

Teachers' Concerns about Inclusion in Mainstream Early Childhood Development in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

This study examined teachers' concerns about inclusion in mainstream Early Childhood Development (ECD) in Mashonaland West educational province of Zimbabwe. Embedded within the "core expertise" of inclusive pedagogy, the study draws on a sample of twenty-one mainstream ECD teachers purposively selected from the educational province. Entrenched within qualitative phenomenological methodology, individual semi-structured interviews, non-participant observation and document analysis were conducted to collect data. The study used a constant comparative approach of data organisation with continual adjustment throughout the analysis. Participants had systemic concerns about inclusion in mainstream ECD including the lack of physical facilities, time, clear and specific policy, finance, support services and flexible curricula. Participants also had teaching related concerns about inclusion including stakeholders' negative attitudes, large class sizes, inadequate professional preparation and the nature and severity of disabilities. The institutionalisation of individual and institutional capacity building strategies could optimise inclusion in mainstream ECD in Zimbabwe.

Keywords: *Children with disabilities; concerns; Early Childhood Development, inclusion; mainstream teachers, Zimbabwe*

Introduction

Since the worldwide adoption of inclusion in education in 1994, educational systems are experiencing fundamental changes including a significant increase in the diversity of school populations (Bhatnagar & Das, 2013; Florian, 2012; Voss & Bufkin, 2011), in particular, mainstream classrooms which are significantly heterogeneous (Ballard, 2012; Hornby, 2012; Kisanji & Saanane, 2009). Studies reveal that, despite the adoption of inclusion internationally, its practice varies between and within nations (Ballard, 2012; Naicker, 2006; Singal, 2008), including states, provinces and districts. Zimbabwe is no exception as there are significant differences between urban, semi-urban, farm and rural settings and educational provinces with per capita incomes significantly higher than those where the vast majority of the population live in abject poverty (Zimbabwe National Statistical Agency, 2013). In addition, there are districts in Mashonaland West educational province that have not significantly benefitted from the post-colonial national economic reform (Education for All, 2015).

Despite the global adoption of inclusion, there are reservations regarding whether the mainstream classroom can provide optimum quality education to children with disabilities (Majoko, 2005; Yadav, Das, Sharma & Tiwari, 2015). Also, how to ensure such provision in response to the individual needs and abilities of children with disabilities is a decisive issue (Florian & Linklater, 2010; Pantic, 2015; Voss & Bufkin, 2011). It is widely acknowledged that segregated education, that was primarily institutionalised across the world during the eighties and early nineties, did not yield the desired results (Ince, 2012; Miles, 2009; Rouse, 2008). Despite the earlier common misconception of inclusion as the commonplace physical placement of children with diverse learning needs in mainstream classrooms, more recently, researchers postulate that it is much more than such a placement (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Majoko, 2005; Slee, 2010). Inclusion embodies the quality of the school experience of children and the extent to which they are assisted to learn, achieve and participate fully in the life of the school (Ballard, 2012; Florian & Rouse, 2009; Friend & Bursuck, 2012).

Overall, inclusion depends on several factors including necessary revisions and changes in policies, regulatory systems and administrative structures and the availability of materials and resources (Chireshe, 2013; Naicker, 2006; Yadav et al., 2015). It is, in particular, dependent on teachers' positive attitudes, knowledge, skills, competencies and understandings (Ballard, 2012; Bhatnagar & Das, 2013; Florian, 2014). As inclusion is complex and demands fundamental changes from teachers (Florian & Spratt, 2013; ; Kershner, 2007; Rouse, 2008), its successful and effective practice is contingent on their willingness to accept children with special needs (Hornby, 2012; Pantic & Florian, 2015) and their self-efficacy and beliefs (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Slee, 2010; Voss & Bufkin, 2011). Teachers' concerns therefore require systematic addressing before establishing the foundation of a successful inclusion programme (Agbenyega, 2007; Kim & Rouse, 2011; Oswald & Swart, 2011).

Inclusion in mainstream Early Childhood Development in Zimbabwe

In 1994, Zimbabwe actively adopted inclusion in mainstream ECD in compliance with civil rights movements as expressed in several international human rights agreements, charters, conventions and declarations (Education for All, 2015). These include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United

Nations, 1989), the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006) (Mandina, 2012; Mpfu & Shumba, 2012; Mugweni & Dakwa, 2013). Although inclusion takes several forms, raising questions about what constitutes model practice, what counts as evidence of such practice and how it can be known (Artiles & Kozleski, 2015; Florian, 2014), its fundamental premise is that schools are about belonging, nurturing and educating all children irrespective of their differences including ability, language, gender, culture, ethnicity and class (Florian, 2012; Pantic & Wubbels, 2010; Singal, 2008). The philosophy is entrenched in the transformation of schools into communities that respect and celebrate differences, the changing of the curriculum to meet child diversity, the framing of policies and practices to be inclusive of all families and the design of professional preparation and development to systematically address the needs of all children (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Horny, 2012). Inclusion is embedded in addressing and responding to the individual needs of all children including those with disabilities through increasing access, acceptance, participation and achievement in learning, cultures and communities and reducing exclusion within and from education (Florian & Linklater, 2010; Pantic & Wubbels, 2010; Voss & Bufkin, 2011).

Despite the broad focus of inclusion, comparable to other countries including the United States of America (Artiles & Kozleski, 2015), Ghana (Agbenyega, 2007), South Africa (Naicker, 2006), Botswana (Chhabra, Srivastava & Srivastava, 2010), Tanzania (Kisanji & Saanane, 2009), Zambia (Miles, 2009) and Uganda (Okwaput, 2006), in Zimbabwe (Mutepfa, Mpfu & Chataika, 2007), the philosophy tends to focus on children with disabilities and special needs. In Zimbabwe, there is an estimated 600 000 children of school going age with disabilities (Deluca, Tramonta & Kett, 2013). These include speech or language impairments, mental retardation, visual impairment, hearing impairment, autism, orthopaedic impairments, emotional disturbances, traumatic brain injuries, specific learning disabilities or other health impairments (Chireshe, 2013). These children have developmental challenges in one or more of the domains of communication, cognitive development, physical development and social or emotional and adaptive development and are guaranteed special needs education programmes and services (Mpfu & Shumba, 2012; Musengi & Chireshe, 2012).

