



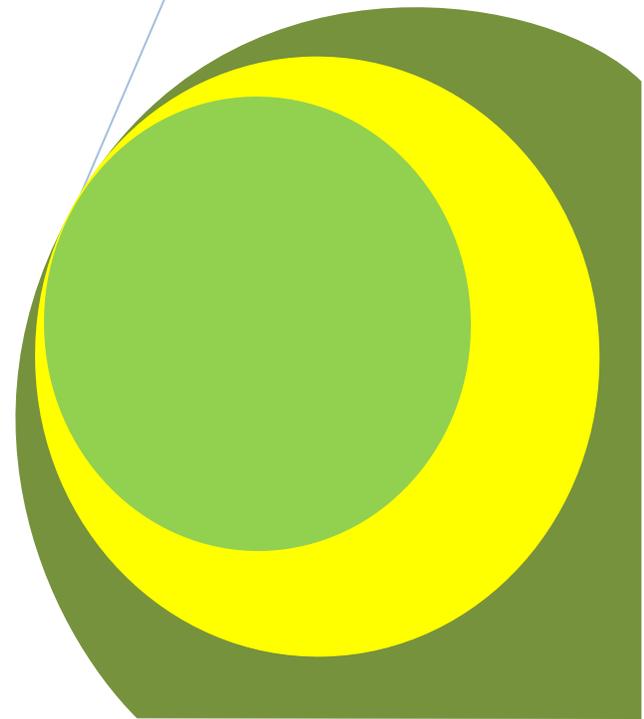
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Effectiveness of Inclusive Education Provision (Integrated Units) in all Schools in Zimbabwe Schools

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Research Article

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Abstract

Inclusive education is teaching all children in schools including those with special needs. In Zimbabwe, the 1987 Education Act advocates for free, compulsory primary education for all without discrimination of any kind. As a result of this policy, most public schools accommodate children with disabilities and teach them together with the able-bodied. This study was principally directed at investigating the effectiveness of the integration of units in schools to accommodate the disabled. The study was conducted in both urban and rural schools and the population comprised all regular school-going children. A purposive sample comprising eight (8) heads of schools, eighty (80) specialist teachers, eighty (80) main stream teachers and one hundred and sixty (160) parents whose children attend schools in selected inclusive schools in the country. A total of four hundred (400) respondents were used. The study employed the descriptive survey approach. The research instrument for the collection of the required primary data was the questionnaire. The results from the study highlighted that inclusive teaching was not effective enough to cater for disabled children's individual needs. Lack of funding to purchase special gadgets for children with special needs was a common problem. The study therefore recommends that there should be more resources allocated for special needs children's education and an increase in community participation in the maintenance of inclusive schools.

Key terms: Specialist teacher, Ordinary schools, Integrated units, Special needs, Special needs education.

INTRODUCTION

Before attainment of independence in 1980, children with disabilities were sidelined in many activities in Zimbabwe, especially in their education, due to people's negative attitudes. Children with disabilities were not regarded as assets who could contribute to the economic development of the country and that of their family and society as a whole. Socially, children with disabilities are stigmatised as misfits because of their physical, mental limitations and general outlook. After independence, the Zimbabwean Government, through the Ministry of Education, assumed both administrative and professional roles of running special education by engaging the schools psychological services who provided services to Special Needs Education. This is education to meet the needs of those children who cannot benefit from normal public schools without provision of special equipment and facilities of some kind.

The Education Act (1987:12) states that "...no child shall be refused admission to any school on the grounds of race, tribe, colour, religion, creed, place or origin or the social status of his/her parents. The act therefore promoted the rights of education for both able-bodied and disabled children. Both were combined in regular schools where an attempt was made to offer them education suitable to their conditions in normal school classrooms. The assumption is that these children with special needs will receive the help they need in special classrooms from their classmates. Ambrose (2010) points out that the provisions for special needs children include a special curriculum or modified curriculum, special equipment, facilities, resources, modification of the physical environment or special teaching techniques and also paying more attention to the social structure and emotional climate in education. It is common cause to note that failure to make these provisions has not only caused false hope to the attainment of inclusive education, but has resulted in children with disabilities developing negative attitude towards school. Analysis of the above facts reflects that the children with special needs need to be accommodated in ordinary schools with the special help provided within the resources normally available in the normal school classroom. They receive education specially designed for them and an instruction suited to their needs. A specialist teacher becomes the link between the parents and the children requiring specialist instruction as well as other professionals. As Chakuchichi (2006) highlights, the specialist teachers have knowledge and skills to address the unique needs of disabled learners ,

thereby referring parents to the School Psychological Services for assessment which aims at providing the basis of formative and valid decision making.

