

# An Assessment of the Theory and Practice of Inclusive Education, with Special Reference to Secondary Teacher Education in Zimbabwe

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**Abstract:** *The purpose of this study was to examine the relevance and effectiveness of the inclusive education programme run by secondary teachers' colleges in their preparation of student teachers for the challenges of teaching students with diverse learning needs as found in regular secondary schools. An intensive research approach which applied qualitative techniques of data generation was used. The study utilised information from multiple sources such as participants from a purposively selected secondary teacher education institution, key informants from the area of education, and documents from the department that taught inclusive education at the selected college. Data on barriers to learning and achievement of students in secondary schools were generated from what were judged to be information-rich sources, using focus group discussions, and semi-structured interviews. The model used for assessing the inclusive education programme was designed for that purpose, through a combination of two theories: Program Evaluation Theory by Rossi, Lipsey, and Freeman (2004) and Discrepancy Evaluation Model by Provus (1969). The findings of the study revealed that the inclusive education programme run by teachers' colleges did not take into consideration what was viewed by participants and key informants as barriers to students' learning and achievement in schools. Based on the findings, the study made a number of recommendations on what strategies could be used by teacher education to develop student teachers for inclusive teaching. The recommendations included the following: that Zimbabwe should reach a point of consensus on the meaning of inclusive education; that barriers to learning experienced by students in the schools should be used to inform inclusive education programmes for teachers' colleges; and that the teaching of reading should be deliberately factored into all the subject majors in teacher education.*

**Keywords:** diversity, teacher education, teacher quality, inclusive teaching, social inclusion versus inclusive education

## 1. Introduction

Inclusive education in teacher education is meant to equip student teachers with skills to identify and address barriers to learning that students in the schools might experience in learning (Ainscow, 1999). Globally, teacher education is recognised as vital for preparing such teachers who can effectively teach classes made up of students with diverse learning needs (UNESCO, 2009), in other words - inclusive classes. Because of the diversity that exists among learners, inclusive pedagogy is no longer an option but a necessity in the teacher preparation programme. Since every student is unique and unrepeatably, it is important that teachers learn the art of embracing that diversity by making positive use of it in their effort to effectively reach all their students in meaningful ways. This study was motivated by the fact that

although inclusive education is taught as a compulsory course in teacher education in Zimbabwe, there is consistent evidence that a vast majority of students taught by graduates of teachers' colleges experience exclusion from meaningful learning even as they sit in the classes with the rest of their classmates. If the Ordinary Level (O-Level) examination results are anything to go by, then they serve as evidence that the majority of secondary school students are not accessing the curriculum, in spite of accessing schools. According to UNESCO (2005), teachers with adequate preparation for inclusive classes would ensure not only attendance of students in school, but their full participation and achievement as well. Following is a summary of the country's O-Level pass-rates over ten successive years:

**Table 1:** Zimbabwe Ordinary Level Pass-rates for the years 2003-2012

2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
13%	10.2%	12.2%	14.2%	9.85%	14.44%	19.33%	16.5%	19.5%	18.4%

[Published by Zimbabwe Schools Examinations Council (ZIMSEC), in Zimbabwean newspapers: the Financial Gazette of 20 February, 2013, and the Herald of 5, 6, and 13 February, 2013].

Statistics accessed from ZIMSEC further reveal that the majority of the failing candidates actually failed all the five or more O-Level subjects they were examined in. The desire of this research was to conduct an assessment of the theory and practice of inclusive education in secondary teacher

education, so as to find out how it went about equipping student teachers for the demands of inclusive classes found in the schools. The assessment would also check how much the current inclusive education programme in teacher education addressed what was regarded by relevant informants as barriers to learning and achievement experienced by students in secondary schools. The application of Provus's (1969) Discrepancy Evaluation Model in the assessment involved finding out what exactly was happening in the area of inclusive education at a

selected secondary teachers' college, against what ought to have been happening in the preparation of teachers for inclusive pedagogy.

## 2. Review of Related Literature

### 2.1 Conceptualisation of Inclusive Education

#### 2.1.1 Lack of Consensus in Definitions of Inclusive Education

Generally, there seems to be lack of consensus on the interpretation of the concept of inclusive education (Clough and Corbett, 2000; Norwich, 2001; Hick, Kershner, and Farrell, 2009), leading to confusions on the direction to take concerning its practical application (Haug, 2010). There are those who define inclusive education as an approach to serve children with disabilities and special educational needs within mainstream schools with their non-disabled peers (Porter, 2008; Blecker and Boakes, 2010; Chireshe, 2013), yet there are others who see the role of inclusive education as that of addressing obstacles that all learners may encounter in pursuing education (Lipsky and Gartner, 1999; Mitchell, 2005; Cigman, 2007; Armstrong, Armstrong, and Spanagou, 2010). A possible risk where there is lack of consensus on meaning is that professionals might not be referring to the same thing when they talk about inclusive education, or that they might actually be chasing conflicting goals, all in the name of inclusive education. Operti, Brady, and Duncombe (2008), in Acedo, Amadio, and Operti (2008:121), point out how definitions of inclusive education started off narrow, and then progressively broadened:

Essentially, the concept of inclusive education has evolved from a narrow perception, based on special education or mainstreaming of children with special educational needs towards a broader understanding of an education system that addresses the needs of all learners.