In pursuance of inclusion in accord with the global world, Zimbabwe institutionalised several supportive initiatives (Chireshe, 2013). These include the passage of several pro-inclusion policies and legislation including the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment Number 20 of 2013 section 75, the Education Act of 1987 as revised in 2006 (Mugweni & Dakwa, 2013) and recommended practice circulars including the Secretary's Circular number P36 of 1990, the Secretary's Circular number 12 of 2005 and the Director's Circular number 7 of 2005 (Mutepfa et al., 2007). These mandate the right of all children, including those with disabilities, to access, participation and achievement in mainstream ECD (Mandina, 2012; Mpfu, Kasayira, Mhaka, Chireshe & Maunganidze, 2007). Also, through mandating the right of access and participation by individuals with disabilities to programmes, services and settings available to those without developmental delays, the Disabled Persons Act of Zimbabwe of 1996 supports inclusion in mainstream ECD (Majoko, 2005; Musengi & Chireshe, 2012). The most recent Principal Director's Circular Number 20 of 2011 reveals that, out of 5 896 public primary schools in Zimbabwe, 3 610 have ECD classrooms which are inclusive of both children with and without disabilities (Mugweni & Dakwa, 2013). The aforementioned initiatives have brought inclusion in mainstream ECD to the forefront of the education reform movement in Zimbabwe. With

adequate resource allocation and management, coupled with addressing teachers' concerns about the philosophy, effective implementation of these initiatives can change the lives of children with disabilities in the country (Mandina, 2012; Mushoriwa & Muzembe, 2011; Mutepfa et al., 2007). The following section presents teachers' concerns about inclusion.

Teachers' concerns about inclusion

Studies reveal several categories of teachers' concerns about inclusion including classroom-related concerns such as behaviour problems (Donnelly & Watkins, 2011; Forlin & Chambers, 2011), large class sizes (Bhatnagar, 2006; Oswald & Swart, 2011) and negative attitudes of educators and others (Friend & Bursuck, 2012; Huang & Diamond, 2009). Meeting the educational needs of children with and without disabilities (Oliver & Reschly, 2010; Pantic & Florian, 2015) and designing and implementing curriculum and instructional adaptations (Kim & Rouse, 2011) are also teachers' classroom-related concerns about inclusion. Further, teachers' classroom-related concerns about inclusion include evaluation, grades and diplomas (Friend & Bursuck, 2012) and the social acceptance of children with disabilities (Gok & Erbas, 2011; Ncube, 2006; Pantic & Florian, 2015).

Similarly, inappropriate infrastructure (Bhatnagar, 2006; Donnelly & Watkins, 2011), lack of trained teachers (Agbenyega, 2007; Singal, 2008), financial limitations (Secer, 2010; Friend & Bursuck, 2012), non-availability of teaching materials and equipment (Chhabra et al., 2010; Oswald & Swart, 2011), unavailability of specialised personnel (Okwaput, 2006) and lack of support staff (Oliver & Reschly, 2010) are teachers' school-related concerns about inclusion.

Teachers' self-related concerns about inclusion include the lack of training in special education (Bhatnagar, 2006; Naicker, 2006), teacher stress (Friend & Bursuck, 2012), incompetence to teach children with different disabilities (Flecha & Soler, 2013; Forlin, Keen & Barrett, 2008; Gok & Erbas, 2011), inadequate knowledge and skills about inclusive practices (Oliver & Reschly, 2010) and difficulty in keeping all the children with and without disabilities focused during the class (Donnelly & Watkins, 2011; Flecha & Soler, 2013; Huang & Diamond, 2009).

Additionally, teachers' management-related concerns about inclusion include time and scheduling (Gok & Erbas, 2011), additional workload and responsibility (Ballard, 2012), lack of support from school administrator/principal (Kim & Rouse, 2011), difficulty in inclusion of children with disabilities in co-curricular activities (Majoko, 2005; Chireshe, 2013) and negative attitudes of parents of children without disabilities (Florian, 2012). Further, teachers' academic achievement-related concerns about inclusion include the overall academic standards of the school (Kim & Rouse, 2011) and academic achievement of children without disabilities (Pantic & Wubbels, 2010).

The foregoing studies reveal that, unless the stage is set beforehand, it may be impossible to realise effective and successful inclusion in mainstream ECD. Without the provision of appropriate information and opportunities for teachers to acquire experience working with children with disabilities, initiatives to optimise the quality of inclusion in mainstream ECD may be futile (Pantic & Florian, 2015; Secer, 2010). Teacher professional preparation and development for inclusion is indispensable prior to its adoption (Friend & Bursuck, 2012; Voss & Bufkin, 2011). The design and implementation of professional preparation and development

programmes that meet teachers' needs requires a systematic collection of information about their concerns about inclusion (Ince, 2012; Kershner, 2007). Although the above cited studies that were identified in other countries can provide educational policy makers and administrators with a framework for addressing teachers' concerns about inclusion in mainstream ECD, a systematic exploration of the issue is needed in the Zimbabwean context. The subsequent section presents the rationale for the study.

