

**INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICY IMPLEMENTATION: IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO**

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*This manuscript examines results from a national survey of teachers in Trinidad and Tobago. Data from this study were derived from a national survey conducted by the consulting firm Miske Witt and Associates for the Trinidad and Tobago Ministry of Education. The aim of the survey was to solicit broad-based perspectives on teachers' knowledge and attitudes about inclusive education. Items for the survey were constructed on consultation from Ministry requests for information about the knowledge, attitudes, and resources available to teachers – specifically related to students with disabilities. Through descriptive and regression analyses, data provide insights into teacher preparation and professional development priorities. Among them, further training for general education teachers on how to help students with disabilities succeed in mainstream environments.*

The prospect of *Education for All*, a proclamation signed in the year 2000 by countries around the world (United Nations Education, Science, and Cultural Organization – UNESCO 1990, 2000), has left challenges for countries wishing to implement a high quality education for all of their children. Although many countries in the world have adopted policies that seek to reach out to marginalized populations, the correlation between educating children with the highest levels of need and the resources needed to make adequate educational progress is strong. Therefore, educational policy makers have sought to find ways in which delivery of educational services is *inclusive* in nature, i.e., such services are reflective of the needs of all students who may enter a school, from the most high achieving to the most educationally challenged. Inclusive education makes sense from both practical and rights-based frameworks.

Over the past several decades, inclusive education approaches have been utilized for the education of students with special needs (Biklen, 1992). Special needs education is the teaching of children who, for various reasons, cannot benefit from the curriculum as it is typically presented (Williams, 1988). Nations in the Global North have reacted differently to calls for improved special needs education and services for special needs, specifically people with disabilities. Many nations have followed United Nations statements such as the United Nations *World Program of Action Concerning Disabled Persons* and created national policies that required education options for people with disabilities (Garbo, 1999; Hegarty, 1998). The United States adopted national policies guaranteeing the right to a *free and appropriate public education* for all students with disabilities (Crockett, 2000). In the United Kingdom, an influential report presented by Baroness Mary Warnock criticized educational practice for people with disabilities (Department of Education and Science, 1978). This report called for an end to categorical schooling (for example schools for the blind, *delicate* or *socially maladjusted*) and for a general opening of schools for children with *special educational needs* (Clough, 2000). Italy has educated students with disabilities for decades in fully inclusive classrooms (Berrigan, 1994; Garbo, 1999) while other European countries varied in their levels of inclusivity.

One distinction that was clearly drawn in the 1990s regarding inclusive education was the difference between *integrated* and *inclusive* education. During the 1990s, models of integrated education began to arise and were subsequently criticized (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1997). While some scholars defended placement options in which students spent part or all of the school day away from the regular classroom (Crockett & Kaufman, 1998), others claimed that excluding children from the regular education curriculum based on arguments of appropriateness infringed on the student's civil right to education (Biklen, 1992; Taylor, 2001). Furthermore, integrated education systems, in which students

pass in and out of the regular classroom at varying times during the day, met criticism for being *fragmented* and lacking the holistic school experience that non-disabled students experience (Davern, Sapon-Shevin, D'Aquanni, Fisher, Larson, Black, & Minondo 1997, 33).

Although the terms *integrated* and *inclusive* education have sometimes been used interchangeably (Mariga & Phachaka 1993), both EFA and *Salamanca Statement on Principles, Policy, and Practice in Special Needs Education* (UNESCO, 1996) specifically call for *inclusive* education as the best practice for students with disabilities. Inclusive education, as opposed to integrated education, has a focus on whole-school systems change on a global level.

#### *Inclusive education in the Global South*

Special needs education is a relatively recent phenomenon in many countries of the Global South. Although there are exceptions (like Costa Rica, which has been providing special education services for nearly 60 years) (Stough, 2003), disability issues have historically been framed as a family issue (Ingstad & Whyte, 1995). Immediately after periods of colonization ended for countries in the Global South, formalized services for people with disabilities in many developing countries were minimal. Ingstad and Whyte (1995) posited that such services were difficult to justify for *non-productive* members of society when overall needs are so great.

