to meet. In particular, teachers identified children with learning difficulties and, to a greater extent, children with Emotional and Behavioral Difficulties as the most difficult categories.

Finally, Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996) in their meta-analysis of American attitude studies, which included 28 survey reports conducted from at least 1958 through 1995, reported that two thirds of the teachers surveyed (10, 560 in total) agreed with the general concept of integration. A smaller majority was willing to implement integration practices in their classes, but responses again appeared to vary according to disabling conditions. Moreover, only one third or less of teachers believed they had sufficient time, skills, training and resources necessary for integration.

The above studies indicated that teachers are often not prepared to meet the needs of students with significant disabilities and that the severity of the disabling condition presented to them determines their attitudes towards integration. This is especially insightful in view of the work of Schumm and Vaughn who, in a number of studies, examined how teachers (elementary through high school) plan and make adaptations for students with learning difficulties. The results revealed that teachers were not likely to develop individualized lesson plans (Schumm & Vaughn, 1991, 1992). In particular, teachers at the elementary level were more likely to plan individual assignments, alternative materials, and individualized assessments than were secondary teachers (Schumm & Vaughn, 1991) and collaborated more with special education teachers than did secondary teachers.

### **Problem statement**

This study was concerned with pre-service teachers' attitudes towards inclusion. The underlying assumption here is that professional attitudes may well act to facilitate or constrain the implementation of inclusive education. Most studies in this field have been conducted overseas and they have tended to focus mainly on in-service educators. The international studies reflect dearth of research on how pre-service teachers perceive inclusion (Hover & Yeager: 2001; Van Reusen, Shosho & Bonker: 2000).

Most teacher training programmes especially in South Africa do not prepare pre-service teachers for a teaching and learning environment that is inclusive and the *dearth of provision for SEN in South Africa is reflected in the absence of such modules in the general-teacher-training curriculum* (Choles, 1997). This therefore makes it critical for the need to conduct research in this field. This means that the understanding of the nature of pre-service teacher's attitudes remains a major challenge because of the limited empirical research in this area. On the whole this issue has received little attention in social studies research. Therefore this study is an exploratory study. Further most research has been done at primary school level and this study is going to focus on high school pre-service educator's attitudes.

The research question that the present study attempts to unravel is:

What is the nature of attitudes of pre-service educators towards inclusive education?

*Aims of research*

The present research aimed at achieving the following objective:

- To investigate pre-service educator's attitudes towards inclusion.

*Participants*

The sample of the present study was drawn from the final year students registered for the Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), B.Phys.ed) and B.A (Ed), and were full time students of the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. The participants were mainly English-speaking. The sample comprised of 22 students. The table below illustrates the biographical details of the sample.

*Biographical Details*

Table 1 below shows the biographical details such as gender, age and home language of the preservice

**Table 1****Biographical Details**

<b>Independent Variable</b>	<b>N=22</b>	<b>%=100</b>
<b>GENDER</b>		
Male	7	32
Female	15	68
<b>AGE</b>		
18-24	16	73
25-29	5	23
30-34	1	5
<b>HOME LANGUAGE</b>		
English	17 Whites	77
Isizulu	1	5
Sesotho	2	9
Sesotho Sa Lebowa	2	9

educators who had agreed to participate. The majority of the participants were female and English speaking. Seventy three percent of the sample fell in the 18-24 year age group.

*Research instrument*

Questionnaires developed by Choles (1997) and Gordon (2000) was adapted and used as a measuring instrument to record the responses of the research participants. The adapted questionnaire was assessed by a research psychologist to improve its validity and validity. The questionnaire included two sections. The first section dealt with factors influencing attitudes and were designed to provide background information.

The second section focused on pre-service educator's attitudes towards inclusive education. An adaptation of questionnaires used by Gordons (2000) and Choles (1997) was be made.

*Research procedures for the administration of the research instrument and control of confounding variables.*

A questionnaire was designed to assess the attitudes pre-service teachers towards inclusive education. The Director: Teacher Education at Wits University was approached to inform her of the study to be undertaken. The research participants were asked to make themselves available for the investigation with the researcher on a specific day and time. They were being made aware that the investigation would be confidential and as a result it would not be necessary for them to indicate their names. Their permission was being sought. One of the researchers was the presenter and co-ordinator of the General & Vocational Guidance Methodology Course. The questionnaire probably took between 10-15 minutes to complete

**Results and Discussion***Attitudes towards inclusive education***Table: 2****Attitudes towards inclusive education (N22)**

	Percentage
Positive Attitudes	60%
Negative Attitudes	35%
Undecided	5%

As can be seen from the above table, overall, preservice educators responded positively towards inclusive education with regards to the inclusion of children with special needs. It should be noted that the studies reviewed reveal both negative and positive attitudes towards inclusive education. The present investigation confirms the findings of the studies by Davies and Green, 1999; Gordon, 2000; Dada and Alant, 2002; Van Reusen, Shosho & Barker, 2000; Agran, Snow and Swaner, 1999 which indicated that pre-service educators have a positive attitude towards inclusive education.