Rationale for the study

Experiences of other countries with inclusion reveal that systemic changes in education is a complex process particularly when such changes are mandated by "external forces" and demand a redefinition of roles and responsibilities on the part of the implementers of these changes (Ince, 2012; Pantic, 2015; Slee, 2010). Regarding the Zimbabwean context, initiatives by the central government since 1994 have made it incumbent on all schools to adopt inclusion in mainstream ECD. Nevertheless, research reveals that although the implementation of an educational innovation such as inclusion might occur at state, provincial and district levels, the most fundamental of these must occur at the classroom level (Agbenyega, 2007; Artiles & Kozleski, 2015; Kim & Rouse, 2011). Similarly, other researchers reveal that it would be naïve to assume that an enabling legislative framework for inclusion would guarantee the development and implementation of inclusive education programmes (Bhatnagar & Das, 2013; Deppeler, 2012; Florian, 2012). These researchers assert that the fundamental factors for the success of inclusion are the positive attitudes, skills, competencies and understandings of classroom teachers who are the direct implementers of inclusive education programmes. In the same vein, the beliefs of teachers regarding acceptance of inclusive practices will influence the extent to which they will execute that duty (Forlin et al., 2008; Gok & Erbas, 2011; Hornby, 2102).

Research consistently reveals that it is the willingness of teachers in mainstream classrooms that ensures successful and effective inclusion in education (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Mandina, 2012; Mpofo & Shumba, 2012). In contrast, the negative perceptions of teachers in mainstream classrooms regarding inclusion are barriers to its effective practice (Alkin, Demir, Sucuoglu, Bakkaloglu & Iscen, 2014; Okwaput, 2006; Voss & Bufkin, 2011). It is therefore critical to investigate and consider teachers' concerns about inclusion in mainstream ECD. Although studies consistently reveal that much of the success of inclusion depends on teachers' willingness to implement it, the researcher's literature review did not yield any studies that systematically examined teachers' concerns about inclusion in mainstream ECD. This study was carried out to fill such a void in literature particularly in Mashonaland West educational province of Zimbabwe. As Zimbabwe actively adopted inclusion in 1994 and is continuously institutionalising supportive initiatives, it seemed timely therefore to carry out this study to ascertain teachers' concerns about inclusion in mainstream ECD in one of the country's largest educational provinces, Mashonaland West educational province. Specifically, this study addressed the following research question:

What are the concerns of teachers about inclusion in mainstream ECD classrooms in Mashonaland West educational province of Zimbabwe?

Theoretical framework

The “core expertise” of inclusive pedagogy which is entrenched in teachers’ engagement in inclusive practices at various levels including classrooms (Black-Hawkins & Florian, 2012; Florian, 2012), collaborative actions to address issues requiring responses beyond the classroom (Florian & Spratt, 2013) and professional and social networking seeking to optimise social justice (Slee, 2010) informed this study. Substantive engagement of families in decisions about education (Flecha & Soler, 2013), sharing responsibility within school for the outcomes of all children, planning strategies to address exclusion and underachievement and collaboration with other professionals (Friend & Bursuck, 2012; Oliver & Reschly, 2010) also underpins the “core expertise” of inclusive pedagogy. This body of knowledge constitutes the core expertise (the knowing, doing and believing) entrenched in the inclusive pedagogical approach (Pantic & Florian, 2015).

The “core expertise” of inclusive pedagogy is further embedded in the commitment of teachers to enhance the achievement of all children whilst safeguarding the inclusion of those who are vulnerable to exclusion and other forms of marginalisation (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). It requires that teachers shift their focus from “most” and “some” children to “everybody” embedded within a socio-cultural framework on pedagogy (Deppeler, 2012) where the complexities inherent in providing for differences among children are subsumed within a set of interrelated ideas about them, learning, teaching and the curriculum (Pantic & Florian, 2015). The “core expertise” of inclusive pedagogy is grounded in open-ended views of the potential of all children and teachers’ extension of the range of opportunities that are availed to everyone in the learning community of the classroom and school (Black-Hawkins & Florian, 2012). In the Zimbabwean context, inclusion in mainstream ECD requires that teachers account for difference as a fundamental component of human development in any conceptualisation of learning (knowing). Teachers must believe and be convinced that they are qualified and capable of teaching all children (believing) and that the profession is required to develop creative new ways of working with others (doing) (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011).

Methodology

This study used a multiple-case study design entrenched in qualitative research methodology. Qualitative research methodology is utilised when information about an investigated phenomenon is limited and when the study seeks to explore and describe experiences through identifying themes and developing theories grounded in informants’ perceptions of events (Corbetta, 2003; Grbich 2007). The methodological approach of this study was embedded in phenomenology since it solicited participants’ practices, experiences and views. Phenomenology seeks to comprehend daily life situations of individual informants (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007; Creswell 2009). Such constituted individual teachers’ concerns about the inclusion of children with disabilities in their mainstream ECD classrooms.

Study sites

Zimbabwean public mainstream primary schools are clustered into 10 educational provinces (Education for All, 2015). This study was conducted in selected public mainstream primary schools in Mashonaland West educational province. The medium of instruction in these schools

is English (Zimbabwe National Statistical Agency, 2013). Nevertheless, local languages, including Shona and Ndebele, are also used in teaching and learning to facilitate ease of understanding (Education for All, 2015).

Sampling

Mashonaland West educational province constitutes 702 public mainstream primary schools in districts, namely, Sanyati, Zvimba, Makonde, Kariba, Mhondoro-Ngezi, Hurungwe and Chegutu (Zimbabwe National Statistical Agency, 2013). These schools are categorised into rural, peri-urban and urban with regards to their grouping (Education for All, 2015). To understand teachers' concerns about the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream ECD, one public mainstream primary school, which included children with disabilities, was selected from each of these settings from the respective districts using snowball sampling. Snowball sampling was utilised because of the scarcity of potential informants due to the limited number of children with disabilities who are included in mainstream ECD classrooms (Cohen et al., 2007; Creswell, 2009; Pierce, 2008). The sample comprised 21 public mainstream primary schools. Recruitment of teachers was executed through contacts with Mashonaland West Provincial Education offices. The researcher distributed information letters to contacts in the designated schools and, following the head teacher's approval of the study, to teachers who were perceived to meet the inclusion criteria for participation.

