

BAHAMIAN TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INCLUSION AS A FOUNDATIONAL PLATFORM FOR ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Norrisa Newton
Yvonne Hunter-Johnson
Beulah L. Gardiner-Farquharson
Janelle Cambridge
The College of the Bahamas

Despite the paradigm shift globally regarding the adoption of inclusive education, teachers still have varying preconceived misconceptions about its successful implementation and practices in the general education classroom. This qualitative study focused on teachers' perception of adapting inclusive education policies and procedures in The Bahamas and its implication for adult education. The participants of the study were teachers (n=18) in the K-12 educational system in The Bahamas. The findings from this study revealed that there was a vast misconception of the definition of inclusive education. Secondly, five overarching factors that influenced teachers' perception of inclusive education were (a) lack of training, (b) insufficient resources and (c) administrative support, (d) teachers' attitudes and (e) inadequate/misconception of information regarding inclusive education. The study further provides an overview for implications for education and training of general education teachers charged with the responsibility of accommodating children with disabilities in regular/inclusive classrooms.

Inclusive education is on the global agenda to attract the involvement and collaboration of all stakeholders. The support for this action is being guided through the principles of The Salamanca Statement (1994). Legislation by national, regional, and international agencies is aggressively enacting policies and laws to support and promote the education of all children in the general education setting. Teachers are perceived to be an integral component in the implementation of inclusive education (Haskell, 2000). Research communicates that teachers' perception are the key to the success of inclusive programs, as they are critical to the process of including students with disabilities into regular classes. It is important to examine the attitudes of educators toward the inclusion of students with disabilities into regular settings as their perceptions may influence their behavior toward and acceptance of such students (Hammond & Ingalls, 2003). The success of inclusive programs may be at risk if regular classroom teachers hold negative perceptions toward the inclusion of students with disabilities (Van Reusen et al., 2001). Negative perceptions of inclusive education may become obstacles, as general education teachers attempt to include students with disabilities (Cawley, Hayden, Cade, & Baker-Kroczyński, 2002).

The most salient trend in education involving individuals with disabilities is that of inclusion. Teachers are regarded as a key component in the educational system. However, instruction in the general education classroom is influenced by the individuals being taught. The need to sensitize educators to this perplexing issue is paramount to the success of all students. If teachers were more receptive toward inclusion, student achievement, socialization, skill acquisition, and access to education would increase for students with disabilities. Findings from Andrews and Frankel (2010) recognized that inadequate training and skills required to teach students with special needs are important in the implementation of inclusive education programs.

On this premise, the study was conducted to examine teachers' perception of inclusive education and its implication for adult education. For the purpose of this study, adult education encompasses continuing education with a focal point on professional competence and best practices. It is envisaged that the findings from this study will have significant impact on adult education as it relates to inclusive

education The Bahamas. Moreover, it will inform policy makers of designing a framework to deliver inclusive education programs necessary to increase the achievement of students in regular classes. The results will also inform college administrators of practical internship experiences that would enhance the preparation of our future teachers. Finally, the study aims to sensitize readers about teachers' perception on inclusive education and the implication for adult education.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that acts as a foundational platform for this study is Andragogy (Knowles, 1980). The term andragogy, which is influenced by humanistic education, is defined as *the art and science of helping adults learn* and is often utilized to distinguish the difference between education of adults and children (Davenport, 1987). There have been a myriad of discussions regarding the concepts of andragogy and pedagogy and its application and implication to adult learning. Likewise, much dialogue defining andragogy as being teacher centered compared to pedagogy which is learner centered (Hunter-Johnson and James 2012; Shipton, 2011). The andragogical approach, which is reflective of the andragogical orientation, is grounded on four assumptions developed by Knowles (1980) that are often categorized as the principles of adult learning. Such assumptions are grounded on an individual's maturity. Knowles (1980) believed that as an individual matures: (1) their self-concept moves from one of being a dependent personality towards being a self-directed human being; (2) they accumulate a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasingly rich resource for learning; (3) their readiness to learn becomes oriented towards the developmental task of their social role and (4) their time perspective changes from one of postponed application of knowledge to immediacy of application and accordingly their orientation towards learning shifts from one of subject-centredness to one of performance-centerdness (1980, pp. 44-45).