The situation highlighted above tries to describe the ideal situation regarding integrated units in ordinary schools. Against the background of the current policy and legislation on the rights of children with disabilities and their fundamental rights to attend school with able-bodied children this paper reports on the actual situation in primary schools.

Literature review

Ainscow and Booth (2008) refer to integration as the act of teaching students with special education needs in regular education classrooms. Ambrose (2010) views special needs as modified education appropriate to meet educational needs of children with disabilities. It is learner-centred, flexible and adjustable to individual needs and potential. To achieve the above points, educators should remember that in special education, a child is taught a subject and it is therefore important to understand the type of children we teach, how to teach them, what to teach them and what level to achieve the objectives.

Thomas and Loxley (2013), state that the Zimbabwean government is striving towards functional integration for the benefit of handicapped children. Students with special needs participate in both academic and social activities in the mainstream classes. Students may be withdrawn to a special class or resources unit for special help or a resource facility. In functional integration for example, blind students who are integrated receive most of their teaching in ordinary classes but are withdrawn for specialised lessons such as Braille, mobility and orientation as well as daily living skills.

The specialist teacher is an initiator of integration. Jorgensen, Schuh and Niesbert (2011) say the disabled student remains in the hand of the specialist, who develops special programmes or curriculum for individual disabled learners. The specialist teacher maintains balance in curriculum, modifies and differentiates curriculum to meet individual needs. However, Ambrose (2010), comments that most of the special curricula are merely watered down version of the regular curriculum. The implication here is that, whilst it is difficult for students with disabilities to access the regular school curriculum, it is necessary to replace more difficult tasks with simple ones at a slower pace than to replace them by practical skills not relevant to the regular school curriculum.

The specialist teacher is also a resource person. Kluth, Villa and Thousand (2011) confirm that as a resource person enlightens parents on ways of getting round their problems. The specialist teacher explains to parents their rights, interprets certain documents in lay person's language. In the process of being a resource person, the specialist teacher becomes a counsellor.

Counselling by the specialist teacher can also be extended to the disabled learners in order to help them cope with environment in managing symptoms of negative discrimination, stigmatisation and denial of opportunities by the non-disabled. The specialist teacher is also the school's resource person. Often, children and ordinary teachers act in a cruel way towards disabled children because they fear and do not understand different disabilities (Thomas and Loxley, 2011). The specialist teachers can also share knowledge and practices in managing disabled persons through holding workshops and parents. Werner (2010) says education involves many partners. Parents, peers and community members need to be informed and convinced to the level of becoming willing to contribute their share in promoting special needs education.

The specialist teacher faces funding problems to purchase books, stationery and infrastructure for providing any education-related services for children with special needs (Werner and David, 2013). Lack of equipment such as gadgets used in special needs to enable teachers to teach, for example, projectors, hearing aids, Braille machines, speech mirrors and others become a problem to the specialist teacher. Ambrose (2010) describes the situation whereby the specialist teacher has to move to places where there are Braille machines and do the brailing for the student. In other schools, specialist teachers buy speech mirrors using their own money.

The specialist teacher also faces attitudinal problems from the mainstream teachers. Turnbull and Turnbull (2010) point out that the specialist teacher feels too special. This in turn poses negative attitudes from ordinary class teachers. For example, the specialist teacher delays and finds the school assembly over. Announcements would have been made and in case of the hearing impaired child, he or she would not have heard anything since the specialist teacher was not there to sign for the hearing impaired. Once the announcements at the assemblies have not been properly communicated to those hearing impaired learners, the specialist teacher then has problems.

Lack of effective legislation and policies becomes a barrier for the specialist teacher to deliver his or her work. Peresuh (2009), states that those responsible for preparing national budgets do not have anything to force them to allocate adequate funds for children with disabilities. This results in lack of proper facilities and equipment in schools and bounces back to the specialist teacher's delivery of services.