On the other hand the studies by Crawford, Almond, Tindal and Hollenbeck, (2002) indicated that the majority of teachers shared apprehensions about the inclusion of learners with special educational needs. The findings of the study conducted by Choles (1997) revealed that the majority of teacher educators sampled were ambivalent towards mainstreaming.

The positive response towards inclusive education should be viewed with excitement as it appears that inclusive education is perceived as a progressive option. This is good for South Africa as it has started to gradually implement the practice of inclusive education. It should be noted that this was a small scale investigation and that its results cannot be generalized to the rest of the preservice educators' population. This result has to some extent given an indication that there seems to be some optimism around the question of inclusive education.

#### *Requirements for competency*

**Table 3 :**  
**Requirements for competency**

	%=100
Need for special skills	72
No need for special skills	28
Undecided	2

Table 3 illustrates a high percentage for the need for special skills. This result confirmed a result from a study conducted by Center and Ward (1987) in which regular educators indicated that their attitudes to inclusive education reflected lack of confidence both in their own instructional skills or management skills on the part of the educator. This result is understandable, teaching an inclusive classroom require special skills. Most educators in South Africa are not trained to teach inclusive classes. This creates a feeling of hopelessness and helplessness and as a result the concept of inclusive education for many educators' is anxiety provoking. In the case of the sampled group inclusive education practices were not covered in their training even though South Africa is in the process of implementing inclusive education.

It should be noted that the *White Paper 6: Special Education: Building an inclusive education and training system* acknowledges the significance of empowering the educators. According to White Paper 6 (2001) educators cannot be expected to facilitate learning in inclusive classrooms if they are not empowered to do so. Continued professional development is envisaged. Tertiary institutions have been challenged to develop programmes for diversity learning and to start introducing programmes in inclusive education. This implies that inclusive education is likely to succeed is educators receive pre-service training in educating children with Special Educational Needs

#### *Requirements for successful inclusion*

**Table 4 :**  
**Requirements for successful inclusion**

	%=100
Need for special resources	72
No need for special resources	28
Undecided	2

Table 4 shows that the vast majority of the participants felt that there is a need for special resources. The literature on educator's attitudes towards inclusive education supports this view (Scruggs and Mastropieri, 1996). In terms of the White Paper 6, inclusive education would only be introduced to schools when human and material resources have been provided. Some primary schools would be converted into full service schools here support services and structures and facilities would be made available. Special schools would be converted into resource schools where severely challenged learners

would be kept and the resource school practitioners would be expected to capacitate those who would be in regular and full-service schools because of the expertise they already have.

*Attitudes towards learners with Special Needs*

**Table 5 :**  
**Attitudes towards learners with Special Needs**

	%=100
Positive	77
Negative	27
Undecided	16

As can be seen from the above table, preservice educators responded more positively towards learners with Special Needs. This result is consistent with the result of the study by Thomas (1985). The implication of this result is that the educators should be prepared to meet the needs of the learners with disabilities. Learners with Special Needs are lovely human beings and respond more appropriately and positively when they are loved and supported and encouraged and challenged.

**Conclusion**

It is clear from the preceding discussion that the sampled participants are generally positive about inclusive education. Pre-service training in inclusive education and continued professional development are of paramount significance if inclusive education is to be successfully implemented. The resourcing of schools is essential if the anxieties around the implementation of inclusive education are to be addressed. The fact that literature seem to reveal both negative and positive attitudes towards inclusive education is indicative of the fact that a lot of work need to be done nationally and internationally. It should be acknowledged that South Africa is one of the leading countries in the world in terms of the implementation of inclusive education. Community mobilisation and advocacy work are extremely needed for the South African population to be able to buy into this new concept of inclusive education. An observation has been made that educators, learners and parents are not fully educated about inclusive education. It seems as if there is an assumption that learners would readily accept inclusion. Such an assumption could be dangerous since some learners might negative attitudes towards inclusive education. A study on learner's attitudes towards inclusive education is envisaged.