The theory of andragogy which delineates principles of adult learning is most appropriate for this study as it provides an underpinning cementing the professional/continuing education of all general educators. Further, it provides effective strategies to ensure successful development and implementation of an adult learning environment.

Literature Review

Educating students with disabilities alongside their peers in general education classrooms has increased significantly over the past decade, affecting all aspects of schooling (Ainscow & César, 2006; Cook, Cameron, & Tankersley, 2007). Romi & Leyser's (2006) study argues that not only do teachers' perceptions of inclusive education affect inclusive practices, but the role of teacher educators in preparing new graduates to work in inclusive classrooms serve as a critical component in successful inclusion as well.

According to Cushner, McClelland, and Safford (2012), inclusive education refers to *the practice of including another group of students in regular classrooms: students with physical, developmental, or social-emotional disabilities, and those with chronic health problems* (p. 403). Since the idea of inclusive education is to provide whatever adaptations are needed in an effort to ensure that all students (regardless of their disability) can participate in all classroom experiences, and as much as possible, in the same manner as everyone else, the efficacy of inclusive educators' preparation for working in inclusive classes is of great importance.

The review of literature compares primary and secondary teachers' perceptions of inclusive education, in addition to explaining the factors that influence these teachers' perceptions. The review comprises three sections: The first section provides a cross section of recent studies that have examined primary teachers' perceptions of inclusive education and the influencing factors. The second section highlights recent studies that have examined high school teachers' perceptions of inclusive education, in addition to the influencing factors as expressed by these teachers. Finally, the review of literature explores the importance of adult education programs for primary and secondary teachers towards the accommodation with children with special needs in the regular education inclusive classroom.

It is crucial to ascertain teachers' perceptions of inclusive education so that policy makers can address existing deficiencies in an effort to ensure successful inclusion of all students with special needs. It is equally important that adult education programs are designed to adequately train teachers to operate efficiently within inclusive classroom settings.

Inclusive Education Research

Utilizing the assumption as a backdrop that the successful implementation of any inclusive education policy is largely dependent on educators being positive about it, extensive research has sought to examine teachers' perceptions towards the integration and, more recently, the inclusion of children with special educational needs in mainstream primary and secondary schools. (Ali, Mustapha & Jelas, 2006; Loreman, Forlin, & Sharma, 2007; Ross-Hill, 2009; Jerlinder, Danermark, & Gill, 2010; De Boer, Pijl, & Minnaert, 2011). Findings of these studies were parallel in terms of the influencing factors of the teachers' perceptions of inclusive education.

Research conducted by Ali, Mustapha & Jelas (2006) and Loreman, Forlin, & Sharma (2007) revealed that general education teachers were unwilling to participate in the practice of inclusive education due to insufficient training in special education. The teachers surveyed in these studies expressed concerns regarding their lack of knowledge about, and experience with, various disabilities. In comparison to the findings of Ali, Mustapha & Jelas (2006) and Loreman, Forlin, & Sharma (2007), Ross-Hill (2009) found that many high school teachers were more apprehensive towards the practice of inclusion, when taking into consideration the amount of special education training they had received. Teachers who reported higher levels of special education training, or experience in teaching students with disabilities were found to hold more positive perceptions toward the practice of inclusive education. Research in several countries (Forlin, 2006; Romi & Leyser, 2006; Winter, 2006); Ashman & Elkins, 2009; Hunter-Johnson, Newton & Cambridge-Johnson, 2014) shows that many school teachers have limited skills to teach in inclusive classrooms; this, consequently, translated into serious concerns on the part of teachers to be engaged in inclusive education settings.

Primary Teachers' Perceptions of Inclusive Education

David & Kuyini (2012) support the view that teachers' negative perceptions towards disability lead to low expectations from their students which result to decreased learning opportunities and low academic performance. Avramidis and Norwich (2010) discovered that teachers who have no direct experience with integration, have very negative perceptions whereas those with more experience with disabled people adopt more positive perceptions towards integration. According to Avramidis and Norwich (2010), training in special education appeared to lessen pre-service teacher's concerns regarding inclusive education. Subban and Sharma (2006) support that teachers who reported having undertaken training in special education were found to hold more positive perceptions about implementing inclusive education. Loreman, Forlin and Sharma (2007) reported similar findings which showed that teachers' perceptions of inclusive education were negatively impacted by their training, or lack thereof, in special/inclusive education.