According to Zindi (2007), in Zimbabwe, lack of supervision of special needs education by the Schools Psychological Services (SPS) has made it difficult to coordinate inter-ministerial approach to service provision. These

tend to delay to assess learners identified by the specialist teacher leading to delays for appropriate intervention programmes, (Chimedza, 2008).

Statement of the problem

The study sought to investigate the effectiveness of inclusive education in all schools. It is the researcher's hope that the outcome of the research would benefit the mainstream in the way they treat children with disabilities. It is also hoped that heads of schools and the Ministry of Education would improve facilities for inclusive education to be effective in schools.

Purpose of the study

The study sought to scientifically explore the degree of effectiveness or lack of effectiveness of integrated units in ordinary schools. The researcher intended to establish how integrated units in ordinary schools are a benefit to children with disabilities, to teachers and the society in general. The study sought to reveal some of the positive contributions made by the integrated units in ordinary schools. Finally, the study sought to highlight some shortcomings of the units and possibly suggest ways of improving these integrated units.

Research Questions

The study was rooted on the following sub-questions that tried to provide answers to the main research question: To what extent is inclusive education provision (Integrated Units) effective in all schools in Zimbabwe?

1. How do teachers conceptualise inclusive education?
2. What are the roles of specialist teachers in integrated units in ordinary schools?
3. What problems are faced by specialist teachers in ordinary schools?
4. What are the ordinary class teachers' perceptions on integrated units?

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study stemmed from the fact that it attempted to identify and establish the actual operations of integrated units in ordinary schools through the lens of teachers who constitute a critical constituency on the success or failure of these units. It was hoped that the study would be of great benefit to education planners, the schools, pupils, teachers and parents by cultivating positive attitudes towards disabled learners. It was also envisaged that the recommendations and outcomes of the study would serve as a basis for further research on the topic and help education planners to improve special education in ordinary schools.

Limitations of the Study

This study was concerned with the effectiveness of integrated units in ordinary schools. Units in special education institutions were outside the parameters of this study. In view of the relatively small size of the sample and sub-samples and the deficiencies of the methodology, research design and the instrument used, the study is likely to have limited generalisability. It has to be pointed out also that persons about an issue are essentially subjective and cannot be measured accurately. In spite of the limitations highlighted above, the researcher still believed that the results of the study would significantly contribute towards special education in ordinary schools. In a bid to overcome deficiencies of the methodology, triangulation of the methods will be used.

Delimitation

This study was concerned with the effectiveness of integrated units in ordinary schools. Only eight schools with integrated units were selected from each of the ten provinces in Zimbabwe. On average, Zimbabwe's education provinces have each hundred schools and the eight selected had integrated units and specialist teachers. As stated above, the study delimited the investigation to establish the impact of integrated units in ordinary schools. The investigation did not concern itself with special needs institutions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study used the quantitative methodology and made use of a survey research design chiefly because the study had 400 respondents. The descriptive survey design was chosen because as Leedy (1993) observes, looks with intense accuracy at the phenomena of the moment and then describes precisely what the researcher sees. At the same time, confidentiality of respondents is maintained thereby increasing the chances of giving honest responses without fear of victimisation (Mercan, 2004). The population consisted heads, teachers and parents from seven schools. The sample, purposively selected was made up of eighty (80) heads, eighty (80) teachers from the mainstream classes, eighty (80) specialist teachers and one hundred and sixty (160) parents from each of the selected schools.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were gathered by means of a questionnaire which was largely made up of seven closed-ended questions and three open-ended questions. The three open-ended questions complemented the closed-ended questions by soliciting respondents' opinions regarding the phenomenon under study. All respondents were personally handed the questionnaires by the researcher at their schools. The researcher also collected the questionnaires in order to maximise on the rate of return of the instruments. Non-returns decrease the size of the sample on which the results will be based and also introduce a bias as much as non-respondents are likely to differ from respondents in many important ways (Phillips and Pugh, 2000). Data collected from the questionnaires were presented using tables, figures and graphs which were derived from descriptive statistics around the variables under study. These statistics were computed and inferential implications from them derived and recorded.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study set out to explore the effectiveness of inclusive education provision in all schools in Zimbabwe. This section is presented in two parts namely, presentation of data and discussion.

