

How to Overcome Challenges for Meaningful Implementation of Inclusive Education in Lesotho

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ABSTRACT This study explores the extent to which inclusive education is appropriately and adequately implemented in Lesotho schools. The study, which was conducted among 256 randomly selected teachers in the two districts of Lesotho, namely Lithabaneng and St. Bernadette, reveals a depressing picture. A semi-structured questionnaire with multiple Likert rating scales was used to collect data from the respondents. Teachers still find it difficult to deal with learners with various learning disabilities, while schools' lack of suitable infrastructure compounds the problem for teachers. The findings show that 63 percent of the teachers bemoan a lack of proper training in order to deal with these learners with disabilities; no support material; and no sympathy from parents and authorities. This situation does not only impact negatively on the morale of these teachers, but also defeats the intentions of ensuring that inclusive education is executed in a manner consistent with government policies.

INTRODUCTION

The face of schools in our evolving society is changing, and teachers must acquire skills in working with learners who are academically and physically disadvantaged. Teachers are the key force in determining the quality of inclusion. They can play a crucial role in transforming schools or bringing about no change at all (Robinson 2008; Swart et al. 2004). Schoeman (2012) states that since the passing of the Policy on Inclusive Education in South Africa in 2001, the Department of Basic Education has introduced numerous strategic steps to change the system so that all children can attend their local neighbourhood schools and be supported by teachers to access the curriculum. The principle of inclusion seeks to achieve education for all by restructuring schools as institutions that include everybody, support learning and respond to individual needs. Inclusion may require full-time placement of children with special needs in the regular school with the aim of providing equivalent educational opportunities and experiences

for those learners (Gambhir et al. 2008). In order to respond to the diverse needs of all learners, the existing education system must be transformed from a system of separate education (isolating special education from regular education) into a single integrated system. Schoeman (2012) and Swart et al. (2004) point out that, in practice, the creation of inclusive school communities requires attending to the rights of all learners; shared responsibility among all school professionals; changing organisational structures to promote collaborative decision making and creative problem solving; and making the necessary changes in existing professional roles and school practices.

The successful accommodation of learners with special educational needs requires facilities, infrastructure and assisting devices. Couston and Theoharis (2013) point out that including learners with special needs in regular schools remains a goal and challenge for most educational systems around the world. Evidence suggests that the lack of relevant facilities and materials is a major obstacle to the implementation of effective inclusion (Beyene and Tizazu 2010). Inadequate personnel training programmes is another problem of achieving inclusion in developing countries. Training programmes for support personnel, such as educational audiologists, psychologists, speech and language therapists, and communication support workers, such as interpreters, are not available in many developing countries. Research has indicated

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that in China, support personnel such as vocational counsellors, evaluators and work placement specialists are lacking in most of the educational institutions serving learners with special needs (Fuchs 2010). The creation of inclusive schools requires more than merely the implementation of new policies (Dagnew 2013; Ainscow 2004). Educational policies and financing arrangements should encourage and facilitate the development of inclusive schools; barriers that impede movement from special to regular schools should be removed; and a common administrative structure organised. The progress towards inclusion should be carefully monitored through the collection of statistics capable of revealing the number of students with disabilities (Ainscow 2004; Naylor 2005; Fuchs 2010).

Many countries have adopted policies in favour of early childhood education by supporting the development of kindergartens. Policymakers at all levels, including the school level, should regularly reaffirm their commitment to inclusion and promote positive attitudes among children, teachers and the public as a whole (Fuchs 2010). The future of educational provision for pupils with special educational needs can be seen to be central to educational debate across Europe and the United States of America. Legislation in many countries has focused on the means by which the implementation of a more inclusive education system can be achieved (Beyene and Tizazu 2010). Considering the importance of laws in the implementation of inclusive programmes in particular, and the provision of appropriate services for individuals with disabilities in general, it comes as no surprise that inclusive education and other services for these individuals in many developing countries remain in an embryonic stage due to the absence of mandatory laws and policies influencing the provision of these services. Evidence indicates that legislative guidelines covering special needs provision are non-existent or antiquated in most developing countries (Dagnew 2013).