#### 2.1.2 Social and Educational Inclusion

Scholars such as Florian (2008) and Hornby (2012) point out that there is social and educational inclusion, and that the two are not one and the same thing, hence they should not be conflated as if they were synonymous. They see social inclusion as the bringing together of children with a wide diversity of differences into mainstream schools in the neighbourhood, the goal being that of bringing about an inclusive society, a society where all individuals are valued and have roles to play. They see educational inclusion as focusing on finding ways of effectively teaching all the students in a class, that is, identifying and eliminating barriers to students' learning and achievement, and meeting their diverse learning needs and styles of learning. According to Enabling Education Network (EENET) (n.d.), inclusive education or educational inclusion is about educators continuously searching for better and more effective ways of teaching inclusively; it is a constantly evolving process of change and improvement within schools and the wider education system to make education more welcoming, learner-friendly, and beneficial for a wide range of people. This study is interested in educational rather than social inclusion.

#### 2.1.3 Inclusive Education - The Educational Reform Perspective

It would seem that internationally, inclusive education is increasingly being seen as a reform that supports and welcomes diversity amongst all students (UNESCO, 2001). UNESCO (2005:13) defines inclusive education as: "A process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, ... reducing exclusion within and from education". In other words, inclusion fights against exclusion in education. Inclusive education promotes a flexible curricular arrangement, where every learner's needs are accommodated. According to Ainscow, Dyson, and Weiner (2013:6): "Inclusion is concerned with all children and young people in schools; it is focused on presence, participation and achievement; ... inclusion involves the active combating of exclusion; and inclusion is seen as a never-ending process". It (inclusive education) is an educational reform, a paradigm shift in educational practice (Ainscow, 2005), a move towards the development of schools that can effectively serve diverse groups of students in inclusive classes. UNESCO (2005:29) explains that: "Inclusion properly understood is precisely about reforming schools and ensuring that every child receives quality and appropriate education within these schools".

Farrell and Ainscow (2002), argue that, according to the Salamanca Statement, inclusion is about mainstream or general education schools developing practices and structures that facilitate an effective response to the diverse needs of all the students in an inclusive setting. In other words, inclusive education concerns itself with Education for All. The Director of UNESCO Bangkok, in Kaplan and Lewis (2013:iii), makes the following observation:

Working towards inclusive education calls for significant changes and modifications in teaching and learning content, approaches, processes, structures and strategies, with a common vision of Education for All (EFA). Teachers have an indispensable role to play.

Odom, Wolery, Lieber, and Horn (2002) point out that beliefs about inclusion influence its implementation, and that programmes, not children, have to be ready for inclusion. "Inclusion is not about placing children in mainstream schools. It is about changing schools to make them more responsive to the needs of all children" (Mittler, 2000:vii). According to the educational reform perspective, inclusion is concerned with transforming the education system and schools for all the students, ensuring that their diverse learning needs are catered for, and that they access high quality education (UNESCO, 2004). Therefore, the educational reform perspective of inclusive education recognises that each student comes to the learning arena with his or her own unique needs and abilities, and that education is supposed to respond effectively to the diversity of *all* the students.

It is of utmost importance that teacher education, through inclusive education, equips student teachers with skills to manage diversity. Inclusive education is "... an approach that looks into how to transform education systems and other learning environments in order to respond to the diversity of

learners” (UNESCO, 2005:15). It is clear that within the educational reform perspective, inclusive education is not a disability movement whose main focus is to fight for the rights of disabled people, but a concern about all the learners (this includes learners with disabilities) being assisted to achieve their fullest potential. According to the educational reform perspective of inclusive education, curricula are the ones that should adapt to the students’ learning styles and needs, not the other way round.

Inclusion within the educational reform perspective is concerned with the presence, participation and achievement of all the students, and is an essential part of the ‘Education for All’ (EFA) movement (UNESCO, 2005). Kaplan and Lewis (2013) observe that such inclusion is about developing teachers’ capacities to reduce exclusion from and within education. According to Ainscow (1999:15) and UNESCO (2005:15), there are four key elements that support inclusive practice. These are: that (a) inclusion is a process; (b) inclusion is concerned with the identification and removal of barriers to learning and achievement; (c) inclusion is about the presence, participation, and achievement of all students; and, (d) inclusion involves a particular emphasis on those groups of learners who may be at risk of marginalization, exclusion, or underachievement. Following is a brief discussion of these four points:

(a) As a process, inclusion implies the following: that it is a never-ending search to find better ways of responding to diversity (Ainscow, 1999:15); that it is ongoing, like a journey, rather than a destination or a state; that it is about the development of “. . . learning to learn skills, not just subject knowledge” amongst students (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2010:8); and that it respects diversity and the different needs, abilities, characteristics, learning expectations of all the students, and eliminates all forms of discrimination (Acedo, Amadio, and Operti, 2008). The diversity of students’ learning needs, backgrounds, characteristics, abilities, and learning styles make it necessary for educators to treat each case as it comes. UNESCO (2004:7) observes that, “. . . there are no set paths or ready-made ‘quick fix’ solutions to follow”, which makes inclusion a never-ending search for better and more effective ways of responding to diversity.

(b) Concern with the identification and removal of barriers to learning and achievement would necessitate the gathering of evidence from a variety of relevant sources, on what is seen as barriers to learning and achievement of students in the schools. According to Ainscow (1999:15), this step would involve collecting, collating, and evaluating information from a wide variety of sources in order to plan for improvements and problem-solving. A barrier analysis approach to inclusive teaching and learning would enable educators to identify barriers that are based within the child, and those that are based outside the child (Harris, Miske, and Attig, 2004). Experience has proved that where educators fail to identify barriers to learning, some barriers go unnoticed, and so inhibit the students from reaching their potential in education.