Therefore, much of the service provision for people with disabilities in the Global South has been historically organized by religious groups (Kliewer & Fitzgerald, 2001), NGOs (Ingstad & Whyte, 1995), or charitable organizations within a given state (Csapo, 1987). Formalized services in the past (where available) were typically residential/custodial, and similar to historical state-run institutions in the Global North world (Kliewer & Fitzgerald, 2001). Rehabilitative services that were available were congregated in urban areas and largely inaccessible to the rural poor (Helander, 1992).

Coinciding with legislation and changing services for people with disabilities in the Global North, a new service delivery model was devised by the World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations organizations. This new model, called Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) sought to serve the masses of people with disabilities in the Global South through extension services provided by local community members (who received support from experts). The model employed local or expatriate specialists that taught local parents and health workers strategies to work with people with disabilities within the community, designing rehabilitation schemes that were locally relevant (Helander, 1992).

CBRs effects on global disability policy are far-reaching. Miles (1999) noted that the philosophical tenets of CBR (that specialist services in capital cities are inappropriate, both culturally and economically, for the majority of people with disabilities) led educationists to begin to question educational services that were overly-reliant on specialists and out of the reach of most children with disabilities. In the spirit of CBR, educationists that worked in the Global South began to question how to reach children with disabilities in a localized, appropriate way.

After a period of experimentation with integrated education, the global education community began to discuss and make policy proclamations around *inclusive* education (Mariga & Phachaka, 1993; Miles 1999; UNESCO 1990, 1994). For some countries, inclusive education was not a new phenomenon. As noted above, Costa Rica has been educating its children with disabilities for nearly 60 years. Costa Rican teachers and parents provided services inclusively simply because the infrastructure of the nation did not allow for children in the mountains to access specialist services. Pakistan (and presumably many countries), however, delivered what Miles and Miles call *casual integration* (1993, 210). This was especially true in rural areas where parents simply sent children to school and they were included as best as possible. In areas where educational understandings of disability were scant, students either assimilated into school or dropped out.

Inclusive special needs education, a specific attempt to meet the needs of students with disabilities, is a somewhat recent phenomenon for many countries in the Global South. Many countries instituted policies during the era of EFA and *Salamanca*, but research on inclusive special needs education in general is still emerging in the Global South.

While research is in its early stages, there have been several promising developments relating to inclusive education in the Global South. Much of the promising research discusses how inclusive education fits into existing educational models, thus decreasing resistance from local entities. Finding a

*fit* between what exists and what is new has been found to be effective in both organizational (Stacy, 1992; Wheatley, 1994) and educational literature.

Commenting on the fit between local educational needs and inclusion, Stubbs (1997) posited that poverty (while a detriment to overall services) may be a catalyst for inclusive special education services. Inclusion is often borne out of a lack of alternatives of service provisions for people with disabilities (Stough, 2003). When highly-trained professionals are absent, communities (including parents, teachers, and extended families) become disability experts (Miles 1998). Stubbs (1997) lists as examples the Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR) and Lesotho, two of the poorest countries in the world, that are now implementing inclusive education with very little formalized support.

In other countries, inclusive education appears to match locally constructed understandings of education. In China, for example, kindergarten and pre-school classes are developmental and less competitive than upper levels of education, therefore, inclusive education efforts have begun during these years (Callaway, 1999; McCabe, 2003). In Viet Nam and Lao Peoples Democratic Republic, inclusive practices appeared to mesh well with socialist ideologies (Stubbs, 1997; Villa, Muc, Ryan, Thuy, Weill, & Thousand 2003). In Africa, Botswana has gradually moved away from its center-based model by using special education centers as resource centers to support regular schools but maintaining some services at centers (Abosi, 2000). This satisfies both inclusion advocates and stakeholders interested in maintaining centers.