Fuchs (2010) suggests that while the socio-political and moral arguments for inclusion have been well established, insufficient attention has been given to the development of an understanding of classroom practices that are conducive to creating an inclusive education system. The moral imperative for inclusion is clear and few teachers would deny the fact that a move towards a more equitable education system should

be regarded as a priority. Despite this, moves towards the achievement of greater inclusion have been slow. Research indicates that under some circumstances inclusion can be efficacious, yet many teachers remain uncertain with regard to its implementation in their schools (Beyene and Tizazu 2010; Schoeman 2012). The inadequacies of the teacher training programmes, in view of the lack of relevant materials and facilities in the institutions in most developing countries, and the concerns about the inadequacies in personnel preparation programmes in developing countries, are well documented (Beyene and Tizazu 2010).

This paper is prompted and premised on the fact that documentary evidence has revealed that in Lesotho, teachers are not trained in inclusive education and do not have the professional skills needed for working or assisting learners in the inclusive or mainstream class. There is further lack of support for teachers; for example, evidence demonstrates that there is a critical shortage of educational tools and equipment to meet the needs of learners who require special care in the inclusive classroom (Ministry of Education and Training – Lesotho 2005). Studies of the attitudes of Zimbabwean school personnel towards educating learners with special needs reported negative teacher attitudes towards educating disabled learners in an inclusive setting (Engelbrecht and Green 2007). Gambhir et al. (2008) indicate that parents and siblings, like disabled children, are subject to stigma, marginalisation and discrimination. Additionally, Causton and Theoharis (2013) contend that teachers find it very difficult to deal with the increasing number of children with behavioural problems in mainstream classrooms. These children are disruptive in the extreme and the learning climate in the classroom negatively affects all the learners. The teacher's lack of the necessary knowledge, skills and expertise to understand and assist these learners leads to frustration and feelings of inadequacy, which disrupts effective teaching and successful learning. This situation gave rise to this paper, intended not only to determine the challenges with which teachers are confronted in their attempt to implement the imperatives of inclusive education in Lesotho, but also to explore and recommend appropriate measures that are beneficial to teachers and learners.

Unpacking Inclusive Education and its Challenges for Lesotho

Inclusion is a process; we will never achieve it completely, but we can try (Gambhir et al. 2008). Inclusive education is about changing and transforming the education system to accommodate all children, regardless of their strengths or weaknesses in any area, or whether they have become part of the school community (Engelbrecht and Green 2007). Furthermore, the major challenge of inclusive education is to satisfy the needs of heterogeneous groups of learners in the classroom. Therefore, it is mandatory for all concerned stakeholders to seek solutions to misconceptions, wrong beliefs and social barriers encountered with current special needs education practice in inclusive settings (Dagnew 2013; Tiruesew 2005).

The Education White Paper 6 (2000) defines inclusion as an end process rather than a simply changed state. It is viewed as a process of increasing the participation of learners in, and reducing their exclusion from culture, curriculum and communities of local centres of learning. Inclusive education is a seemingly uncomplicated term that is often assumed to be the same in all contexts. Dagnew (2013) argues that there is no commonly accepted notion of inclusion, but rather a range of varieties of inclusion. He identifies inclusion as placement; inclusion as education for all; inclusion as participation; and social inclusion. In South Africa, inclusive education has been a human rights issue along the way to creating a non-discriminatory society. Schoeman (2012) states that inclusive education involves the “practice of including everyone irrespective of talent, disability, socioeconomic background, or cultural origin in supportive mainstream schools and classrooms where all students’ needs are met”. Thus, inclusive education is about the values of community, collaboration, diversity and democracy; a vision of society and a road to be travelled. This said, it is an unending road, with all kinds of barriers, some of which are invisible and some of which are in our heads and hearts. Implementing a more inclusive model of schooling for pupils with special needs requires the will to do it (Mukhopadhyay et al. 2012; Williams et al. 2005). The movement towards inclusive education has its roots in different places; it can now be seen as a response to a global social concern. Through-

out the world, governments and many stakeholders advocate quality education and education for all (Ministry of Education and Training Lesotho 2005).