The inclusion criteria for teachers to participate in this study included at least a mainstream undergraduate ECD teaching qualification, five years of experience in teaching children with disabilities in mainstream ECD classrooms and that they were, at the time, a teacher in a mainstream ECD classroom in Mashonaland West educational province. The adequacy of the sample was determined when no relevant or new data emerged regarding categories which were well developed with respect to their properties, dimensions and variations (Corbetta, 2003; Pierce, 2008; Silverman, 2009). A total of 21 mainstream ECD teachers, made up of 16 females and five males, one per participating school, constituted the sample for this study. Each of the participants taught in mainstream ECD classroom which had a maximum of 48 five- to six-year-old children. Each mainstream ECD classroom included, at most, seven learners with disabilities. Participants were between 34 and 56 years old with six to 16 years of teaching experience. In addition to primary school teachers' diploma with specialisation in ECD, 14 participants had post-graduate qualifications in mainstream education. The researcher carefully gained entry into the schools, sampled participants, established good relations and maintained ethical protocols.

Procedure

The researcher sought and secured ethical approval from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education of Zimbabwe, Mashonaland West Provincial Education offices and the head teachers of participating primary schools prior to the execution of this study. Thereafter, informed consent was secured from the participants before conducting the study. The foregoing parties were provided with letters which constituted a brief, clear, concise and precise research profile to secure ethical approval and informed consent. Each participating institution constituted a unit and reflected a distinct context of mainstream ECD culture and setting (Corbetta, 2003; Creswell, 2009; Grbich, 2007). The researcher discerned similarities and differences from these educational settings to explore teachers' concerns about inclusion in mainstream ECD

classrooms. The researcher executed 21 individual interviews with participants, one interview per participant. Since an individual interview allows the participants to express their opinions and perceptions about a studied phenomenon in their own words (Charmez, 2006; Creswell, 2009; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006), it is a fundamental instrument in soliciting data in qualitative research (Cohen et al., 2007; Grbich, 2007; Lewis 2003). To provide a framework for the interviews, but motivate participants to express their concerns about the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream ECD in mainstream classrooms, semi-structured individual interviews with open-ended questions were utilised. Semi-structured interviews assist the interviewer to ask questions about a phenomenon under investigation while allowing individual interviewees to elaborate their perspectives and experiences (Charmez, 2006; Cohen et al., 2007; Corbetta 2003). The interviews followed an individual in-depth semi-structured format that explored teachers' concerns about inclusion in mainstream ECD classrooms.

Although there was a degree of structure and organisation to the process because of the use of the interview guide, the approach was still flexible as context-specific questions were probed during the interviews. Demographic information, including years of teaching and additional teaching qualifications, was solicited from the participants. Participants' perspectives and experiences in inclusion of children with disabilities in ECD mainstream classrooms were probed. The individual in-depth interview questions were structured as follows: (a) Describe the length of time you have been teaching at ECD level and your professional training background; (b) Describe the children that you are experienced in including in mainstream classroom; (c) How do you experience the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream classrooms?; (d) What issues do you confront in the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream classroom?; (e) Kindly add anything else that we did not talk about regarding the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. On average, each individual interview lasted 90 minutes. All the interviews were carried out in English and were recorded with the consent of the participants. Tape recordings facilitated accurate collection of data and assisted the researcher to be more attentive to the individual participants. Individual interviews were carried out at participating schools at participants' proposed time schedules outside school hours.

The researcher also executed 21 non-participant classroom observations, one per participant per day which lasted 30 minutes on average. Non-participant classroom observations provided the researcher with the opportunity to observe participants during teaching and learning in mainstream ECD classrooms for disconfirmation or confirmation of data solicited from individual interviews. Non-participant classroom observations also assisted the researcher to establish the extent to which the verbalised concerns were in alignment with the expressions of the participants. Non-participant classroom observations were documented using an observation protocol. Data, on how the process, environment, product and content of inclusion in mainstream ECD classroom was managed, was recorded, based on the narratives of the participants. Participants filled a reflection form wherein they were interrogated on their unique concerns about the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. The researcher took reflective field notes using an observation guide. The researcher had also informal follow-up conversations with participants for clarity regarding their concerns about the inclusion of children with disabilities in their mainstream classrooms. The researcher further photographed facilities, activities and resources of study sites and analysed documents including teachers' scheme books, lesson plans, instructional materials, children's workbooks and education policy

documents. These documents served as sources for the triangulation of data. The study was conducted between January 2015 and October 2017.

Data analysis

The researcher and three critical readers, who were experts in qualitative research, triangulated data solicited from different settings, methods and sources in order to illuminate on emerging themes (Charmez, 2006; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006; Lewis, 2003). Individual participants' responses were compared within and across settings. The utilisation of a combination of individual interviews, document analysis, non-participant observation and informal follow-up conversations facilitated an assessment of degree of convergence and complementarity of study findings and elaborated on divergences between findings accumulated (Charmez, 2006; Cohen et al., 2007; Grbich, 2007). Whereas individual interviews aided understanding of the teachers' concerns in the process for inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream ECD classrooms, non-participant observations enhanced contextual understanding of the concerns in the practice of inclusion of these children. Individual interviews illuminated on non-participant observations and assisted in the validation of other non-participant observations. Identification of the research question, establishment of trends within and across all data, initial code generation, discerning similarities and differences for identification of the initial overarching themes, reviewing of themes, definition and renaming of themes and writing of the report comprised triangulation of data. The focus of the study informed data organisation and interpretation throughout the process. The primary themes that were identified after the preliminary analysis were presented to the participants for review. This motivated further discussions and added to the accumulated information, enhancing the trustworthiness of the themes.