Other countries included disability services as part of reforms for overall educational improvement. Overall educational improvement is the ultimate objective of inclusive education. The Republic of South Africa, for example, began reform of special education along with its overall education system after apartheid. In the days pre-dating the first democratic elections in South Africa, special education scholars speculated that inclusive education would coincide with more systemically inclusive education (Naiker, 1993; Nkabinde, 1995). Such was the case, as South Africa included children with disabilities as one of many sub-groups that were to have renewed access to the general education curriculum (Republic of South Africa Department of Education, 2003).

From a practical perspective, inclusive education streamlines the number of sub-systems in a national education system. When all students are expected to succeed within the context of one national curriculum, there does not need to be multiple levels of governance over educational systems. At the same time, if national curriculum is deemed to be the path through which children gain knowledge and become participative citizens, undercutting that curriculum for particular students represents a barrier to the most basic public service provided to children.

Trinidad and Tobago (T&T), the southernmost country in the Caribbean chain of islands, has been wrestling with issues of access and excellence for several decades. In 2007, the Ministry of Education's Student Support Services Division (SSSD) outlined how Trinidad and Tobago would create an inclusive system of education that provided seamless support for Trinbagonians from early childhood to postsecondary education. According to its 2007 paper *Understanding Inclusive Education in Trinidad and Tobago*, the SSSD stated that an inclusive education system:

*involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures, and strategies, with a common vision...and conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular education system to educate all children...ensuring that all citizens from all backgrounds are prepared to participate in and contribute to the development of a modern skill-based economy*

(Trinidad and Tobago Ministry of Education, 2007).

Of particular concern to the Trinidad and Tobago (T&T) Ministry of Education are students who have learning challenges associated with cognitive or sensory impairments. Within education literature, children with these characteristics are often labeled *disabled*. The term *disability* has both a stigmatizing effect on children and provides quick information to service providers about a student's challenges. For the purposes of this article, the World Health Organization's definition of disability best sums up the outlook of the T&T Ministry of Education. According to the World Health Organization (2001), disability is an interaction between limitations in a person's sensory, physical, or cognitive functioning and the features of that person's society. For example, a person might have challenges due to sensory, cognitive, or physical characteristics, but those challenges may either be exacerbated or minimized by societal actions. In the case of T&T's Ministry of Education, there is an awareness that students may have visual, sensory, learning, psychological, behavioral or other

challenges, but the focus on inclusive education is to remove or minimize barriers to learning caused by inaccessible pedagogy, inappropriate expectations, or environments with physical barriers.

The notion of educating students with disabilities in general education classrooms – and providing the services such students need in a *seamless* education system follows global norms moving toward inclusive education. The Ministerial focus on inclusive education is a logical next step in special needs education in T&T. Like many countries around the world, T&T's historical roots for special needs education lie in services provided by philanthropic and religious organizations. To fill the void in centralized services, the University of Sheffield (UK) partnered with local teacher organizations to provide Diplomas in Special Needs Education in the 1980s (Adams, 2006). Other local universities (such as the University of Trinidad and Tobago) also began offering special needs education coursework as part of their Bachelor of Education coursework. Further teacher development workshops in the 1990s sponsored by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) provided teachers with a broader understanding of special needs education (Adams, 2006).

Building on these initiatives, T&T's inclusive education in focus (i.e., merging services for all students and creating universally accessible classrooms) presented new era in student service and support. This era, which seeks to bring together previously segregated models of service delivery, required new knowledge about where strengths and needs lie in regard to educating all Trinbagonian students together. Previous knowledge development would be used as a basis for finding ways to educate all students in inclusive environments. The research reported in this article and other studies were part of a large information-gathering effort by the T&T Ministry of Education designed to guide policy direction from over the next ten years. The trajectory for Trinidad and Tobago in the years to come is to establish inclusive primary and secondary environments (beginning with a focus on early childhood and primary education). According to Cambridge, Thomas, and Huggins (2006) the ultimate goal is to create a system whereby all schools, from early childhood to postsecondary, are accessible to all students, including students with disabilities.

#### *Overview of Research*

Data from this study were derived from a national survey conducted by the consulting firm Miske Witt and Associates for the Trinidad and Tobago Ministry of Education. The aim of the survey was to solicit broad-based perspectives on teacher knowledge and attitudes about inclusive education. Teachers were asked to provide feedback on Likert scales for three main broad areas of their work – their students, their experience and preparation, and the types of support they receive.