In most countries in the western world, special schools have been established for the education of learners with special needs (MacBeath et al. 2006). Fuchs (2010) states that the main problem is that some schools fail to specify exactly how resources have been targeted to support children with special educational needs. Engelbrecht and Green (2007) indicate that governments in developed countries have begun to take responsibility for the education of children with disabilities in the form of special education, which developed as a system parallel to mainstream education. In Lesotho, however, more and more learners with disabilities are being integrated into mainstream classrooms without capacitated teachers to deal with this inclusion. MOET (2005) shows that in 2003, the pupil: classroom ratio was estimated at 67:1 and the pupil ratio at about 46:1. The shortage of qualified teachers, as well as overcrowding in classrooms, is among the factors that contribute to the low quality and inefficiency of primary education. However, while the total number of teachers increased steadily, more than doubling from 4,139 in 1974 to 8,908 in 2002, the number of qualified teachers has not increased proportionately. The poor quality of teaching and learning was revealed in the Southern African Consortium on Measuring Educational Quality Survey carried out in 2001 and the baseline study on attainment in numeracy and literacy carried out in 2003 (MOET 2005).

Both studies reveal that the majority of primary school pupils in Lesotho do not attain the minimum expected level of competency at both grades 3 and 6. The role played by inadequately trained teachers in this low achievement cannot be overstated. Schoeman (2012) recognises the growing need for teachers to understand and assist learners with behavioural problems that act as a barrier to effective learning. In the past, learners were accommodated in schools of industry and reform schools as places of safety, which were part of the specialised education provided for learners. These learners have now to be accommodated in mainstream schools in their communities, and they need to be provided with a supportive and effective learning and teaching environment (Schoeman 2012).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Sampling

Kumar (2005) defines research design as a plan, structure and strategy of investigation to obtain answers to research questions or problems. In this paper, the research approach followed was mainly quantitative and descriptive in nature. Quantitative research is a numerical method describing observations of materials or characteristics (Salkind 2012; Maree and Pieterse 2007). A self-designed, semi-structured questionnaire using a five-point Likert rating scale was used to collect data from randomly sampled teachers. De Vos et al. (2005), MacMillan (2008) and Sarantakos (2005) define a questionnaire as a set of questions on a form which is completed by randomly selected respondents for a research project.

Population and Sampling Size

MacMillan (2008) defines population as a group of individual persons, objects or items from which samples are taken for measurement, while sample size refers to the number of participants or objects which are used for research projects (Sarantakos 2005). The randomly selected sample population of this study consisted of primary school teachers from the two centres of Lithabaneng and St. Bernadette in the Maseru District of Lesotho. A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed, with 256 questionnaires returned fully completed, yielding a response rate of 64 percent.

Instrumentation, Data Collection and Analysis

The questionnaire consisted of two sections: Section A focused on demographic issues, while Section B addressed attitudinal and perception variables on the implementation of inclusive education in Lesotho. Section B included 29 closed questions and one open-ended question, with the closed questions using a five-point Likert rating scale ranging from: strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1), to assess the hypothesis of this paper. The content and face validity of the instrument was ensured because respondents were asked questions in their mother-tongue that were familiar and related to their work experience. The process of data analysis involves making sense out of text and image data. It involves preparing the data for analysis; conducting different analysis; moving progressive-

ly deeper into understanding the data; representing the data; and interpreting the larger meaning of the data (Salkind 2012). Neuman (2006) maintains that the charts, graphs and tables give the reader a condensed picture of the data, allowing the reader to see the evidence collected by the researcher. A computer-aided statistical analysis was used to compute the results of the study, employing the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 14.0. Narrative descriptions were also applied for the information obtained through observation and interviews to triangulate the results of the data collected through the questionnaire.

Ethical Considerations

Permission was first sought and granted by the relevant educational authorities prior to approaching all the participating primary school principals and before administering the questionnaire. Participants were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity, as well as voluntary participation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In an effort to tackle and address IE challenges, it is common practice to find most schools across the world adopting what Causton and Theoharis (2013) term Self-Contained Programs. Either on its own or in collaboration with neighbouring districts or provinces, almost every provincial education department in most countries, including South Africa and Lesotho runs separate classrooms, separate programmes and even separate schools for learners with disabilities. These programmes tend to serve learners with more significant disabilities who have more complicated needs by placing them together in separate rooms or buildings. While these programmes claim to offer something individualised for complicated learners, research has shown that the practices in these classrooms do not individualise and result in higher teacher burn-out rates; lead to low postsecondary employment; result in low rates of independent living; lead to the over-representation of learners of colour and those of low-income status; and rely on an increased use of physical restraint on learners (Causton and Theoharis 2013).