Findings

Through analysis of interview transcripts, two themes emerged, namely, systemic concerns about inclusion and teachers' self-related concerns about inclusion.

Systemic concerns about inclusion

Ambiguity of policy and legislation

Eighteen participants were concerned about clear and specific policy and legislation on inclusion, as confirmed by these selected excerpts (pseudonyms used):

Because of lack of specific policy on inclusion in our country [Zimbabwe], we [mainstream teachers], specialist teachers, educational psychologists, social workers and parents at our school confront role conflict and role ambiguity in its practice. For instance, because of their professional preparation in School Guidance and Counselling, specialist teachers lack clarity whether it is within their professional jurisdiction to provide psychotherapy to children (Todo).

Mainstream education policy governs inclusion in Zimbabwe. This policy is not clear about its rationale. Hence, stakeholders including typically developing children and their parents, communities and most mainstream teachers do not support inclusion because of lack of understanding of its essence (Sengu).

We [mainstream teachers] lack legal accountability regarding inclusion because of ambiguity of policy and legislation. Inclusion or exclusion of learners with special needs primarily depends on our personal will rather than policy. The country [Zimbabwe] lacks clear and concise policy mandating quality education for all including learners with disabilities (Sona).

Documents on national policies and legislation revealed that the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream ECD classrooms was based on mainstream education policies and legislation, including the Zimbabwe Education Act of 1987 as revised in 2006, the Zimbabwe Constitution Amendment Act Number 20 of 2013 section 75 and the Principal Director's Circular Number 20 of 2011. The vision and mission statements of all participating schools were entrenched in mainstream education including the pursuit for academic excellence of typically developing children. Mainstream education policy and legislative framework, including whole-class approach to pedagogical content, process, environment and product informed all observed participants' inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. Consistent with the "core expertise" of inclusive pedagogy which is entrenched in shifting from "most" and "some" children to "everybody" (Black-Hawkins & Florian, 2012; Florian, 2012), participants' policy focus was embedded in responding to human differences in ways that include children rather than exclude them from what was ordinarily available in the daily life of the mainstream classroom.

Stakeholders' negative attitudes

Seventeen participants were concerned about stakeholders' negative attitudes towards inclusion, as confirmed in the following selected excerpts:

Stakeholders including parents, communities, the government and communities do not pool resources for inclusion because of negative attitudes towards people with disabilities. As a result, I lack human, material, financial and technological resources for inclusion in my classroom (Kake).

Children without developmental delays and their parents, communities, mainstream teachers and school administrators do not morally and materially support inclusion at our school. This is due to negative attitudes towards people with disabilities emanating from stigmatic cultural standards (Tsaru).

Individuals, organisations and institutions, including most mainstream teachers, parents of typically developing educands, mainstream schools and donors underestimate the abilities of educands with disabilities. Consequently, they perceive inclusion as a barrier to the achievement of typically developing educands (Tseu).

School documents, including attendance registers of stakeholders' meetings, showed that most parents, donors and government officials were absent from meetings on teaching and learning of children with disabilities but attended meetings on teaching and learning of typically developing children. All participating schools lacked disability friendly physical infrastructure including spacious doorways, classrooms, storerooms and toilets to accommodate children who used wheelchairs. In all participating schools, typically developing children were observed isolating

their peers with disabilities in pair, trio and group work activities in and out of classrooms, including academic assignments and games. Inconsistent with the “core expertise” of inclusive pedagogy which demands that difference must be accounted for as a fundamental component of human development in any conceptualisation of learning (“knowing”) (Florian & Linklater, 2010), stakeholders focused on the disabilities rather than the abilities of children.

Lack of physical facilities

Twenty participants were concerned about the lack of physical facilities for inclusion, as confirmed in the following selected statements:

All classrooms at our school are not disability friendly. They lack ramps and are not spacious enough for easy mobility of pupils who use wheelchairs. Our classrooms are not deaf-friendly because they lack acoustic environments to accommodate pupils with hearing aids (Taku).

Classrooms in most schools in the province are not spacious enough to set up quiet zones for learners with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Storerooms, classrooms and libraries of most schools are also inaccessible to learners with physical disabilities as they are meant for typically developing learners (Ndada).

Our school lacks physical facilities for inclusion of educands with disabilities. These include guidance and counselling offices, disability-friendly furniture and equipment including desks, computer hardware and software (Ndoga).

Schemes of work and lesson plans of teachers showed that they put children in large teaching and learning groups to facilitate their sharing of limited resources, including textbooks and desks. Teaching and learning groups of at least ten children were observed in classrooms in all participating schools. All participating schools lacked ramps to accommodate children who used wheelchairs. Inconsistent with the “core expertise” of inclusive pedagogy, which is premised on increasing participation and achievement of “all” children, including those with special educational needs (Florian & Rouse, 2009), the physical facilities of mainstream pedagogical settings were not conducive to learning for all, including those with disabilities, in the community of mainstream classrooms.

Time

Nineteen participants were concerned about time as regards inclusion as highlighted in the following selected excerpts:

I cannot meet the full range of needs of learners with disabilities because of my classroom time-table. It is fully packed with academic subjects (Famba).

My management of teaching and learning is in compliance with national standards and expectations. The teaching and learning of educands with disabilities is time-consuming as they need task analysis. Inclusion therefore interferes with my coverage of the content of the national curriculum and ultimate meeting of national standards and expectations (Tsaru).

The government mandates the teaching and learning of specific subject content per school term. Pupils with disabilities impede teaching of the specified content per term because they need much time to master concepts (Tok).

Schemes of work and lesson plans of teachers revealed that they covered subject specific content per school term in compliance with the national school curriculum and syllabi regardless of whether or not children mastered such content. All participants were observed following the time-tables of their classrooms. Inconsistent with the “core expertise” of inclusive pedagogy which is entrenched in perceiving difficulties in learning as dilemmas for teaching for innovative service delivery (Pantic, 2015), participants viewed such challenges as deficits in children.