Presentation of data

Table 1: Distribution of respondents by sex N = 400

Sex	Respondents	Percentage
Male	100	25
Female	300	75
Total	400	100

Of the forty respondents, 100 were males whilst 300 were women. The majority of respondents were women. This information tallies very well with the gender composition of teachers in urban schools. Most urban schools have more women than men in their human resources.

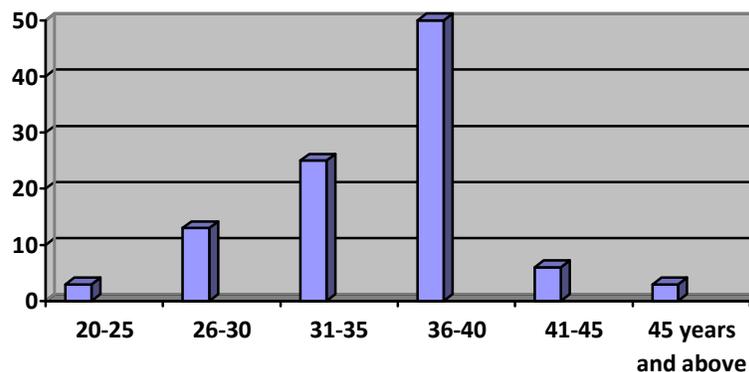


Figure 1: Age range of respondents (N=400)

Figure 1 above shows that most respondents fell within the 31-35 and the 36-40 age ranges. This shows that the majority of respondents were relatively young in the education system.



Figure 2: Respondents’ conceptualization of integrated units in ordinary schools

The majority of respondents (75%) appeared to fully understand the meaning of integrated units and a few (25%) thought they were schools for the deaf and visually impaired children only. This information reveals that respondents were aware of the concept of integrated units.

Table 2: Who is a specialist teacher? N = 400

Who is a specialist teacher?	Frequency	Percentage
Any qualified teacher is a specialist teacher.	20	5
A teacher with special skills to handle children with disabilities.	380	95
Total	400	100

Table 2 above reveals that an overwhelming majority of respondents (95%) could distinguish specialist teachers from ordinary classroom practitioners. The implications of this information are that respondents were well informed about the subject under study.

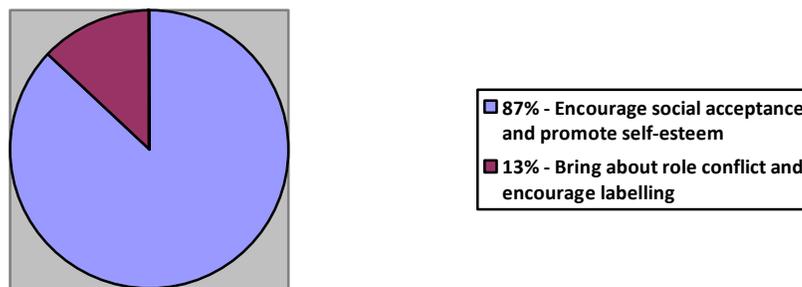


Figure 3: Perceptions of integrated units (N=400)

Figure 3 above reveals that the majority of respondents (87%) viewed integrated units in ordinary schools positively. They felt that the units encouraged social acceptance and promoted self-esteem.

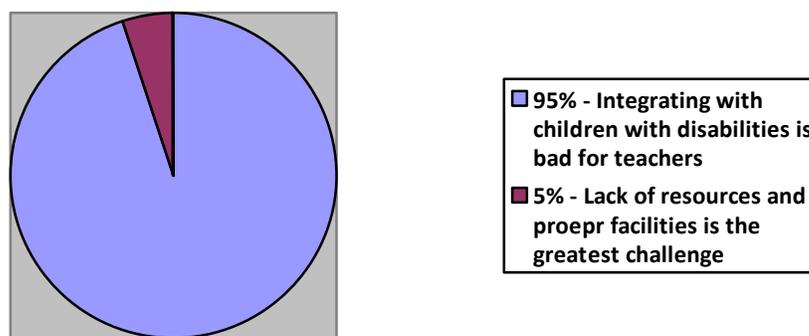


Figure 4: Challenges faced by specialist teachers in integrated settings in ordinary schools

Figure 4 above shows that 95% of the respondents indicated that the major challenge facing specialist teachers working on integrated settings in ordinary schools had to do with lack of resources.