The empirical findings of this paper report firstly on the biographical data of respondents, which include: (i) gender, (ii) age group, (iii) educational level, and (iv) teaching experience.

Table 1: Biographical data of respondents

<i>Demographic variables</i>	<i>N = 256</i>	<i>Total sample = %</i>
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	73	28.5
Female	183	71.5
<i>Age</i>		
18 – 25	46	18.0
26 – 30	13	5.1
31 – 40	93	36.3
41 – 50	28	10.9
Above 51	76	29.7
<i>Educational Level</i>		
Below Grade 12 / Form 10	5	2.0
Possession of only Grade 12 / Form 10	19	7.4
Post-school teaching qualifications	202	78.9
Any other qualifications	30	11.7
<i>Teaching Experience</i>		
Between 1-5 years	75	29.3
Between 6-10 years	63	24.6
Between 11-20 years	68	26.6
Over 21 years	50	19.5

Table 1 shows that more females (71.48%) than males (28.52%) took part in this study. This finding is congruent with that of Morolong (2007), where it is indicated that generally, there are more female teachers than males in primary schools. The majority of the respondents were in the middle-age range (31-40 years), followed by the highest age range (over 51 years old). This suggests that participants have had reasonable experience of dealing with children, thus enabling them to answer the questions in an informed way. It is also evident from the findings that the most respondents (79%) were not only adequately qualified with post-school qualifications, but also had reasonable amount of teaching experience.

Classroom Teachers’ Attitude Towards The Inclusion of Learners with Disabilities/Impairments

The findings in Table 2 illustrate that the observed t-results (8.111) for the aggregated attitude of the classroom teachers at both centres is greater than the t-critical value (2.000). This implies that the difference between the observed

mean (2.1304) and the expected mean is statistically significant, indicating that the teachers’ attitudes towards the inclusion of disabled learners in the regular classroom is positive. However, this reality does not discount the fact that even though most of these teachers have positive attitudes towards inclusion, the dropout rates for these learners is still a cause for concern.

From Table 3, a total of 113 respondents do not understand what inclusive education is: 18.07 percent strongly disagree and 27.31 percent disagree; 17.67 percent are not sure; while 24.90 percent agree and 12.05 percent strongly agree, to understanding what the term entails. Teachers are the chief implementers of any educational policy. However, with such a sizeable number of respondents not understanding inclusive education, there is still a long way to go in terms of the successful implementation of inclusive education (IE) in Lesotho. This finding concurs with the prevalent perception that many teachers in mainstream schools are not well trained to help learners with special needs in Lesotho. Regarding the availability of teacher development programmes, 12.45 percent and 22.09 percent strongly disagreed or disagreed respectively. Those who neither agreed nor disagreed make up 13.65 percent. While 36.95 percent and 37 (14.86%) of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed respectively, it is clear that some teachers feel that the Ministry of Education is not doing enough towards their development. The impact of this neglect is not only adverse for the schools where these teachers are working, but in the wider scheme of things, results in the failure to achieve the national imperative of ensuring that inclusive education is implemented properly and successfully.