Finance

All participants (21) were concerned about the lack of finance in inclusion, as highlighted in the following selected statements:

Nationally, schools lack finance to successfully practice inclusion. They cannot requisite inclusive teaching and learning material, human and technological resources (Demo).

Because of the national economic crisis, schools throughout the province cannot finance curriculum materials and resources for inclusion. Resultantly, they lack necessary inclusive teaching and learning resources (Tsetse).

At our school, we are short of finance to offset fixed and recurrent costs in inclusion. We are not able to meet the costs in effective maintenance of computer technology for inclusive teaching and learning (Nanzva).

Documents including school and classroom inventories revealed that all participating schools lacked finance to buy teaching and learning materials and resources including computer hardware and software for children with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. All the participating institutions lacked the finance to repair the limited computers that were available. All observed schools had inadequate materials and resources including chalk, door locks, chairs, tables and textbooks because of the shortage of finance. Inconsistent with the “core expertise” of inclusive pedagogy which is premised on seeking and trying out novel ways of working to support the learning of all children in the community of the mainstream classroom (Slee, 2010), participants lacked strategising on pooling finance for inclusion.

Curriculum

All participants (21) were concerned about the lack of curriculum flexibility for inclusion, as highlighted in the following selected excerpts:

Our national ECD curriculum is rigid. We [teachers] cannot adapt its content and teaching strategies to the unique needs of children with disabilities such as their pace of learning. On account of its academic orientation, it is exclusive of functional academics (Gono).

Our school curriculum lacks flexibility to accommodate children with developmental delays in mainstream classrooms. For instance, it lacks flexibility for teachers to use alternative assessment for children with disabilities (Tseu).

I do not have curricular resources and materials that are responsive to the needs of children with disabilities in my classroom. I do not have textbooks that are written in large print to cater for the needs of children with low vision in my classroom (Taku).

Documents including head teachers' lesson observation sheets indicated that teachers were required to cover specific teaching and learning content per school term in compliance with national curriculum and syllabus. All observed classrooms lacked disability friendly curriculum materials and resources including textbooks that were written in large print to accommodate children who had low vision. Inconsistent with the "core expertise" of inclusive pedagogy which demands a shift in teaching and learning from an approach that works for "most" children existing alongside something "additional" or "different" for those ("some") who experience difficulties, participants were focused on attending to individual differences without avoiding the stigma of marking some children as different. This is a move towards the development of a rich learning community characterised by learning opportunities that are adequately made available for "everyone", so that all children are able to participate in the classroom (Florian & Linklater, 2010).

Large class size

Seventeen participants were concerned about the large class sizes as regards inclusion, as highlighted in the following statements:

I have 48 learners in my classroom. I cannot meet the individual needs of these learners because they are too many. I cannot cope with learner diversity in my classroom (Fana).

Throughout the country, averagely, there are 45 children in classrooms. Our pedagogy is not responsive to the individuality of these children as they are too many (Famba).

Addressing the full range of needs among 49 pupils in my classroom is unrealistic. I cannot design and implement Individualised Educational Plans for such a large pool of pupils (Shana).

Documents including class registers indicated that all participating schools had on average a class size of 48 children. Teachers were observed using cooperative teaching and learning strategies including whole-class and group work at the expense of individualised instruction to cope with large-class sizes. Teachers could not attend to the individual needs of children with and without disabilities including their tempo and pace of learning because of large class sizes. Inconsistent with the "core expertise" of inclusive pedagogy which focuses on "everybody" in the community of the classroom (Flecha & Soler, 2013), participants focused on children with disabilities as they were in need of additional support.

Support services

Eighteen participants were concerned about the lack of support services for inclusion, as confirmed in the following selected excerpts:

Schools across the province lack specialised personnel for inclusion. These include therapists, nurses and social workers (Ndada).

Multi-disciplinary teams in our province are short of specialists including educational psychologists, specialist teachers and school counsellors. This hampers collaborative pooling of resources including teaching and learning materials and expertise for inclusion (Gango).

At our school, we lack national, provincial, district and institutional level support in inclusion. It is impossible to successfully practice it without support (Todo).

Documents including staff lists showed that all participating schools lacked specialist staff including social workers, specialist teachers, occupational therapists and educational psychologists. Meetings of multi-disciplinary teams that were in progress in observed institutions lacked specialist personnel including nurses, physiotherapist and specialist teachers. Consistent with the “core expertise” of inclusive pedagogy which is grounded in working with and through other adults that respect the dignity of all children as full members of the community of the classroom (Florian & Spratt, 2013), participants perceived that their collaboration with other stakeholders was indispensable in successful inclusion.

Teachers’ self-related concerns about inclusion

Inadequate professional preparation

All (21) participants were concerned about their inadequate professional preparation for inclusion, as confirmed in the following selected statements:

Nationally, we [mainstream teachers] lack positive attitudes, knowledge and skills in inclusion because of inadequate professional training. Therefore, we cannot effectively manage inclusive teaching and learning in our classrooms (Gamba).

My pre-service teacher preparation constituted basic components of inclusion including some theoretical perspectives, categories of disabilities and strategies of managing child behaviour. I therefore have limited professional competence in inclusion (Tok).

Our teachers’ colleges lack comprehensive pre-service and in-service teacher preparation for inclusion. They do not expose teacher trainees to comprehensive theory and practice of inclusion (Todo).

Like any other mainstream teacher in the country [Zimbabwe], I cannot adapt pedagogy to the individual needs of both pupils with and without disabilities in my classroom. I was not equipped with adequate theory on inclusive education as well as

practical experience in inclusive settings in my pre-service and in-service training (Fana).