In contrast, Ali, Mustapha, and Jelas (2006) found that in general, teachers held positive attitudes towards inclusive education. According to the results of their study, the teachers agreed that inclusive education enhanced social interaction and inclusion among the students and thus minimizing negative stereotypes on special needs students.

Influencing Factors of Primary Teachers' Perceptions

An international study of four countries by Loreman, Forlin and Sharma (2007) found that factors such as close contact with a person with a disability, teaching experience, knowledge of policy and law, and confidence levels had significant impact on student teachers' attitudes. Research regarding teachers' perceptions of inclusive education has provided varied results. Some studies suggest perceptions toward inclusive education were strongly influenced by the nature of disabilities (Avramidis and Norwich, 2010), while other studies have indicated that teachers were more positive about including only those children whose characteristics were not likely to require extra instructional or management skills on the part of the teacher (Hwang & Evans, 2011).

Numerous studies revealed that the teachers' reluctance towards the practice of inclusive education was due to a lack of training in the area of inclusive education (Muhanna, 2010; Kilanowski-Press, Foote & Rinaldo, 2010; Bradshaw and Mundia, 2006). Bradshaw and Mundia (2006) assert that teachers may welcome all learners but feel *ill-equipped* at times to deal with the diverse range of needs. Muhanna (2010) concurs that teachers' feelings of inadequacy are potential barriers to inclusive education.

High School Teachers' Perceptions of Inclusive Education

Several studies have shown that primary and high school teachers share similar perceptions regarding inclusive education; some negative, and some positive as well (Dupoux, Wolman, & Estrada, 2005;

Barco, 2007; Ross-Hill, 2009). Barco's (2007) findings suggested that secondary teachers held both positive and negative perceptions toward inclusion; these perceptions varied when it came to issues of making accommodations and modifications for disabled students, whether part time or full time in the inclusive classroom setting. Similarly, Wiggins (2012) found a significant relationship between high school teachers' perceptions of inclusion and classroom setting. This researcher concluded that teachers with experience in teaching within inclusive classrooms held more favorable perceptions toward inclusive education than those teachers who did not teach in inclusive classrooms.

In comparison to Ross-Hill (2009), Dupoux, Wolman, and Estrada (2005) found high school teachers' perceptions of inclusive education to be more negative than those of primary teachers towards mainstreaming students with learning disabilities. However, there did not seem to be any significant association between grade levels taught and teacher perceptions toward inclusive education. Bradshaw (2003) and Barco (2007) concur that teachers' feelings of inadequacy are potential barriers to inclusive education. Barco (2007), in agreement with Ali, Mustapha, and Jelas (2006), found high school teachers' perceptions toward inclusive education to be more positive, alluding to the practice as being beneficial. Both studies emphasize, however, that the success of any inclusive education program depends upon the perceptions of the teachers in the classroom.

Influencing Factors of High School Teachers' Perceptions

A willingness on the part of teachers to support all children in the mainstream classroom, including children with special needs, is the hallmark of inclusive education. According to Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden (2010) high school teachers have diverse conceptualizations of inclusive education, and some challenges to the success of implementing such a practice include issues of knowledge, training, and resources.

As with the study conducted by Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden (2010), De Boer, Pijil, and Minnaert (2011) also suggested that educational environment-related variables, such as the availability of physical and human support, were consistently found to be associated with attitudes to inclusion. Findings revealed by Slavica (2010) concur with those of Hwang & Evans (2011), which found that a lack of support by administrators influenced negative perceptions in teachers towards inclusive education. As with primary teachers, researchers (Gaad & Khan, 2007; Kalyva et al., 2007) have found that insufficient teacher preparation and training pose a hindrance to the process of inclusion at the high school level as well.