(c) Presence, participation, and achievement of all students would involve, among other things, their attendance in

school, quality of their experiences in the process of learning, and outcomes of learning across the curriculum, not only test and examination results (Ainscow, 1999:15). Harris et al. (2004) give examples of programmes that show great concern for the presence, participation and achievement of all the students in the learning arena. They propose strategies such as sensory learning, multiple intelligences approach, knowledge about barriers to learning and raising of self-esteem for both teachers and students. Gardner (1999), in his theory of multiple intelligences, also makes an observation that many students experience learning problems not because they do not want to learn or lack effort, but because they cannot learn the way the teacher wants them to learn.

Access to schools is not enough if the quality of learning is not attended to. UNESCO (2005:10) explains that Education for All (EFA) means, “. . . ensuring that all children have access to basic education of good quality. This implies creating an environment in schools and in basic education programmes in which children are both able and enabled to learn”. Harris et al. (2004) observe that schools should be learning-friendly, in addition to being inclusive.

(d) Emphasis on those groups of learners who may be at risk of marginalization, exclusion, or underachievement would involve taking steps to ensure that those groups that are statistically most ‘at risk’ are carefully monitored to ensure their presence, participation and achievement in the education system (Ainscow, 1999:15). It would seem that inclusive education is incomplete without the identification and minimization of barriers to learning experienced by students.

#### **2.1.4 Conceptualisation of Inclusive Education in Zimbabwe**

In the various publications on inclusive education in Zimbabwe that were reviewed, there was generally acknowledgement of the existence of a broader definition of inclusive education, although the focus of the studies tended to be on the diversity of disability such as visual or hearing impairment when it came to the actual studies conducted (Nyoni, Marashe, and Nyoni, 2011; Mafa, 2012; Mandina, 2012; Chireshe, 2013; Samkange, 2013). However, in the National Report on the status of education in Zimbabwe, a broader view of inclusive education is presented (UNESCO, 2008). According to that report (UNESCO, 2008:17), the system whereby “. . . disabled children joined the mainstream classes or ‘normal’ children . . . is therefore a narrow concept which is incorporated in inclusive education”. The report reveals various ways in which Zimbabwe is responding to the call for inclusive education, and following are some of those ways: Expanding and diversifying the curriculum so that different students’ interests and aptitudes are catered for; Channeling students into either academic or technical education after nine years of school; Reviewing conditions of service for teachers in order to motivate them; Ensuring that all learners are exposed to Information Communication Technology and HIV and AIDS education by making these disciplines policy issues; Increasing the number of institutions offering basic, secondary and tertiary education; Putting more emphasis on:

. . . early identification of learners with disabilities so that they attend school at the appropriate age like their non-disabled counterparts. . . In addition the Ministry established a whole Division for School Psychological Services and Special Needs Education to cater for the provision of quality education to children with disabilities (UNESCO, 2008:7);

Decentralising education systems to parent communities, thus giving ownership of schools to parents in order for parent bodies to identify excluded children in their locality, and to raise funds for the development of their schools; Modifying subject content to make it inclusive; Transforming the education system in order for it to respond to the diversity of learners; and, Teaching pre-service and in-service teachers how to handle students from varied backgrounds, including integrated students with disabilities (UNESCO, 2008).

In order for Zimbabwe to move the concept of inclusive education forward to agreed levels, it is important that the country first reaches a point of consensus on the meaning of the concept of inclusive education. The fact that every teachers' college in the country is required to teach inclusive education makes it even more urgent that a consensus on the meaning of that concept be reached.

## **2.2 Teaching Competences Needed for Inclusive Classes**

According to Mafa and Chaminuka (2012), as well as Mafa and Makuba (2013), teaching competences needed for inclusive classes include the following: Understanding students, which is a paradigm shift from focusing on subject content, to understanding students' capabilities to master concepts at varying levels of development, and their levels of interest; Mentoring ability, that is, assisting students to expand their understanding as they take responsibility for their own learning; Flexibility, that is, being open to new ways of teaching and avoiding rigidity; Developing skills that are beyond subject area content, for example, developing individualised instructional materials to suit students' learning needs; Ability to select appropriate teaching strategies, that is, avoiding the 'one-size-fits-all' approach to pedagogy; and, Ability to differentiate content, thereby providing students with a variety of ways of approaching content, and accommodating different styles of learning.

The following teaching competences are some of those highlighted by Kimani, Kara, and Njagi (2013) as necessary for inclusive teaching: Ability to handle large class sizes with high teacher-pupil ratios, by applying a wide range of teaching strategies that have been seen to work; Cooperative group teaching, which can be likened to the creation of small classes with many teachers, with group members assisting each other to contribute something to achieve a group goal; Memory training; Phonetic awareness and practice; Formative assessment and feedback, where teachers regularly probe for knowledge within and at the end of lessons to see if students understood, before giving them clear feedback on how they could improve; and, Ability to effectively teach students who are functioning at different levels, designing activities for them that are appropriate for their age and level of development.

Jha (2002) highlights the following points concerning inclusive pedagogy: That inclusive education recognizes that students learn in different ways, and accepts diversity as a strength rather than a problem; That inclusive teachers apply the concept of multiple intelligences in their teaching as they follow flexible curricula that respond to the diverse needs of students. Jha (2002:140) also suggests a number of inclusive strategies which show what teaching competences are required for effective inclusive teaching. These include the following: Whole class inclusive teaching; Group/cooperative/ collaborative learning; Peer tutoring/ child-to-child learning; Activity based learning; Team approach/ problem solving; and, Equity in assessment/ examination. Jha's suggestions coincide with the definition of inclusive teaching given by the University of Sidney (2006). The University of Sidney views inclusive teaching as helping students to learn how to learn, how to take responsibility for their own learning and that of others.