### **Method**

#### *Sample*

For this study, the entire *population* of Trinbagonian teachers was surveyed. At the request of the Trinidad and Tobago Ministry of Education, surveys were distributed to all primary, secondary, and special schools in the country. According to a national database, there are 8,000 teachers employed in each of these capacities. Approximately 8,000 surveys were distributed to all districts on the island of Trinidad and to Tobago. District education offices were responsible for both the distribution and collection of survey instruments. During analysis, teachers from special schools were sometimes left out. The rationale for leaving special school teachers out of analyses was that there is a small population of special schools in Trinidad and Tobago, compared to mainstream schools, where inclusive education would take place. Descriptive analyses indicated that special school teachers were generally quite knowledgeable about disabilities, but reported hesitancy to support inclusive education policy. The remaining data were analyzed from primary and secondary education sites. The response rate was relatively high (nearly 25%) and distributed evenly across districts. Education supervisors, however, noted that the time the survey was distributed was near the end of the school year, so participation could have been improved with better timing of distribution. In addition, lower response rates were noted from Tobago, which received its surveys several days after districts in Trinidad due to logistical complications.

#### *Instrument*

As noted above, data for this study were derived from a survey instrument. To ensure data were trustworthy, several levels of review were implemented prior to the survey's release. First, a team of educators familiar with inclusive education in international settings constructed the survey. Items were based on specific information requests from Trinidad and Tobago's Ministry of Education in relation to teacher perspectives and experiences with inclusive education. Once items were agreed upon, high

ranking officials from the T&T Ministry of Education's Student Support Services Division reviewed the document for content and tone. After Ministry review, a small segment of public school teachers piloted the instrument to ensure that all items were comprehensible and culturally appropriate. This group of teachers provided qualitative feedback on items. In total, teachers responded to 51 items across three domains: information about students, information about the teacher (including attitude and knowledge), and information about levels of support experienced by teachers. Within each domain, there were items that asked for factual information (e.g., *In my classes I have \_\_\_ students with diagnosed visual impairments*) and professional opinions (e.g., *I feel I receive a \_\_\_ level of support from community groups*). Among these items were general demographic items such as: subject taught, number of students taught, certification, years of experience, sex of teacher, level of school taught (e.g., primary, secondary, special), and location of school (e.g., urban, rural). For the purposes of analysis, all teachers were included. The rationale for this inclusion was Trinidad and Tobago's policy of universal secondary education. Because of this policy, all teachers are expected to meet the needs of all students and would likely have experience with a variety of students. As with all self-report instruments, there may be a tendency for teachers to rate their own behaviors or perspectives differently than an external observer. For this reason, the Ministry of Education required a broader set of instruments to be used for its report (specifically, focus group interviews with students and classroom observations). At this time, however, only survey results are available for public reporting.

For each item, forced choice responses were selected in order to minimize the range of possible data available for analysis. The authors of the survey chose ordinal, rather than continuous variables, in order to create circumstances that would more likely produce normal distribution of responses. Some of the survey data were originally analyzed for the government-commissioned study while others were analyzed specifically for this manuscript. Permission to re-analyze and publish survey data were granted from the Trinidad and Tobago Ministry of Education Student Support Services Division. This division underwrote the original special needs education study that informed this manuscript.

#### *Analysis*

Two phases of analysis were conducted. The first phase examined descriptive statistics in order to better understand the current educational state of affairs in Trinidad and Tobago. By examining mean scores from particular items, we were quickly able to get a sense of the day-to-day classroom experiences of teachers. Results from these preliminary analyses are reported below. The second set of analyses aimed to predict where strengths and deficits were present in T&T's teaching force in regards to implementing inclusive education. For the latter set of statistics, an examination of data distribution was first conducted in order to provide an indication of robustness of data. Regression analyses were conducted on three characteristics of teachers (general education certification, special education certification, and years of experience) to determine which factors may predict implementation of inclusive education strategies. In all cases, self-reported behaviors were the dependent variables against which teacher characteristics were measured. The statistical model of  $Y = a + b_1X_1 + b_2X_2 + b_3X_3 + e$  where  $Y$  = the dependent variables (described in *Results* section,  $X_1$  = General Education Certification,  $X_2$  = Special Education Certification, and  $X_3$  = Teacher Experience) was used for all analyses.