Importance of Adult Education Programs for Teacher Preparation in the Inclusive Classroom

Underlying inclusive education is the assumption that the general classroom teacher has certain knowledge and understanding about the needs of different learners, teaching techniques and curriculum strategies. According to Florian and Rouse (2009), *The task of initial teacher education is to prepare people to enter a profession which accepts individual and collective responsibility for improving the learning and participation of all children* (p. 596).

Studies suggest (Bailleul et al., 2008; Florian and Rouse, 2009) that the quality of the teacher contributes more to learner achievement than any other factor. Similarly, Reynolds (2009) concur with Bailleul et al., (2008) in proposing that the need for 'high quality' teachers equipped to meet the needs of all learners becomes evident to provide education for an inclusive society. Reynolds (2009) argues that it is the knowledge, beliefs and values of the teacher that coincide to create an effective learning environment for all learners, making the teacher a critical influence in education for inclusion and the development of the inclusive school.

A major component of an effective educator involves understanding how adults learn best (Lieb, 2008). The role of teachers today in inclusive education requires extensive background knowledge about various types of learners and their specific needs. As research indicates that the more preparation prospective teachers receive, the more likely they are to remain in the profession (Darling-Hammond, 2003); this further reinforces the need for effective teacher education which takes account of the increasing diversity of needs in today's classrooms.

According to Bourdon and Roy (2004), significant challenges confronting adult educators include a diverse adult population presenting a variety of educational needs, and the establishment of new training programs stemming from the education reform in common basic education, i.e., programs that are based

on a change in adult education practices, including the diversification of adult education approaches and the classification of disciplines.

These challenges, according to Saint-Laurent (2007), raise a question concerning teachers' ability to face these changes, in terms of their training and past experience. Similarly, Bourdon and Roy (2004) found that the initial and continuing training in adult education, especially for student teachers in the field of special education, posed an even greater challenge on its own. The problem of adult education is treated from the standpoint of the training of future teachers of adult learners, as well as that of adult learners said to have *low schooling* and whose characteristics lead to a reflection on the content and training devices offered to their current and future teachers (Molina & Villemagne, 2011).

The education of teachers and school personnel is the primary way of ensuring that evidence-based teaching strategies are applied when working with students with special needs (National Research Council, 2001). Teachers have the advantage of directly being able to identify each student's specific needs and goals; when they have the knowledge of evidence-based practice in the classroom, they are better equipped to match the strategies to the individual needs of each student served (Simpson, 2005), thereby ensuring success for all students.

Researchers suggest (Bailleul et al., 2008; Reynolds, 2009) that the knowledge constructed by future teachers is acquired not only in the formal context of initial training, but also in the field, in contexts other than the purely academic setting. In this frame, the implementation of practical activities involving the application of diverse knowledge has its place in a training curriculum for inclusive educators.

With the current nature of teacher preparation programs and their reported limitations in equipping teachers for inclusion, factors associated with teachers' attitudes such as those identified in the present research (i.e., discomfort, fear, teaching experience, knowledge of policy and law and uncertainty) may be important considerations in programs (Loreman, Forlin and Sharma, 2007). The McKinsey Report (2007) examined data from 25 school systems and concluded that the high-performing school systems *get the right people to become teachers; they develop these people into effective instructors, and they put in place systems and targeted support to ensure that every child is able to benefit from excellent instruction* (p. 37).

Schools and districts must determine how to provide the most effective training prior to placing para-educators with students in general education classrooms and how to provide ongoing supervision and support to allow para-educators to provide quality services. Providing release time for special educators to initially acquaint para-educators with the student before they enter the classroom may represent one way to do this. Scott, McGuire, & Shaw (2006) suggest that the Universal Design for Instruction is an avenue by which adult instruction in post-secondary education may be facilitated; it requires that faculty anticipate student diversity in the classroom and intentionally incorporate inclusive teaching practices.

Another approach for training general educators in inclusion, which may help to redress the disjointedness of general and special education, calls for infusing special education content and curriculum into general education courses (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2010). Providing all teachers with disability awareness training and methods for making school subjects more inclusive (especially physical education) would greatly facilitate a more equitable learning environment.