European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (2013) presents a profile of inclusive teachers, which proposes areas of competence for teachers working in inclusive settings. The proposed competences are said to be linked to the following four core values: Valuing learner diversity, where students' differences are considered as resources and assets to education; Supporting all learners, where teachers have high expectations for all students' achievements; Working with others, where collaboration and teamwork are considered as essential approaches for all teachers; and, Continuing personal professional development, where teaching is seen as a learning activity and teachers accept responsibility for their own lifelong learning. Around each of these values are crucial skills and abilities to be developed that can go a long way in informing efforts to create a whole new syllabus of inclusive education for teacher education.

Hopkins (2009) suggests what he refers to as 'practical ways' in which educators can make their classrooms more inclusive. Among his suggestions are the following: LESS whole-class, teacher-directed instruction; LESS classroom time devoted to fill-in-the-blanks worksheets; MORE active learning in the classroom; MORE emphasis on higher-order thinking and learning of key concepts and principles; MORE attention to affective needs and the varying cognitive styles of individual students; and, MORE delivery of special help to students in general education classrooms.

Concerning the development of teaching competences for inclusive classes, Pantic and Florian (2015) express a concern that although there is a lot of talk about teachers being given skills to be effective in their teaching of diverse groups, not much is being said about how those skills can be developed, enacted, or evidenced. In an earlier article, Florian and Linklater (2010) had pointed out that it was important for teachers to know how to make best use of what they already knew when students experienced difficulties in their learning. In other words, when students encounter barriers in their learning, those should be problems for the teacher to solve, not problems within the students.

### 3. Research Method and Design

The study adopted an intensive rather than an extensive research approach, and utilised qualitative methods of data generation in a case study research design. According to Sayer (2000), an intensive approach is for depth in a study, whereas an extensive approach is for breadth. Jeppesen (2005:5) explains that the intensive research approach “. . . is used in research where we want to obtain in-depth knowledge of specific phenomena”, and that it mainly applies qualitative methods and analysis. In the case of this study, structured measurement scales such as those used in quantitative research would have been irrelevant, since the object of the study was to assess a situation as it was, not to manipulate it, and because there was reliance on the meanings that people attached to their experiences. Therefore, the qualitative approach was seen as the most suitable. The study sample consisted of 15 teacher educators from one purposively selected secondary teachers’ college and 6 final year student teachers from the same college, 15 secondary school teachers from two secondary schools, 3 provincial education officers, and 3 Heads of secondary schools from three different provinces. Data were generated through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis of departmental records. Data sources and data generation techniques were triangulated in order to enhance validity and reliability of the findings. The study attempted to find out how teacher educators and graduates of teachers’ colleges understood the concept of inclusive education; what challenges teacher educators were experiencing in trying to teach inclusive education; and how much of what was perceived as barriers to learning at secondary school level was infused into the inclusive education curricula in teacher education. The following five research questions gave direction to the study:

- 1) How is inclusive education defined by teacher educators and student teachers?
- 2) How is inclusive education operationalised in secondary teacher education in Zimbabwe?
- 3) To what extent are barriers to learning evident in secondary schools infused into the inclusive education programme at teachers’ colleges?
- 4) What challenges are the colleges facing in trying to teach inclusive education?
- 5) What strategies can be employed to ensure that teacher education programmes effectively develop teachers for inclusive teaching?

Data generated through some of these research questions were further treated through Malcolm Provus’s Discrepancy Evaluation Model (DEM) (Ahmad, 1998), a model which proposes a comparison of programme performance with standards in order to determine if the programme being implemented is consistent with the programme design standards. According to McKenna (1981), discrepancies are differences that exist between what is actually happening in the programme and what is supposed to be happening according to the desired standards. Provus’s DEM was seen as the most suitable approach since the assumption of the study was that syllabi for and practice of inclusive education in Zimbabwe’s secondary teacher education did not adequately prepare student teachers for inclusive settings found in Zimbabwe’s secondary schools. To explore this

assumption, DEM compared what was happening in the inclusive education programme in teacher education with what was expected to be happening according to desired standards from literature. A conceptual framework for this study was formed through a combination of Provus’s DEM and Program Evaluation Theory by Rossi, Lipsey, and Freeman (2004) (dubbed RLF in reference to the authors’ names). RLF served to point out not only where in the curricular programme to conduct the assessment, but also which types of assessment could be used to access specific types of required information.

### 4. Results and Discussion

This section presents and discusses responses to the five research questions above.