*References*

- Agran, M., Snow, K. & Swaner, J. 1999. A Survey of Secondary Level Teachers' Opinions on Community-Based Instruction and Inclusive Education. *Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps*, 24 (1), 58-62
- Avramidis, E. 2001. *Mainstream teacher's attitudes towards the inclusion of children with special educational needs in the ordinary school*. Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Exeter.
- Baker, J. and Gottlieb, J (1980) Attitudes of teachers towards mainstreamed retarded children. *Educating mentally retarded persons in the mainstream*. Baltimore : University Park Press.
- Bothma, M.P. 1998. *The attitudes of primary school teachers towards inclusive education*. Unpublished masters dissertation, Rand Afrikaans University.
- Choles, G.M. 1997. *Attitudes of South African teacher educators in relation to mainstreaming pupils with special educational needs*. Unpublished master's dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand.
- Crawford, L., Almond, P., Tindal, G & Hollenbeck, K. 2002. Teacher perspectives on inclusion of students with disabilities in high school stake assessments. *Special Services in the Schools*. 18 (1-2), 95-118
- Department of National Education. 2001. *White Paper 6: Special Education: Building an inclusive education and training system*. Pretoria. Government Printers.
- Dover, W, E. 2002. Instructional Management of Para-educator's in inclusive classrooms: The perspectives of teachers. *Annual National Conference\_Proceedings of the American Council on Rural Special education*. (22<sup>nd</sup>), Reno, NV, March 7-9, 2002. U.S. South Carolina
- Elloker, S. 1999. *Inclusive education as a strategy to develop effective schools: A case study of a primary school in a socio-economic disadvantaged environment*. Unpublished master's thesis, University of the Western Cape
- Hover, S.D. & Yeager, E.A. 2001. *Secondary history teacher's perceptions of inclusion of students with disabilities: An exploratory study*. University of Virginia & University of Florida.
- Gordon, C. 2002. *Attitudes of teachers with experience in exclusive education towards inclusion*. Unpublished masters research report, University of the Witwatersrand.

- Gudium, D.M. 2002. *A qualitative study of the perceptions of six pre-service teachers: Implementing oral and written retelling strategies in teaching reading to students with learning disabilities*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Eastern Educational Research Association. (Sarasota), FL, 2 February-27 March 2002
- Hyan, M.E. 2001. *The roles of teachers in developing inclusive classrooms*. Unpublished master's dissertation, Rand Afrikaans University.
- Ivey, J.K. & Reincke, K. 2002. Pre-service teacher's attitudes toward inclusion in a non-traditional class. *Electronic Journal of Inclusive Education*. Oklahoma State University
- Kgare, G.D. 2000. *The role of education support services in the implementation of inclusive education*. Unpublished master's dissertation, Rand Afrikaans University.
- Makunga, N. 2002. *Educator's perceptions of inclusive education for the hearing impaired learner*. Submitted to the University of Zululand as a thesis for the degree M.ed in the Department of Educational Psychology and Special Education
- Mcleskey, J. & Waldron, N.L. 2002. Inclusion and school change: Teacher perceptions regarding curriculum and instructional adaptations. *Teacher education and special education*, 25 (1), 41-54
- Mfazwe, L, and Gous, J.1998. *Learners with special educational needs*. Johannesburg: Heinemann
- Mowes, A.D. 2000. *The attitudes of educators in Namibia towards inclusive education*. Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Stellenbosch.
- Mundia, L.J.S. 2001. *School teacher attitudes to inclusive education in Swaziland*. Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of South Africa.
- Naicker, S.M. 2002. *Transforming education in South Africa: From Apartheid to inclusive education*. Paper presented at Wayne State University
- Papalia, D.E. and Olds, S.W. 1988. *Psychology*. New York : McGraw-Hill
- Sibaya, P.T. 1999. Types of studies in education and appropriate research methods. *Paidonomi*. 17 (1), May 1991
- Sibaya, P.T. 2003. *A guide to success for masters and doctoral students*. University of Zululand. Kwazulu-Natal
- Siebalak, S. 2002. *Educator's perceptions of inclusive education*. Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Zululand.
- Van Staden, V.J. 2001. *Teacher's responses to the challenges of inclusive education*. Unpublished masters thesis, Rand Afrikaans.
- Van Reusen, A.K., Shosho, A.R. & Bonker, K.S. 2000. *High school teacher's attitudes toward inclusion*. *High School Journal* 84 (2) 7-20
- Vithal, R & Jansen, J. 1997. *Designing your research proposal: A manual for researchers in education and social sciences*. Juta & Co Ltd. Cape Town
- UNESCO. 1994. *Salamanca statement*. Paris: UNESCO