### **Results**

#### *Descriptive Results*

Results reported below represent a small sub-section of results from the larger survey. The particular results reported were given highest priority based from governmental offices. One area of concern was teacher attitudes. The first section reports descriptive results from the survey, focusing on the percentage of teachers who answered in a particular way. These results highlight the general status of education in Trinidad and Tobago. Descriptive statistics are followed by regression analyses of selected variables that relate directly to teacher preparation.

#### *Perceptions of Disability (Information about Students)*

In the survey, teachers were asked about the number of children they perceived in their classrooms had specific types of disabilities. The survey asked teachers to note the number of students with a variety of diagnosed disabilities in their classes and to then note the number of students they suspected had disabilities in their classes. A description of each disability, based on consultation from two Trinbagonian School Psychologists, was included in the survey.

Results indicated relatively high numbers of both diagnosed and suspected disabilities. For example, 37% of teachers had at least one student with a diagnosed disability in their class. Beyond those

diagnosed, 75% of teachers suspected that they had at least one additional student in their class who was not diagnosed.

Likewise, 27% of teachers said they had at least one student with a diagnosed visual impairment in their class, and 41% of teachers suspected they had at least one additional student with a visual impairment who was undiagnosed. Only 10% of teachers had at least one student with a diagnosed hearing impairment in their classes, but an additional 28% felt they had students with undiagnosed hearing impairments in their classes. Likewise, 10% of respondents said they had at least one student with a physical impairment in their class and an additional 13% felt they had at least one student with an undiagnosed physical impairment in their class. Thirty-seven percent (37%) of teachers had at least one student with a diagnosed learning disability in their class, while 71% of teachers believed they had at least one student with an undiagnosed learning disability in their classes. Another category of concern for teachers was students with cognitive impairments. Thirty-seven percent (37%) of teachers had a student with a diagnosed cognitive impairment in their classes and an additional 64% felt they had students with undiagnosed cognitive impairments. Incidence of students with emotional/behavior disorders were the most prevalent. Fifty-nine percent (57%) of teachers had at least one student with diagnosed emotional/behavior disorder (E/BD) and 61% of teachers felt they had at least one student with an undiagnosed behavior disorder. Table 1 (below) demonstrates the percentage of teachers who had documented and perceived students with disabilities in their classes.

**Table 1**  
**Percentage of Teachers Reporting Students with Diagnosed and Suspected Disabilities**

<i>Disability Category</i>	<i>1-2 (students)</i>	<i>3-4</i>	<i>4-5</i>	<i>6-7</i>	<i>8-9</i>	<i>10 or more (students)</i>
Vision Diagnosed	19%	5%	2%	1%	1%	
Vision Suspected	33%	9%	4%	4%	1%	1%
Hearing Diagnosed	8%	1%	1%			
Hearing Suspected	19%	6%	2%	1%	1%	1%
Learning Diagnosed	17%	8%	4%	3%	2%	2%
Learning Suspected	32%	17%	8%	5%	3%	3%
Cognitive Diagnosed	18%	8%	5%	2%	2%	2%
Cognitive Suspected	32%	15%	5%	3%	3%	3%
Emotional Diagnosed	29%	13%	5%	2%	3%	3%
Emotional Suspected	33%	13%	6%	4%	3%	2%

*Attitudes about Inclusive Education (Information about Teachers)*

When asked if all children could learn, 73% of teachers completely agreed and another 23% of teachers agreed. In addition, 97% of teachers surveyed agreed that all children belong in school. Likewise 98% of teachers (78% of them strongly agreed) that there should be high standards for all students. Ninety-nine percent of teachers (93% of them strongly) agreed that the psychological well-being of all students contributes to their success in school. Table 2 demonstrates the level of general agreement for including all students in educational experiences.