#### 4.1 QUESTION 1:

#### How is inclusive education defined by teacher educators and student teachers?

##### 4.1.1 Results

Definitions of inclusive education were generated from the participants through interviews. Their responses were compared with the standards extracted from literature where inclusive education was viewed as an educational reform. The purpose of the comparison was to determine if there were discrepancies or not between the ideal and the actual – the ideal being the educational reform perspective of inclusive education as found in literature, and the actual being data generated from participants. The findings can be summarised in tabular form as follows:

**Table 2:** Participants’ conceptualisation of inclusive education (IE)

Description	Total no. of Participants	IE is - Effective teaching of diverse learners	IE is - Geographical relocation from special schools to general education schools	The meaning of inclusive education is not known
Teacher educators	15	1	13	1
Student teachers	6	0	6	0

##### 4.1.2 Discussion

All the participants shown in Table 2 were asked what they understood to be the meaning of inclusive education. Out of the fifteen teacher educators, two differed from the rest: Lecturer 5 stated that: ‘*Inclusive education is about finding ways of teaching every child, both disabled and non-disabled together, so that they all learn effectively*’. Lecturer 8, on the other hand, confessed that she did not know what ‘inclusive education’ meant: ‘*Honestly I don’t want to lie. I’ve heard that term a lot, but I have never taken time to find out what it means*’. The rest of the teacher educators in the sample viewed inclusive education as the geographical relocation of children with disabilities from special schools to general education schools to learn with the non-disabled. The six student teachers also understood inclusive education as the bringing together of students with disabilities and

those without disabilities, to attend school together. It was clear that the students were repeating a definition they had been taught.

None of the participants said anything about how the diverse learners were to be taught. This confirms the observations made by Ainscow (2004), and Ainscow and Miles (2009), that although internationally, inclusive education was increasingly being seen more broadly as “. . . a reform that supports and welcomes diversity amongst all learners” (Ainscow, 2004:2), there were some countries which still saw inclusive education as, “. . . an approach to serving children with disabilities within general education settings” (Ainscow and Miles, 2009:1). In a way, focus on the relocation of students from special schools to regular schools takes away from teachers’ colleges the responsibility of finding ways of effectively teaching all the students and ensuring that educational practices move forward the Education for All agenda, as long as the goal of relocating learners with disabilities to general education schools has been achieved. UNESCO (2008:103) points out that: “. . . if no proper attention is paid to what happens in the classroom, inclusive education remains rhetoric, rather than reality”.

#### 4.1.3 Analysis using Provus’s DEM

According to the responses to the first question, the majority of practitioners related inclusive education to the geographical movement of students with disabilities from special schools to regular schools. In order to find out whether discrepancies exist between this definition and the standard, DEM requires that the first step should be the establishment of standards. In this study, the definition of inclusive education by UNESCO (2005) was used as a standard. UNESCO (2005:13) defines inclusion thus:

Inclusion is a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all 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 (UNESCO, 2005:13).

**Table 3: DEM Standards versus the Actual Conceptualisation of Inclusive Education**

Standards	Actual
Inclusive education is concerned with all learners	It is concerned with the geographical relocation of some students from special schools to regular, neighbourhood schools.
It reduces exclusion from education	Concern is not with educational inclusion but with social inclusion.
It changes and modifies curricular content and teaching strategies	It is silent on what happens in the classroom during learning.

According to the comparison made in Table 3, there is evidence of huge discrepancies between the actual and the standard in the conceptualisation of inclusive education. According to There seems to be evidence of Theory Failure (Rossi, Lipsey, and Freeman, 2004) in the understanding of

the concept of inclusive education in teacher education in Zimbabwe.

#### 4.2 QUESTION 2

##### How is inclusive education operationalised in secondary teacher education in Zimbabwe?

##### 4.2.1 Results

Data on the operationalisation of inclusive education was generated mainly from departmental documents such as syllabi, past examination question papers, external examiners’ reports, time-tables, course outlines and lecture notes. Focus was on the operation of inclusive education during the period 2010-2013 at the selected College. Following is a comparison of the actual operations of inclusive education at the selected college and the standards extracted from a UNESCO publication authored by Kaplan and Lewis (2013).

**Table 4: A Comparison of the Actual Operations of Inclusive Education in Teacher Education in Zimbabwe, and the Ideal**

The Standard	The Actual
Student teachers are to practice inclusive teaching approaches during their teaching practice;	Student teachers do inclusive education after teaching practice;
All courses in all departments in teacher education are to use inclusive approaches – flexible & responsive to learners’ needs and experiences; curriculum related challenges are to be addressed through inclusive education;	Inclusive education is housed and confined to TOE, only slightly touching the area of psychology, also in TOE;
In teacher education, inclusive education is to be taught & practiced “from day one – and throughout – their professional development” (Kaplan and Lewis, 2013:2)	Inclusive education is taught for one term to student teachers in their final year;
Inclusive education is not to be treated as a separate component or a stand-alone course, but is to be integrated throughout core teacher education curricula;	The position of the University, expressed through their 2011 External Examiners’ report to TOE, is that inclusive education should be taught as a standalone course; The timetable at the College has a fixed period for inclusive education;
Inclusive education is not to focus narrowly on disability;	Inclusive education in the recommended handbook has its main focus on disability;
Inclusive education should not be delivered via theory-dominated curricula, but on effective practice-based curricula;	Inclusive education is taught as a theoretical subject, just like the rest of the subjects in the TOE department;
Inclusive education should not be regarded as an issue of ‘special needs education’ or education for children with disabilities;	Inclusive education in the recommended handbook focuses mainly on disability, not much on barriers to learning experienced by all the students;

##### 4.2.2 Discussion

According to information in Table 4, every single standard raised in the way inclusive education should operate in teacher education institutions is not met by the College in

the study. Therefore, there is evidence of Implementation Failure (Rossi, Lipsey, and Freeman, 2004) in the way inclusive education is being run at the selected College.