Moreover, the results show that 9.56 percent of the respondents strongly agreed that there are insufficient appropriate resources to support the curriculum within the inclusive classroom; 15.92 percent disagreed; and 11.95 percent neither agreed nor disagreed. An overwhelming 32.27 percent and 30.28 percent agreed and strongly agreed, respectively. Regarding the

Table 2: Mean scores, standard deviation and one sample t-tests of the regular classroom teacher’s response (n=256)

<i>No. of sample</i>	<i>Expected mean</i>	<i>Observed mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t-observed</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>t-critical</i>
256	2	2.1304	.31902	2.534	268	1.980

Table 3: Attitudinal and perception variables on the implementation of IE in Lesotho

Response items	Rating of responses (%)				
	SA=5	A=4	N=3	D=2	SD=1
Understanding of Inclusive Education (IE)	12.05	24.90	17.67	27.31	18.07
Availability of appropriate school programme for teacher development	14.86	36.96	13.65	22.05	12.45
The problem of resources to support the curriculum	30.28	32.27	11.95	15.94	9.56
The problem of timely distribution and allocation of learning materials	38.19	40.94	10.63	5.91	4.33
Buildings and playgrounds requiring significant modification	22.18	33.87	16.94	15.73	11.29
Supportive and effective school board	4.00	8.80	12.80	37.20	37.20
Presence of special teachers to help learners with special needs	8.63	18.43	12.94	31.37	28.63
Teacher's preparedness for an IE classroom	9.16	17.13	12.35	31.87	29.48
Teachers are trained to deal with learners with auditory impairment	1.19	6.32	3.16	29.64	59.68
Teacher received training to deal with blind learners	3.23	8.06	6.45	26.65	55.65
Teacher received training to deal with sign language learners	1.98	8.70	9.49	33.20	46.64
Incorporation of inclusion education concepts in teacher training curriculum	8.37	12.75	28.29	25.90	24.70
Authorities are supportive to teachers, enabling them to cope with IE demands	8.59	23.05	16.80	24.71	26.95

NB: SA stands for Strongly Agree; A stands for Agree; N stands for Neutral; D stands for Disagree; and SD stands for Strongly Disagree

challenge of timely distribution and the allocation of learning material, findings show that 4.33 percent strongly disagreed with the statement; 5.91 percent disagreed; and 10.63 percent neither agreed nor disagreed. However, a sizeable number, that is, 40.94 percent and 38.19 percent agreed and strongly agreed, respectively with the statement. Late delivery of learning materials can have a detrimental effect on the teaching-learning process. Resources, time and processes promote continuous improvement in teaching, learning and organisational life (Rix et al. 2005). With reference to the need to improve the classroom and school's infrastructure, 11.29 percent strongly disagreed; 15.73 percent disagreed; and 16.94 percent neither agreed nor disagreed. The respondents who feel that their school's infrastructure requires a serious overhaul formed the majority (33.87% agreed and 22.18% strongly agreed). Most schools' infrastructure is not suitable for use by learners with impairments. For example, there are no driveways for wheelchairs. In response to the statement "At my school, we have supportive and effective school board" the majority of responses were negative (37.20% strongly disagreed and 37.20% disagreed). The respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed made up 12.80 percent of the respondents. Only a handful of respondents reacted positively: 8.80 percent agreed and 4.00 percent strongly agreed. Given

this response, it can safely be inferred that the impact of this unsupportive culture is not only likely to adversely affect the effective delivery and implementation of inclusive education imperatives, but also the morale of teachers.

Concerning the availability of special teachers to help students with special needs, the findings indicate that 28.63 percent of respondents strongly disagreed and 31.37 percent disagreed. The respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed amounted to 12.94 percent. The rest of the responses were positive (18.43% agreed and 8.63% strongly agreed). Teachers have to juggle many tasks and responsibilities at once, such as being psychologists, psychiatrists, and social workers. Hammeken (2007) states that educators in a team situation must be able to listen to one another, communicate effectively and hold common goals and expectations for students. Collaboration is very important with co-teaching; it is an interactive process that enables teachers with expertise in various academic areas to provide service to a group of learners with a wide range of needs. Whether teachers have been trained and are skilled regarding inclusive education, 29.48 percent strongly disagreed; 31.87 percent disagreed; 12.35 percent neither agreed nor disagreed; while 17.13 percent and 9.16 percent agreed and strongly agreed, respectively. Clearly, many teachers in Lesotho are not qualified to deal with children

with special needs; thus, they cannot function effectively in an inclusive classroom.