The questionnaire had three open-ended questions which sought to get deeper understanding of respondents' situation regarding integrated units. The first question sought to find out from the respondents about the role played by the Schools' Psychological Services (SPS) in promoting integrated units. The majority of respondents indicated that they were not aware of this organisation except heads and a few teachers.

The second question sought to find out whether respondents had attended any workshops or booster courses about integrated units. All respondents had not attended any.

Finally, the third question sought to explore whether there was evidence of continuous assessment for children attending integrated units. Very few respondents indicated that these existed in their classrooms.

DISCUSSION

The results indicate that whilst integrated units in ordinary schools are not effective enough, they cater for the social and emotional climate in education. They however, do not provide special or modified curriculum, special equipment, facilities, and resources, modification of the physical environment or special teaching techniques due to poor funding. He stated provisions are in accordance with Ambrose's (2010) observations on Provision for Special Education needs. This makes integrated units in ordinary schools less effective. Ainscow and Booth (2005) admit that integrated units in ordinary schools cater for disabled children's needs, the thinking in special needs education is that all children benefit from it.

Results also indicate that respondents were fully aware of the concept of integrated units. Respondents indicated that a specialist teachers' role was very important and significantly different from that of an ordinary teacher. This is in tandem with Jorgensen, Klugh and Niesbert (2011) who say that being a specialist teacher is an initiator of integration who develops special programmes or curriculum for individual disabled learners (Chakuchichi, 2006). On the other hand, Thomas and Loxley (2013) states that the specialist teacher maintains balance in curriculum, modifies and differentiate curriculum to meet individual needs.

The specialist teacher is a link between parents and professionals (teachers) Kluth, Villa and Thousand (2011). The specialist teacher explains to parents their rights, interprets certain documents in lay's language like hospital reports of their children. In the process of being a resource person, the specialist teacher becomes a counsellor (Rukuni, 2008).

Results from the study also reveal that the integrated units in ordinary schools face a multiplicity of challenges. Lack of equipment such as gadgets used in integrated units to enable teachers to teach, for example projects hearing aids, Braille machines, speech mirrors and others become a problem to the specialist teacher. Lack of effective legislation and positive policies becomes a barrier for the specialist teacher to deliver his or her lessons. As Peresuh (2009) observes, those responsible for preparing national budgets do not do anything to force them to allocate adequate funds for the disabled children. The other conspicuous challenges faced by integrated units in ordinary schools include lack of proper or modified curriculum, non-provision of special equipment, facilities, lack of booster courses, workshops and training sessions involving both parents and teachers.

CONCLUSIONS

The outcome of this study revealed that:

- Most respondents appreciated the existence of integrated units in ordinary schools, which moved children from isolation to participation.
- There are major barriers that stood in the way of opportunities for effective integrated units in integrated schools such as physical barriers such as lack of appropriate structures, cultural barriers such as stigma and social barriers such as the absence of appropriate services which are targeted to meet the needs of children with special needs.
- Schools lacked the necessary financial resources to meet the educational and related services needed by learners with disabilities.
- Integrated units in ordinary schools lacked supervision and assistance from the Schools Psychological Services (SPS) resulting in the ineffectiveness of the specialist teacher.
- There are no workshops boosters or training courses for teachers and parents to facilitate networking.
- There was lack of continuous assessment for further planning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Having the above findings and conclusions, the research puts forth the following recommendations.

- Educational policy guidelines should have legal backings such as an Act of Parliament on the funding of Special Needs Education.
- The Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture through the Schools Psychological Services, should supervise the running of special education needs in schools and implement a compulsory programme of in-service education for administrators and ordinary school teachers to ensure that they are up to date about latest developments on special needs education.
- There is need to intensify training of regular class teachers to equip them with skills to enable them identify learners with special needs and to address their needs.
- There is need for management systems to have reliable data on children with disabilities to help the government respond concretely, efficiently and effectively to the educational needs of disabled children in Zimbabwe.
- Communities should prepare or procure appropriate materials for the full participation of the disabled children in the ordinary schools.
- The Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture should develop syllabi in specialised subjects such as mobility and orientation, Braille, daily living skills to guide both the specialist and ordinary classroom teachers so that in the event of the specialist and teachers' absence, learners with disabilities continue learning.
- There is need for creating an inclusive ethos in the schools where all learners, teachers and parents are equally valued.

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