#### 4.3 QUESTION 3

**To what extent are barriers to learning evident in secondary schools infused into the inclusive education programme at teachers' colleges?**

##### 4.3.1 Results and Discussion

Information generated in this section addresses two areas: firstly, what is seen by participants and key informants as barriers to learning and achievement of students in secondary schools; and secondly, whether the identified barriers are addressed in the inclusive education programme at the selected College or not. Therefore, the presentation of data in this section is divided into two parts: Part 1 and Part 2.

##### Part 1: Barriers

A large number of barriers to learning and achievement were highlighted by the practitioners, and from those barriers, a selection was made of those that were seen as falling within the skills that teacher education could equip student teachers for.

(a) *Illiteracy*: The problem of students' failure to read was brought up by all the interviewees and the focus groups. It was clear that they considered this as a major barrier to learning and achievement at secondary school level. This observation is consistent with findings recorded in literature. For example, an article by Hoagies' Gifted Education Page (1996-2016:n.pa) states that: "No other skill taught in school and learned by school children is more important than reading. It is the gateway to all other knowledge"; Lyon (2001:n.pa) points out that: "Poor readers lag far behind in vocabulary development and in the acquisition of strategies for understanding what they read, and they frequently avoid reading and other assignments that require reading". Following are a few of the comments from participants and key informants concerning the problem of students' failure to read: *'Illiteracy is the number one cause of student failure . . .'* (Head 2); *'Non-readers actually fail before they even get to the class; it could be an issue of low self-esteem'* (Teacher 7); *'With non-readers, even if you explain things to them in a language they understand, and you make sure that they have really understood, come a day or two later, they will have forgotten'* (Teacher 2). It would seem, therefore, that non-readers experience a host of other related problems such as forgetting very easily and low self-esteem.

(b) *Automatic Promotion*: Automatic promotion was presented as a significant causal factor of illiteracy, as the following observations show: *'Automatic promotion is a cruel practice for the students, their parents, and the teachers. It is responsible for illiteracy that is abound in the schools, and illiteracy negatively affects all the other learning. In fact, failure to read is the mother of all the learning problems'* (Lecturer 6); Lecturer 1 pointed out that with automatic promotion there was total disregard for students' performance: *'There are four power points at every school – the subject teacher, the HOD, the Deputy*

*Head, and the Head – who sign every student's report card and see how each student is performing, but do nothing about it'. 'Automatic promotion must go; it is not helping the children; it must just go'* (Head 1). *'Automatic promotion actually works against inclusive education in that where inclusive education recognises student diversity in the classroom, automatic promotion disregards it by assuming that everyone is ready for the next level, all at the same time'* (Lecturer 4).

On automatic promotion, David (2008) argues that it would be more beneficial to try to understand why a student was failing, and to work out strategies of assisting such a student to catch up, than to engage in debates over whether automatic promotion or grade retention was better. Mainardes (n.d.:14) advises that where automatic or social promotion is in use, teachers should, ". . . use more modern pedagogy, continuous assessment, strategies of special assistance to slow learners, and an environment of learning materials".

(c) *No training for remediation*: Education Officer 1 pointed out that what compounded the problem of students' poor performance in their learning and achievement was: *' . . . the fact that teachers' colleges did not seem to be equipping their graduates with skills to do remediation'*. It was further pointed out by Education Officer 2 that as subject specialists, student teachers put more importance in content coverage than on remediation, and that generally, secondary school teachers were quite good at diagnosing learning problems, but not at generating solutions or remediation for the identified problems. *'The problem is that they (secondary school teachers) see themselves as subject specialists, and so they concentrate on content coverage of their subjects more than on addressing students' learning difficulties'* (Education Officer 2).

Selvarajan and Vasanthagumar (2012), in their study, found that remedial teaching was effective in raising the understanding and performance of more than 93 percent of the learners who were in their study. Therefore, if teachers lack remediation skills, it might mean that students who struggle with their academic tasks will continue to lag behind.

(d) *Poor teaching methods*: Coupled with lack of training for remediation is the issue of poor teaching methods. On poor teaching methods, a few of the sentiments raised by some of the educators in the study were as follows: *'The lessons these secondary teachers prepare lack detail, depth, and diversity. Their lessons do not cater for the students' diverse learning needs'* (Education Officer 1). *'Feedback tends to come rather late. The teachers delay with the children's exercise books'* (Education Officer 3). *'Secondary schools are not addressing the issue of non-readers. Simply pointing out that the problem exists, does not automatically translate into a solution for the problem'* (Education Officer 2). Lecturer 6 blamed the system of getting students used to having things translated into their vernaculars during learning, yet the examinations are not translated: *'Teachers are encouraged to address students in a language they understand, but the exams are not translated into that*

language. Therefore, the students are not familiar with the language of the curriculum' (Lecturer 6).

Poor teaching methods speak of poor teacher quality. Although the teacher factor may not be the only deciding factor in the performance of the students, the importance of teacher quality cannot be denied. According to findings from numerous studies carried out internationally, there is clear evidence of correlation between student achievement and the quality of teaching and the teacher's knowledge of the subject (Rice, 2003; Policy Studies Associates, 2005; RAND Education, 2012).

(e) *Overcrowded classrooms*: The issue of massive classes was raised by lecturers, teachers, and student teachers, and some of their arguments are as follows: 'With big classes, it is not possible to assist the struggling students individually within the class period without compromising the learning of the rest of the class' (Teacher 5). 'With large classes, teachers either give less tests and exercises because of the large quantities of marking involved, or they give written work that is way below standard to ensure faster marking' (Teacher 3).