The review of literature assumes that teacher education for inclusive education should prepare teachers to engage with learner diversity arising from age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnic, cultural, linguistic or religious background, socioeconomic status, disability or special educational needs. The research findings lead to the recommendation that teacher training institutions emphasize teaching skills that would enhance teacher trainees' capacity to support students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms.

Methods

Study Setting

Within the archipelago of The Bahamas, The Ministry of Education is the premier institution exclusively responsible for the educational system. Throughout the 700 plus islands and cays, there are approximately two hundred and six schools in the school system; one hundred, sixty-one are fully maintained by the government and forty-five are private schools. However, initially, there were minimal special education schools.

There has been much discussion within The Bahamas, regarding special education and by extension, the all inclusive classroom. However, it was not until the establishment of The Education Act (1962) that special education and special services for children with special needs were formalized and delineated (Stubbs, 2008). Since then, there has been much progress regarding the advancement of specialization and the all inclusive classroom. Such initiatives includes but are not limited to: (a) in 1994, The Bahamas commitment as one of the 92 governments that agreed to provide inclusive education according to the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action which advocate inclusion (b) In 2002 the launching of the National Commission on Special Education which revealed a need for 5000 plus children with special needs in need of special services. This was a pivotal discovery which led to the decision that children with special needs would no longer be denied access to general education classrooms (Stubbs, 2008). (c) The government of The Bahamas in conjunction with the Inter-Development Bank begun a myriad of initiatives promoting the inclusion of special education in the mainstream education setting. At the preschool and primary level, there was the introduction of a special education unit that was dedicated specifically for children with special needs dependent upon their level and type of disability while still allowing them to be amalgamated in mainstream school. (d) Most recently, 2013 the government of The Bahamans sponsored its first graduate cohort of special education teachers specializing in Literacy and Inclusive Education at the local college.

Study Design and Data Collection

The research methodology used in this study was a qualitative phenomenological design which was reflective of semi structured interviews with participants using preset questions outlined by the researchers. Data was collected from 18 public school teachers (ten elementary and eight secondary) throughout the New Providence District in The Bahamas. The interviews were tape-recorded and immediately transcribed. Analysis was conducted through the process of open coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin 2010). Working within the research structure provided by the research objectives and the conceptual framework, transcribed data was qualitatively analyzed through open coding to establish themes and main concepts. Recurring topics in the text were recognized as themes and sub-themes. A table of central themes and sub-themes was constructed. This process allowed a deeper understanding and explanation of issues that were being studied. To ensure greater validity and reliability a peer reviewer read through the data to ensure themes and categories corresponded with the research questions and were properly analyzed. The guiding research questions were: (1) What are teachers' perceptions towards Inclusive Education? (2) What are some possible factors that influence teachers' perception towards inclusive education? (3) What are some recommendations for promoting adult education practices for inclusive education teachers at the elementary and secondary school level?

Participants

Andrews and Frankel (2010) asserted that convenience sampling is the apposite sampling technique regarding the feasibility and access to participants. On this premise, convenience sampling was employed. A group of teachers ($n=18$) were selected all of which met the following inclusion criteria: must be employed in the public school system as a teacher (primary or secondary), a minimum of five years teaching experience, currently posted at a school within the New Providence District and both genders. All participants were informed of their rights regarding the Institutional Review Board.

Findings

There were 18 participants, 12 females (67%) and 6 males (33%) that were interviewed for this study ($n=10$ primary school teachers and $n=8$ secondary school teachers). The educational level of the participants varied including Bachelors Degree 13 (72%), Masters Degree 4 (22%) and one Doctorate Degree (5%). Professional years of service varied from 5 years (17%), 6-10 years of service 5 participants (28%), 11-15 years of service four participants (22%), 16-20 years of service 5 participants (28%) and one participant that had over 20 years of service (5%). See Table 1 for participants' demographic information.

Research Question 1. What are teachers' perceptions towards Inclusive Education?