Documents including children's workbooks, schemes of work, lessons plans and remedial records showed that teachers used mainstream pedagogical strategies including whole-class teaching and learning that were not responsive to the individual needs of children with disabilities. During delivery of lessons, all the participants displayed incompetence in theory and practice of inclusion including curriculum differentiation, scaffolding and task analysis to meet the individual needs of children with disabilities. Inconsistent with the "core expertise" of inclusive pedagogy which demands that teachers must believe ("can be convinced") that they are qualified and capable of teaching all children ("believing") (Florian & Spratt, 2013), participants lacked confidence in their professional competence to respect and respond to individuality in ways that could include children in the daily life of the mainstream classroom rather than exclude them from it.

Nature and severity of disabilities

All (21) participants were concerned about the nature and severity of disabilities with respect to inclusion, as confirmed in the following selected statements:

The nature and severity of disabilities impedes inclusion in mainstream classrooms. Children with severe to profound disabilities in mainstream classrooms require intensive individualised attention from teachers thereby interfering with the academic achievement of their peers without developmental delays (Kake).

Children with behavioural and emotional challenges can harm their typically developing peers in mainstream classrooms. Apart from endangering the safety and security of their typically developing counterparts, children with behavioural and emotional challenges and intellectual challenges demand specialised professional competence from teachers (Ndogo).

Children with severe to profound disabilities disrupt teaching and learning in mainstream classrooms. They require advanced behaviour management expertise including use of operant conditioning and environmental adaptations which we [mainstream teachers] lack (Sengu).

Documents including social record books of teachers showed that they utilised mainstream education behaviour management strategies including time-out to contain the behaviour of children with disabilities. The behaviour of children with disabilities including outbursts interfered with teaching and learning in all observed mainstream classrooms because of teachers' lack of appropriate attitudes, knowledge, skills and competencies in behaviour management. Inconsistent with the "core expertise" of inclusive pedagogy which demands rejection of deterministic beliefs about ability as being fixed and the associated premise that the presence of some will impede the progress of others (Pantic & Florian, 2015), participants did not believe that "all" children could make progress, learn and achieve.

Discussion

This study examined teachers' concerns about inclusion in mainstream ECD in Zimbabwe. Inconsistent with the "core expertise" of inclusive pedagogy which is entrenched in increasing the achievement of all children whilst safeguarding the inclusion of those who are vulnerable to exclusion and other forms of marginalisation (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Pantic & Florian, 2015), overall, participants were non-supportive of inclusion. Similarly, previous studies also found that teachers had negative attitudes towards inclusion (Bhatnagar & Das, 2013; Friend & Bursuck, 2012; Huang & Diamond, 2009).

Participants were concerned about the lack of clarity and specificity of policy and legislation on inclusion as stakeholders, including specialist teachers, educational psychologists, social workers, parents and themselves, confronted role conflict and role ambiguity in its practice. Typically developing children and their parents, communities and most mainstream teachers were also non-supportive of inclusion as a result of the lack of clear policy that articulated its rationale. Participants further lacked legal accountability regarding practising the philosophy, hence inclusion or exclusion of children with disabilities depended on their personal will. This finding resonates with previous studies which established that, while inclusive education in the West is perceived as a fundamental right of every child with special needs, the same rigour is unavailable in legislation and policies in many developing countries (Ballard, 2012; Chireshe, 2013; Mutepfa et al., 2007).

Inconsistent with the body of knowledge constituting the "core expertise" (the knowledge, doing and believing) embedded in the inclusive pedagogical approach (Florian & Spratt, 2013; Slee, 2010) participants were concerned about their inadequate professional preparation for inclusion. As a result of inadequate pre-service and in-service training, including the lack of exposure to comprehensive theory and practice of inclusion, participants were concerned about their professional competence in practising it. This finding contradicts with the "core expertise" of inclusive pedagogy which demands teachers' professional competence in engendering learning opportunities that are adequately availed to "everyone", so that all children can participate in classroom life (Florian & Linklater, 2010). Similarly, previous studies reveal that mainstream teachers are concerned about professional ill-preparation as regards inclusion (Agbenyega, 2007; Bhatnagar, 2006).

Participants were concerned about stakeholders' negative attitudes towards inclusion. Stakeholders, including parents of typically developing children, communities, the government, mainstream schools, mainstream teachers and donors, were not supportive of inclusion materially and morally because of negative attitudes towards disabilities. This finding contradicts with the "core expertise" of inclusive pedagogy which demands working with and through other adults who respect the dignity of children as full members of the community of the classroom (Pantic & Florian, 2015).

Inconsistent with the "core expertise" of inclusive pedagogy which is entrenched in increasing participation and decreasing exclusion from the community of mainstream schools (Florian, 2014), participants were concerned about the lack of appropriate physical facilities for inclusion. The lack of spacious classrooms with ramps and acoustic environments, inaccessible storerooms and libraries and disability friendly furniture and equipment including desks and computer

hardware and software interfered with inclusion. Similarly, previous studies have established that teachers were concerned about inappropriate infrastructure for inclusion (Bhatnagar, 2006; Chireshe, 2013; Donnelly & Watkins, 2011).

In alignment with previous studies (Gok & Erbas, 2011), participants were concerned about time as regards inclusion. As classroom time-tables were filled with academic subjects and pedagogy was managed in compliance with national standards and expectations, teachers had inadequate time to meet the full range of needs among children with disabilities. This finding is inconsistent with the “core expertise” of inclusive pedagogy which requires teachers to focus on “what” is to be taught and “how” instead of “who” is to learn it (Black-Hawkins & Florian, 2012). Consistent with previous studies (Friend & Bursuck, 2012; Okwaput, 2006; Ncube, 2006), participants were concerned about financial limitations in inclusion. The lack of finance to pool curriculum materials and resources, human and technological resources and offset fixed and recurrent costs interfered with inclusion. This finding contradicts the “core expertise” of inclusive pedagogy which requires teachers to be strategic in supporting learning of all children including those with disabilities (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011).