Such sentiments coincide with findings by researchers such as Carbone and Greenberg (1998:314), who found that with large classes, teachers could only assign ". . . superficial writing assignments" and had inadequate interaction and discussion time in the lessons; Rhalmi (2013), who found that teachers with large classes found it difficult to get satisfactory knowledge of their students' learning needs; and an observation in a module by UZ (1995:52), that: "From general observation, Zimbabwe teachers generally cannot cope with effectively implementing curriculum especially with the abnormally huge class sizes caused by the implementation of Universal Primary Education". Writing about differentiated teaching methods and classroom management, VVOB-Zimbabwe (n.d.) also confirmed that in Zimbabwe, large class sizes of sixty or more students were a common feature. For such classes, VVOB-Zimbabwe proposed differentiated teaching methods that would respond to different learning styles and multiple intelligences of students.

(f) *Unqualified and underqualified teachers*: The participants were totally opposed to the idea of engaging unqualified teachers. Following are some of the observations raised: 'For untrained teachers, temporary teaching is usually a stop-gap measure while they are looking for something better' (Education Officer 1). Lecturer 7 made a passionate observation that if teaching is to be reinstated to its former professional level, the sector had to desist from employing unqualified persons. 'Just like there are no temporary nurses or temporary doctors, the education sector should avoid at all costs, having temporary teachers. That is one of the ways teaching can be reinstated to a professional level, not this semi-profession that it has become' (Lecturer 7).

It would seem that underqualified teachers, or those graduates of teachers' colleges that teach subjects they did not specialize in, are also a common feature in Zimbabwe's secondary schools. Lecturer 8 reported of cases where some underqualified or 'out-of-field' graduates were heads of

departments in subjects they had not majored in. The implication of such arrangements is that quality inclusive teaching might be compromised since such teachers might skip topics they consider difficult. This fact was confirmed by Lecturer 5 who observed: 'Amongst this group, one finds some teachers skipping some vital topics because they consider them to be difficult; or delivering lessons poorly; or giving wrong explanations'.

This is consistent with findings by Omosewo (2009), who found that some science teachers were not teaching certain components of the Physics syllabus because of lack of adequate training in the subject. Paton (2014) issued a warning against the hiring of unqualified teachers, pointing out that such a practice undermined the teaching profession, and left the door open to poor quality teaching.

(g) *Poor internet and Library resources*: The importance of the library and internet to student learning was brought up in one of the focus group discussions. The sentiments of the group are captured in the comment made by Teacher 2, that: 'Internet access for pupils . . . is normally limited and thus their research is negatively affected. Unfortunately, the library also has very few relevant books'.

According to Sahin, Balta, and Ercan (2010), the internet contains vast quantities of varied and valuable information that can enhance students' learning. There are also studies that link school libraries with student achievement. For example, Lonsdale (2003), cites various studies that show that the school library plays a significant role in developing skills in students, such as communication, numeracy, study, independent learning, and problem-solving.

## **Part 2: Extent to which the identified barriers to learning are infused in the inclusive education programme**

Findings in this section came from checking how much of the barriers to learning and achievement generated from educators were addressed in the teacher education curriculum for inclusive education. The results showed that all the seven barriers raised were not included in the inclusive education curriculum for teacher education.

### **4.4 QUESTION 4**

#### **What challenges are the colleges facing in trying to teach inclusive education?**

Data presented in this section were generated from three teacher educators who taught inclusive education at the College in the study. Following is a list of challenges they said they faced in trying to teach inclusive education at the College.

##### **4.4.1 Results**

- a) The content of the recommended inclusive education handbook was not different from Special Education which the colleges had been teaching all along;
- b) Lack of understanding of the concept of, and justification for inclusion by practitioners: Lack of involvement of programme implementers during the planning stage of the programme was highlighted as a possible causal

factor towards lecturers' lack of understanding of the concept of inclusive education.

- c) Absence of an agreed definition of the concept of inclusive education; Lack of staff development of lecturers to give them a knowledge base for teaching inclusive education;
- d) The College lacked specialised skills to teach students with disabilities; the library lacked braille books; there were neither braille equipment nor skills training; there was no disability resource centre, and no ramps for wheelchairs on some of the buildings such as some hostels and the dining hall.
- e) The impersonality of mass lectures which are the main mode of lesson delivery in the TOE department, and the pressure to complete the syllabus work against inclusive education.
- f) Wrong timing of the inclusive education programme which is introduced to the student teachers after their teaching practice; Understaffing in the TOE department which was said to compromise the quality of marking, and to delay feedback on assignments as the few lecturers battle to complete the large numbers of scripts each of them have to mark;
- g) Lack of inclusive methods of teaching and coping with diversity; Problems with rigid curricula and same testing methods for every student;
- h) 'Inclusivising' every course in TOE, that is, moving from teaching inclusive education as a module, to infusing it in all the subjects taught at the College; and ensuring that it is taught from the first to the last day of school.

#### 4.4.2 Discussion

Each of the challenges raised has the potential of disabling the theory and practice of the programme of inclusive education in teacher education. These findings coincide with those made by other researchers, for example Okoth (2016). In a study of challenges of implementing a top-down curriculum innovation, Okoth (2016) came up with several challenges which included the following: lack of understanding of concepts, where information on the innovation was unclear and its theoretical underpinnings vague; Lack of understanding, which led to each teacher implementing what they understood the programme to mean; Lack of teacher involvement in the development of the curriculum, coupled with the absence of teacher preparation for the innovation; Also contextual factors such as large class sizes, insufficient time for the subject, and demands to prepare students for examinations. Okoth's findings are consistent with the findings of the present study.