The results from the study revealed conflicting perceptions towards inclusive education at a primary and secondary level. At the primary level, the participants were very candid with their responses. However, while most of the teachers (60%) demonstrated negative attitudes towards the implementation of inclusive education within primary schools, some of the teachers (30%) displayed mixed feelings about the practice, and one teacher (10%) firmly support the practice of inclusive education. In general, the teachers viewed the idea of inclusive education as an extremely difficult feat due to the myriad deficiencies within the public education system, which, in their opinion, would impact the success of

inclusive education. Teachers reported that at this present time, *it is not feasible for the government of The Bahamas to venture into such an undertaking because there are too many concerns in dire need of immediate resolution* (Hunter-Johnson, Newton and Cambridge, 2014).

Table 1. Participants Demographic Information

Variable	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Males	6	33
Females	12	67
Educational Level		
Bachelors Degree	13	72
Masters Degree	4	22
Doctorate Degree	1	5
Years of Service		
5	3	17
6-10	5	28
11-15	4	22
16-20	5	28
>20	1	5

N=18

Contrary, at the secondary level, revealed that teachers at the high school level in The Bahamas demonstrated moderately positive attitudes toward inclusion and was consistent with previous studies conducted internationally (Campbell, Gilmore, & Cuskelly, 2003; Gal, Schreur, & Engel-Yeger, 2010; Monsen, & Frederickson, 2003). The majority of participants (62.5%) made statements which revealed that they had positive views toward inclusion. One participant expressed that, *I think it is an exceptional idea because children can learn from each other and teachers can collaborate on best practices*. Subsequently, some teachers (25%) welcomed the idea of inclusion, but exhibited mixed feelings toward the idea of inclusive education. The teachers believed that certain factors were necessary for inclusion to be effective. Additionally, one teacher commented, *I believe inclusive education can be embraced in all stages. If disabilities are categorized and some of the less severe disabilities can initiate the process then we can gauge how effective it is*. Subsequently, one participant (12.5%) perceived inclusion as negative and in irate voice expressed, *I did not train to teach students with special needs because I don't have the patience*. This comment suggests that training will play a critical role in how teachers' perceive inclusive education.

Research Question 2. What are some possible factors that influence teachers' perceptions towards inclusive education?

The data revealed that there was consistency among the responses of the primary and secondary school in regards to the factors which influenced their perceptions towards the implementation of inclusive education (a) lack of teacher training, (b) insufficient resources, (c) limited administrative support, (d) teachers' attitudes, and (e) inadequate /misconception of information regarding inclusive education.

Lack of Teacher Training

Training plays a critical role in the effective implementation of inclusive education. Much discussion was noted regarding the lack of training of teachers to effectively teach an all inclusive education class and its implication not only regarding the students but for the teachers. When questioned, one teacher stated *I am not trained to teach special needs students; I have a difficult time teaching normal students*. Another participant responded, *teachers need to be trained about the different disabilities and strategies or interventions. Further, they would need to be trained on how to develop a curriculum for their students that would speak to the students' needs and assessment*. Training needs concerns of teachers were not only focused on their training with regard to their ability to teach but also to identify appropriate instructional techniques and assistive learning resource as a result of proper training to ensure learning is evident. One participant stated, *If I am not trained to the point of being able to identify*

various disabilities in students, how can I be expected to adapt my teaching methods to cater to the needs of students with various disabilities?

Insufficient Resources

Both primary and secondary teachers identified insufficient resources as a critical influential factor towards teachers' perception of inclusive education. It was also noted that sufficient resources are available i.e. assistive technology this would aid regarding those teachers who may have a negative perception towards inclusive education. One participant stated, *lack of resources...teaching [the] regular student is a challenge because the school lacks sufficient supplies. Could you imagine lacking the resources to teach students with special needs that require more resources? It would be very strenuous.* Many participants emphasized the importance of resources for both teachers and students for the effective implementation of inclusive education. However, many concerns were also noted regarding proper facilities. One participant expressed that *If inclusive education is implemented there should be facilities to accommodate the students that may have physical or mental handicaps and resources for the education of those students to be a success.* Another participant concurred with that response and stated that *I am not against inclusive education. However, I feel that the facilities and resources would need to be in place.*