Participants were concerned about the lack of curriculum flexibility for inclusion. Curriculum content, teaching and assessment strategies were not flexible enough to accommodate the unique needs of children with disabilities. This finding is inconsistent with the “core expertise” of inclusive pedagogy which is embedded in responding to the complexity and diversity of children as a natural consequence of humanity instead of portraying “some children” as “different” thereby creating an unhelpful hierarchy within diversity (Florian & Linklater, 2010). Similarly, previous studies reveal that teachers are concerned about designing and implementing curriculum and instructional adaptations in inclusive settings (Pantic & Wubbels, 2010). In this study, participants were concerned about the lack of curriculum resources and materials that were responsive to the needs of children with disabilities. This finding concurs with previous research which reveals that teachers are concerned about the non-availability of teaching materials and equipment for inclusion (Chhabra et al., 2010; Friend & Bursuck, 2012; Oswald & Swart, 2011). Inconsistent with the “core expertise” of inclusive pedagogy which is premised on everybody approach to inclusion, participants’ concerns about the unavailability of textbooks written in large print for children with low vision was premised on an individualised approach to inclusion (“most” and “some”).

Consistent with previous studies (Bhatnagar, 2006; Oswald & Swart, 2011), participants were concerned about large class sizes in inclusion. As a result of large class sizes, participants failed to adopt individualised teaching to meet the full range of needs among children with disabilities. This finding is inconsistent with the “core expertise” of inclusive pedagogy which requires teachers to extend what is ordinarily available for “all” children (creating a rich learning community) rather than using teaching and learning strategies that are appropriate for “most” alongside something “additional” or “different” for “some” who experience difficulties (Florian & Spratt, 2013).

Regarding inclusion, participants were concerned about the nature and severity of disabilities. Similarly, previous studies reveal that teachers are concerned about their incompetence to teach children with different disabilities (Flecha & Soler, 2013; Forlin et al., 2008; Gok & Erbas, 2011). Inconsistent with “the core expertise” of inclusive pedagogy which rejects deterministic

beliefs about ability and the associated premise that the presence of some will impede the progress of others (Slee, 2010), participants were concerned that children with severe to profound disabilities required advanced intensive individualised attention while those with behavioural and emotional challenges could harm typically developing children. Participants were concerned that children with behavioural and emotional challenges needed advanced behaviour management expertise. Although this finding aligns with previous studies which reveal that teachers are concerned about behaviour problems in inclusion (Donnelly & Watkins, 2011; Forlin & Chambers, 2011), it is inconsistent with the “core expertise” of inclusive pedagogy which is grounded in individual teachers’ successful practice and recognises the complexity of their work, including the processes of reflective and practical problem-solving in which they continually engage (Black-Hawkins & Florian, 2012; Flecha & Soler, 2013).

Consistent with previous research (Okwaput, 2006), participants were concerned about the lack of specialised personnel for inclusion. Participants were concerned about the lack of specialist staff including therapists, nurses, social workers, educational psychologists and school counsellors. Similarly, the “core expertise” of inclusive pedagogy demands that teachers engage in collaborative actions to address issues that require responses beyond the classroom (Florian & Spratt, 2013; Friend & Bursuck, 2012). They can also take part in professional and social networks that seek to contribute to greater social justice (Alkin et al., 2014). In addition, they can share responsibility for planning strategies to address exclusion and under achievement and work with other professionals within the school for the outcomes of all children (Flecha & Soler, 2013; Oliver & Reschly, 2010). Participants were concerned about the lack of support at national, provincial, district and institutional levels for inclusion. Similarly, previous studies reveal that teachers have support concerns about inclusion (Chhabra et al., 2010; Friend & Bursuck, 2012).

Implications, limitations and future research

Participants had several classroom-related, school-related, self-related, academic achievement-related and management-related concerns about inclusion in mainstream ECD which have several implications for policy, practice and research. The passage and enforcement of clear and specific policy on inclusion could potentially eliminate role conflict and role ambiguity confronted by professionals and parents, clarify its rationale to the stakeholders and garner their support and guarantee teachers’ legal accountability regarding its practice. The provision of comprehensive theory and practice on inclusion in pre-service and in-service training could also adequately prepare and develop teachers for it. Further, disability awareness campaigns could foster positive attitudes in stakeholders towards inclusion and pooling resources for its practice.

Similarly, establishment and reinforcement of disability-friendly school environments and the requisition of appropriate physical facilities could facilitate inclusion. The institutionalisation of flexible classroom time-tables, national curriculum management standards and expectations and collaboration of stakeholders in pooling resources and off-setting fixed and recurrent costs in inclusion could also facilitate its practice. Developing and implementing flexible curricula that could accommodate child diversity, reduce class sizes, provide specialised support and national, provincial, district and school/institutional support could facilitate inclusion.

This study has some limitations that should be noted while interpreting its findings including its examination of mainstream teachers' concerns about inclusion in one educational province of Zimbabwe, while the philosophy is practised nationally. The transferability of the findings of the study to other educational provinces in the country is therefore unknown. Further, variables besides those gleaned in this study could have influenced participants' concerns about inclusion. The study also excluded the concerns of other stakeholders including children with and without disabilities and their parents, specialist teachers, school administrators and therapists. Consequently, it cannot be ascertained whether the aforementioned stakeholders' concerns resonate with those expressed by mainstream teachers. Future studies could therefore examine these stakeholders' concerns for informed teacher professional preparation, development, support strategies and services for inclusion. Since teachers had classroom-related, school-related, self-related, academic achievement-related and management-related concerns about inclusion, future research could also examine and propose best models for individual and institutional capacity building for inclusion.

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