#### 4.5 Question 5:

**What strategies can be employed to ensure that teacher education programmes effectively develop teachers for inclusive teaching?**

Interventions to address barriers to learning and achievement, and strategies that came from the participants and key informants in response to the fifth research question are presented in this section.

#### 4.5.1 Results

- a) To address the barrier of illiteracy and automatic promotion, the educators proposed that the teaching of reading should be infused into all the subject majors at teachers' colleges.
- b) The problem of lack of training of teachers for remediation was to be addressed through equipping student teachers with skills for conducting effective remediation.
- c) The barrier of overcrowded classrooms was to be addressed through teaching student teachers techniques of coping with large numbers of students.
- d) The suggested intervention to address the challenge of unqualified and under-qualified teachers was to teach student teachers the skills of cooperative teaching and how to make flexible curricula.
- e) For poor teaching methods, the interviewees suggested that teacher education should develop among student teachers, the skills of teaching learners with diverse learning needs and styles of learning.
- f) For poor internet and library resources, the suggestion was to expose student teachers to making their own teaching/learning aids.

Following are a few of the strategies the interviewees said could be employed to ensure that teacher education programmes effectively developed teachers for inclusive teaching:

- a) Teach inclusive education in every subject at teacher education level since it is a tool subject to enhance the teaching of all the other subjects.
- b) Expose student teachers to ZIMSEC expectations and the training that ZIMSEC uses in the training of its markers.
- c) Give clinical supervision to students on Teaching Practice, not the assessment that student teachers are subjected to.
- d) Re-introduce professionalism by taking teacher education away from universities which only develop them academically, back to teachers' colleges.
- e) Boost language proficiency among students by utilising every possible opportunity to develop their language skills. Expose students to activities that are meant to boost their language proficiency, such as public speaking, debates, library periods, or in-class pair-work.
- f) Strive for consensus on the definition of inclusive education; All concerned parties need to come together to discuss the issue, and find out what the general trends are internationally. Only when they have arrived at a standard, justifiable, and satisfactory definition of inclusive education can they chart a way forward.
- g) To introduce mass lectures with a difference, where individual learners' needs are catered for. For example, a topic is introduced in a mass lecture, followed by students breaking up into smaller tutorial groups, where different methods of approach are used by different lecturers.
- h) Use of varied testing methods such as practical, oral, portfolios, or written examinations, in order to accommodate learners' multiple intelligences and styles of learning.
- i) Making curricula flexible so that they are the ones that bend to reach all the individual learners rather than the other way round.

#### 4.5.2 Discussion

Although the strategies presented were meant to address the situation in Zimbabwe, they are consistent with those raised in other studies. Cornell University Center for Teaching Excellence (2016:n.pa.) points out that in order to teach inclusively, the teacher should, “. . . utilize a variety of teaching strategies, activities, and assignments that will accommodate the needs of students with diverse learning styles, abilities, backgrounds, experiences.” On varying testing methods, the same source advises teachers to “. . . provide flexibility in how students demonstrate their knowledge . . .”, and in their choice of assessment techniques they use.

#### 5. Conclusions

The meanings of inclusive education that the practitioners have are varied, which makes it difficult to reach a consensus on how it is to be implemented. The foci of studies of inclusive education in Zimbabwe tend to view inclusive education as a disability study, whose interest seems to be the geographical movement of students from special schools to regular schools. International literature, however, reveals that inclusive education is about equipping student teachers with skills to effectively teach learners with diverse learning needs and styles of learning. This might not be easy to achieve if the concept of inclusive education remains locked in with disability studies, or conflated with social inclusion.

There is evidence that the majority of students taught by graduates of teachers' colleges do not access meaningful learning in spite of their being physically present in the classes. This seems to indicate that the inclusive education done at teachers' colleges is deficient in as far as equipping student teachers for inclusive classes is concerned. Furthermore, it also emerged in this study that the current programme of inclusive education in teacher education is not informed by what practitioners view as barriers to learning and achievement of students in the schools. The fact that inclusive education is taught to student teachers after their teaching practice further weakens it in that student teachers do not get to use it during the practical part of their course. Another weakness of inclusive education in teachers' colleges is that it is confined to the TOE department, where it tends to be treated as one of the theoretical subjects in that department. Lack of involvement of implementers at the planning stage of the programme could be responsible, to some extent, for lecturers' failure to appreciate the philosophy behind the concept of inclusive education.

The study revealed that inclusive education was not being given enough time, since it was only given one double period per week, for one term only, and it was only taught to finalists, yet the expectation was for inclusive education to be taught from day one of college to the end of the course. It was also taught as a stand-alone course, yet literature clearly stated that it was not supposed to be taught as a stand-alone course, but to be infused in all the subjects. It was taught through a theory-based curriculum, not a practice-based one as it should have been;

#### 6. Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study made a number of recommendations on what strategies could be used by teacher education to develop student teachers for inclusive teaching. Following are some of the recommendations made: There is need for Zimbabwe to come to a consensus on the meaning of inclusive education, in order for practitioners to pursue similar goals when they talk about or implement inclusive pedagogy. Barriers to learning and achievement experienced by students in the schools should inform inclusive education programmes offered by teachers' colleges. There is need for teacher educators to be staff developed before they can be expected to teach new subjects or handle unfamiliar programmes. The teaching of reading should be deliberately factored into all subject majors in teachers' colleges, since the findings are that students' failure to read is perceived as a major causal factor in their failure to thrive in both their classwork and examinations.

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