**Table 2**  
**Percentage of Agreement About Statements About Educating All Students**

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>
All children can learn	73%	23%
All children belong in school	73%	24%
There should be high standards for all students	78%	20%
Children's psychological well-being contributes to school success	93%	6%
Students with special needs can become productive adult citizens	45%	50%

Survey data, however, indicate that teachers' beliefs in their students' capacity to become productive adults is slightly less unanimous than the data above. Although 95% of teachers believed that students with special needs can become productive adult citizens, only 45% strongly agreed.

*Knowledge of Inclusive Education (Information about Teachers)*

Inclusive education classrooms often require teachers to collaborate with multiple professionals and to assess students in a variety of ways. Trinbagonian teachers nearly unanimously reported an understanding of these capacities. For example, 98% of teachers strongly agree (100% of teachers

agree overall) that collaboration is an important facet of inclusive teaching. Likewise, 95% of teachers report that they use a variety of assessment types for monitoring student progress.

Some teachers, however, reported that they lack knowledge of other aspects of inclusive education. For example, only 42% of teachers reported that they well understand what is necessary to teach in an inclusive classroom (another 44% of teachers said they *somewhat* understand what is necessary). Likewise, only 27% of teachers claimed they had *a lot* of experience with communicating curriculum to parents (57% of teachers claimed they had *some* experience). Only 6% of respondents had *a lot* of experience with curriculum differentiation (42% had *some* knowledge). Finally, only 4% of teachers had *a lot* of knowledge about Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) (22% had *some* knowledge). Table 3 represents the level of knowledge teachers have relevant to various aspects of inclusive education.

**Table 3**  
**Areas of Perceived Strength and Weakness of Teachers**

<i>Competency</i>	<i>Strong Agreement</i>	<i>Agreement</i>	<i>Weak Agreement</i>	<i>Disagreement</i>
Collaboration	98%	2%		
Varied Assessments	95%	5%		
Understanding Inclusive Ed.	42%	44%	10%	4%
Communicating Curr. w/parents	25%	57%	17%	1%
Curriculum Differentiation	6%	42%	30%	22%
IEP Experience	4%	22%	24%	50%

#### *Information about Levels of Support for Teachers*

The final domain was the support that teachers received relevant to their teaching. Teachers were asked if they received *high*, *adequate*, or *low* level of support from the following stakeholders: parents, community or religious organizations, colleagues, business organizations, district representatives, and the national government. Numerically, a score of 2 indicated a high level of support, a score of 1 indicated an adequate level of support, and a score of 0 indicated a low level of support.

Statistical Mean scores indicated that teachers reported dissatisfaction with the level of support they received from parents (Mean score = .5833), community or religious groups (Mean score = .3799), local businesses (Mean = .2001), or the national government (Mean = .4238). The only stakeholders from which teachers reported adequate support were their colleagues in their schools (Mean score = 1.0943). Table 4 demonstrates teachers' perceptions about support they receive from different stakeholder groups.

**Table 4**  
**Perceived Level of Support for Teachers**

	<i>Low</i>	<i>Adequate</i>	<i>High</i>
Local businesses	X		
Community groups	X		
National government	X		
Parents	X		
Other teachers		X	

#### *Regression Analyses*

In an effort to clarify policy prerogatives, a second series of analyses were conducted to determine the types of teachers who might be targeted for inclusive education professional development activities. We analyzed several self-report statements from teachers to determine if there was a correlation between teacher demographics (specifically, teacher certification and experience) and self-reported knowledge in a particular area. As reported above, results on this item skewed toward a lack of knowledge about inclusive education (Mean score = .77, Standard Deviation = .77, Skewness = .921). We found a positive correlation between understanding the tenets of inclusive education and special education certification ( $B = .21$ ,  $p < .001$ ), although 79% of the explained variance of understanding inclusive education is still not clarified by this analysis).