Insufficient funding by the Ministry of Education and/or the private sector was also revealed as a resource lacking. Participants were adamant that to ensure the successful implementation of inclusive education, adequate funding must be evident. One participant stated, *funding by government to support inclusive education is necessary because it serves as the foundation for educational programs to be successful.* Another teacher responded, *finances play an important role as it is the overall capsule for inclusiveness. Without material, assistance, and proper accommodation, we will never be able to properly provide the level of instruction required for inclusion of students within the normal classroom setting.*

Limited Administrative Support

There was a general consensus that a lack of administrative support regarding inclusive education was a negative influential factor as it relates to inclusive education. Teachers, both primary and secondary, indicated that there was not sufficient support received from inclusive education teachers from administrators not only at the school level but the district level. The teachers also alluded that if support was consistent throughout the public schools system, more teachers would view the practice of inclusive education more positively.

Teachers' Attitudes

Several participants identified teachers' attitudes (negative) as a challenge in implementing inclusive education in the public schools system. One participant stated *Developing an intrinsic desire within teachers to willingly participate in such programs is a challenge.* Another participant indicated that *their salary is not sufficient to be considered an inclusive education.*

Inadequate/Misconception of Information Regarding Inclusive Education

It was noted that misconceptions regarding teachers' definition can be an influential factor regarding inclusive education. When questioned regarding the definition of inclusive education, the responses varied and in some instances were extremely vague. A participant blatantly indicated that she did not completely understand the meaning on inclusive education. Another said, *It [the meaning] is not clear; it needs more clarification.* The other teacher reported, *I'm not certain of its meaning.* This signifies, therefore, that these teachers would be responsible for teaching an all inclusive classroom but were not equipped with a proper understanding of inclusive education.

Research Question 3. What are some recommendations for promoting adult education practices for inclusive education teachers at the elementary and secondary school level?

The results from this revealed unanimously that the government of The Bahamas needs to provide some adult education programs for teachers with responsibility for an all-inclusive classroom. When questioned regarding their recommendations, the participants indicated that the program should be mandatory, free to all teachers, administrators and policy makers (elementary and secondary), conducted at a national and international level, provided in the format of in-service awards which allow teachers to focus solely on the knowledge being learned regarding inclusive education, initiatives (financial and non-financial) should be provided to participants, and should be documented for evaluation purposes.

Discussion

Implications for Education and Training

The research is meaningful and contributes to educational practices and theories regarding inclusive education and the development of adult education programs for all teachers in The Bahamas. First, the study revealed that there are misconceptions regarding the definition of inclusive education which evidently has a rippling impact on teachers' perception of inclusive education and their willingness to accept such initiatives within the educational system. This misconception can be influenced by the fact that in The Bahamas there is no operational definition of inclusive education from the policy level. However, during the 2003 – 2005 National Commission on Special Education's (NCOSE) deliberations throughout the islands, much discussion was held regarding this ideology (Bahamas Government NCOSE Final Report, 2005). However, the Government of The Bahamas to date has not revised The Education Act of The Bahamas and did not articulate policies to support inclusive education practices at any level. NCOSE did however make suggestions for the endorsement of a national definition of Inclusive Education, which may be found in draft procedural documents at the national education agency's headquarters. Since this national initiative, the Government of The Bahamas has made significant progress towards the overall improvement of special education with limited strides towards inclusive education as a national practice.

Second, the research revealed five overarching factors that influence teachers' perception of inclusive education as: (a) lack of training, (b) insufficient resources and (c) administrative support, (d) teachers' attitudes and (e) inadequate /misconception of information regarding inclusive education.

Again lack of training for teachers and administrative support, points directly to critical needs in education and training. Teachers identified the lack of a body of knowledge specific to the nature and needs of students with special needs: categorical identification of students with disabilities; needs assessments for planning; curriculum adaptation and development; intervention strategies; thus the negative attitudes towards the adoption of inclusive education in the Bahamian school system. Furthermore, the perceived lack of support from administrators on the local school and district level also served as a deterrent to attitudinal change and acceptance of differences.

Teachers resoundingly expressed the need to provide in-service adult education and training opportunities, to address issues related to inclusive education. Further suggestions regarding mandatory participation for teachers, administrators and policy makers were also articulated.