Furthermore, whether teachers are able to teach learners who have auditory impairments, 59.68 percent strongly disagreed; 29.64 percent disagreed; and 3.16 percent neither agreed nor disagreed. A minority of respondents (6.32% agreed and 1.19% strongly agreed) claim to have received training with regard to these learners. Similarly, the responses to whether respondents have training to teach blind learners using Braille, showed that 55.65 percent of respondents strongly disagreed; 26.65 percent disagreed; and 6.45 percent neither agreed nor disagreed. On the other hand, 8.06 percent agreed and 3.23 percent strongly agreed. It is a point of concern that the majority of blind learners are still excluded in mainstream classrooms. All schools now need to recognise that failure to anticipate the needs of students with disabilities may well lead to unlawful discrimination (Rix et al. 2005). Additionally, Table 2 shows that only 1.98 percent of respondents strongly agreed that they were trained to use sign language; while 8.70 percent agreed; and 9.49 percent neither agreed nor disagreed. The greater majority of responses were negative, as shown by 33.20 percent who disagreed and 46.64 percent who strongly disagreed. This means that teachers face great challenges in terms of teaching in an inclusive classroom. If a learner has a severe hearing loss, a sign language interpreter should be available to assist. The specialist provides a direct service to the student and supplementary materials to the general and special education teachers (Hammeken 2007).

When asked to specify whether teacher training institutes incorporate the concept of inclusion in the curriculum, the respondents showed varied opinions on the issue, with 24.70 percent stating that they strongly disagreed and 25.90 percent that they disagreed. A further 28.29 percent were not sure, while 12.75 percent of respondents agreed and 8.37 percent strongly agreed. This indicates clearly that in-depth (pre-service and in-service) training is fundamental for inclusive education to be fully functional. The opportunities to attend inclusive education-related courses are not created by the Ministry of Education. The feedback showed that 26.95 percent strongly disagreed; 24.61 percent disagreed; 16.80 percent neither agreed nor disagreed; 23.05 percent agreed; and 8.59 percent

strongly agreed. It is encouraging to note that the Ministry of Education is creating opportunities for teacher enrichment in inclusive education, even though not all teachers are involved. Although these challenges may seem insurmountable, it is not too late to identify, isolate and implement appropriate measures to address them.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this paper reflect very significantly on the challenges and opportunities available for learners, teachers, parents and educational authorities in Lesotho. It is evident that inclusion is a process, and not an end in itself, that requires constant, deliberate attempts and genuine effort. Since teachers are such an important human resource in transforming the education system, it is essential that an inclusive approach to teacher education is adopted. Creating an inclusive school where all learners are acknowledged, valued, and respected, involves attending to what is taught, as well as to how it is delivered. Regrettably, the results show that many teachers in Lesotho schools are not properly trained to help learners with special needs. Yet, the successful implementation of any inclusive policy is largely dependent on educators being positive about it. Despite encouraging messages from the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) in Lesotho of committing to improving the quality of primary education through the upgrading of teachers' qualifications to at least diploma level, there are couple of significant recommendations that this paper makes that could assist in overturning the current status quo in Lesotho regarding Inclusive Education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The report reveals that the output of trained teachers from the Lesotho College of Education (NTTC) and the National University of Lesotho have not been able to keep pace with the ever increasing need for qualified teachers, especially regarding Inclusive Education. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- ♦ On-going teacher support and development is imperative for them to keep abreast with the latest developments regarding Inclusive Education (IE).

- ♦ Teacher training programmes offered, desperately need to be overhauled. It is a known fact that the secret of every successful classroom and school tends to focus on making learners feel welcome, secure and accepted, and on ensuring that they have friends among teachers and other learners while developing a feeling of belonging, positive self-worth and success.
- ♦ A systemic approach can foster and guarantee a 'buy-in' from all stakeholders. The MOET has to embark on a project of Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) to achieve IE aims. A systemic approach entails that Inclusive Education is implemented through the combined efforts of all people, their families, their organisations and the relevant government ministries, such as health, education, and social security. The success of achieving its overall intention must be embraced and supported by all stakeholders. It is for this reason that we argue for a deliberate systemic approach which would guarantee and yield better results for all concerned.
- ♦ Further research should be conducted, not only to determine possible bottlenecks regarding effective implementation, but also regarding the level of alignment between national IE policy imperatives, with the school curriculum in the main.

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