A stronger correlation ( $r = .235$ ) existed between teacher certification or experience and knowledge of curricular differentiation. As noted above, only 26% of teachers claimed to have a high degree of knowledge about curriculum differentiation, and data skewed toward lack of knowledge (Mean = 1.67, Standard Deviation = .903, Skewness = .113). Those that reported such knowledge could be predicted

by special education certification. There was a significant correlation between teachers with special education certification and knowledge of curriculum differentiation ( $B = .539, p < .001$ ).

A still statistically significant, but weaker correlation existed between teacher experience and knowledge of curriculum differentiation (Mean =  $B = .076, p < .001$ ). Teacher experience ranged from a few months to over 40 years, but experience levels were normally distributed (Skewness = .131). In this case, self-reported knowledge of curricular differentiation correlated with years of teacher experience (the more experience, the more knowledge of curricular differentiation).

The final analysis we conducted examined IEP knowledge (Mean = 2.24, Standard Deviation = .856, Skewness = -.699). Results for knowledge about IEPs were very similar to results for curriculum integration ( $r = .236$ ). In this case, special education certification was a predictor of knowledge about IEPs ( $B = .55, p < .001$ ). Teacher experience was also a predictor of IEP knowledge, though to a lesser extent ( $B = .058, p = .001$ ). With over 50% of the explained variance explained by special education certification (and over 60% of the explained variance explained by teacher experience), a clearer picture exists about the teachers who claimed they had *a lot* of knowledge about the IEP process. In all likelihood these teachers were certified in special education. Those who were not special education certified were likely to be experienced. Table 5 provides a synopsis of all statistically significant correlations.

**Table 5**  
**Predictors of Teacher Knowledge About Inclusive Education**

<i>Variable (Knowledge)</i>	<i>Significant Predictors</i>	<i>Non-Significant Predictors</i>
Inclusive Education	SNC	EXP, GEC
Curriculum Differentiation	SNC, EXP	GEC
IEP Knowledge	SNC, EXP	GEC

SNC = Special Needs Certification, EXP = Experience, GEC = General Education Certification

### Discussion

In many ways, some of the findings in this study were expected. We can likely expect that teachers with certification in special education will have more knowledge about the specific skills and processes associated with teaching students with disabilities. On the other hand, important information emerged from this study in terms of planning for next steps of inclusive education. The most poignant finding is that teachers with general education backgrounds have relatively little knowledge and understanding of the needs of special needs students. As noted above, this is expected, but somewhat problematic. Teachers who are specialists are a necessary resource in schools that accommodate students with special needs. It is the general education teachers, however, who spend the majority of time with these students during a school day.

Knowledge in and about special needs is important for two reasons in inclusive environments. First, general education skills need to have an understanding of how to accommodate special needs learners in order to maximize the learning of these students in class (and to minimize distractions to other students that may be introduced when students perennially struggle). Second, and perhaps more importantly is that the vast majority of special needs may at first be *invisible*. Teacher data from Trinidad and Tobago demonstrates that there are many students suspected of having learning or behavioral disabilities. Whether or not these students will eventually go through a full evaluation and are officially labeled as a special needs student is unknown. What is known is that the student is currently *on the radar* of the teacher because he/she is demonstrating behaviors or is struggling to learn. A specialist may help provide specific programming for a child with a specific diagnosis, but general education teachers are still responsible for the day to day teaching of the students they see who have myriad learning challenges.

As the world moves forward in its pursuit of inclusive education, nations like Trinidad and Tobago represent the next phase of implementation. For the past 30 years, nations have worked to define, promote, and gain attitudinal acceptance of inclusive education practices. The next generation of inclusive education policy and practice is using data (such as national surveys, classroom observations, assessment data, etc.) to drive policy implementation. In the case of Trinidad and Tobago, a clear next step is to examine its general education teacher preparation program while at the same time building on the strengths of Trinbagonian teachers, such as their self-reported collaborative spirit and

understanding of classroom assessment. The process of including students with diverse abilities into general education classrooms provides opportunities for all students to access and succeed in their national curriculum. Challenges of *how* to best implement inclusive education will always exist, but examples such as these from Trinidad and Tobago demonstrate that next steps can be carefully planned, and based on local considerations and contexts.

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