To this end, much emphasis is needed regarding the education of all teachers and administrators towards the development and implementation of a unique inclusive education model for The Bahamian education system based upon best practices.

Presently, The Government of The Bahamas is scheduled to enact national disability legislation and to revise its Education Act, which will include a definition of inclusive education. These legislative initiatives will provide the clarity needed by educators to assist them in their efforts to plan for children with special needs in the regular education environment. Subsequently, it would then be imperative to develop adult education and training programs to address inclusive education training for the Bahamian education system at the national level. Such programs should be free and mandatory for all teachers, both pre-service and par educators within the government and private sector. However, to ensure teachers value the program and perform at their utmost best, their performance should be evaluated and factored into their annual performance appraisals as an influential factor for their promotion.

Further, this program should be guided by the principles of andragogy as asserted by Knowles (1990). The major objectives of the educational program should be to emphasize teaching skills that would enhance teacher trainee's capacity to support students with disabilities and those who are gifted and talented, in inclusive classrooms. On this premise, the program should also be reflective of best practices both nationally and internationally regarding curriculum selection and adaptation, instructional techniques, strategies for modification of lesson, classroom management techniques and inclusion of teaching manipulatives for an all-inclusive classroom. The program should further call for inclusive education teachers to be well versed with methods for infusing special education content and curriculum into general education courses.

Lastly, it is recognized that teachers play a fundamental role in shaping the overall attitudes towards all students in the classroom, those with and without special needs. Therefore, this educational program

should also have a component that focuses on redesigning pre-service teacher training programs and modifying paraprofessionals' attitudes and perception with the view of facilitating more positive feelings in the interactions between teachers and students with special needs, and in particular those with disabilities. By addressing these factors in pre-service and par educator teacher training, it is suggested that the classroom practices of present and future teachers would ultimately be modified. Such emphasis would also address any preconceived anxiety regarding teaching in an all-inclusive classroom.

To ensure such adult education programs are successful, it is paramount that all the relevant resources to ensure the program is successful are available. This would include proper training facilities, instructional resources, assistive technology and materials necessary for implementation of an inclusive education classroom. It further calls for proper modifications to be made to schools for students with physical disabilities and special furniture.

Support is also a crucial factor with the implementation of the adult education programs for inclusive education programs. Such support should originate at the school level and extend to the Ministry of Education. As a support mechanism and to ensure quality control both the inclusive environments and the inclusive education programs should be evaluated annually. Further, proper policies and procedures need to be implemented by the Ministry of Education.

In an attempt to ensure there is consistency regarding expectations of the programs, proper communication practices and in an attempt to exhibit administrative support, educational sessions can be presented and supported in seminars, workshops, conferences and official communication from the Ministry of Education. Additionally, educators can participate in short courses, certificate and diploma programs all geared towards competency-based training in partnership with local colleges and other appropriate education agencies for quality assurance and certification purposes. In keeping with Knowles' (1980) adult learning principles that adults are practical, the training should include fieldwork experiences, and engagement in extensive hands-on problem solving activities for real life application (The Clinical Educator's Resource Kit, 2005).

Conclusion

Educators whether mainstream or inclusive educators are considered to be the foundation of all societies. On this premise, this study was conducted to determine teachers' perceptions of implementing inclusive education. Further, to develop adult inclusive education programs for mainstream/general educators, reflective of best practices. The study revealed there are misconceptions regarding the definition of inclusive education which evidently has a rippling impact on teachers' perception of inclusive education and their willingness to accept such initiatives within the educational system. Secondly, the research revealed five overarching factors that influence teachers' perception of inclusive education as: (a) lack of training, (b) insufficient resources (c) administrative support, (d) teachers' attitudes and (e) inadequate /misconception of information regarding inclusive education. The findings from this study are extremely beneficial and would assist in crafting a national definition of inclusive education for The Bahamas and influencing the curriculum design and program development for mainstream/general education teachers. There is also, much implication for adult inclusive education training for in-service and pre-service teachers. This study also serves as a platform for future research in inclusive education in The Bahamas.

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