

Consumer Science Teachers' Perspectives on Inclusion of Disabled Learners in Mainstream Classes in Eswatini Schools

Mpofu Molyn, Shongwe Nomfundo

Department of Consumer Science Education and Community Development, University of Eswatini, Eswatini

Abstract: The study explored Consumer Science teachers' understanding of inclusion of learners with disabilities into the main stream classes. The study further examined the challenges faced by Consumer teachers in the teaching of Consumer Science to physically disabled learners. The study employed a qualitative approach using an exploratory research design. The study had a sample of twenty (20) participants purposively selecting five (5) participants from each of the four regions of Eswatini. Data were collected using face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions. Data were analysed using thematic analysis. The study findings revealed the lack of teacher training to deal with learners with disabilities in inclusive classes coupled with lack of appropriate resources and infrastructure. The study concluded that few teachers who were teaching inclusive classes were not well equipped for such classes. The study recommends the provision of in-service training to enhance the teaching of physically disabled learners.

Index words: Inclusion, Disability, Consumer Science, Impairment, Inclusive Education, Perspectives, Mainstreaming, Persons with Disabilities

I. INTRODUCTION

Until the year 2013 Eswatini did not have a comprehensive policy, strategy or legislation for addressing the rights and needs of Persons with Disabilities hence the formulation of the National Disability Policy (NDP) in 2013. The NDP recognised that persons with disabilities are valuable citizens of the country and sought to create an environment that provided them with equal opportunities, protection of their rights and full participation in society. A basic prerequisite for development is the capacity of society to use its own resources to sustain itself. Yet the people with disabilities find themselves in a state of under development due to past and present discrimination in accessing opportunities (NDP, 2013).

The goal of the policy is to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by persons with disabilities and to promote respect for their inherent dignity. The objectives of the

NDP were to:

- improve the socio-economic status of men and women, girls and boys with disabilities

- ensure that all persons with disabilities have equal access and opportunities to education and health services at all levels
- ensure that all buildings and infrastructure are accessible to persons with disabilities
- promote inclusiveness and ensure that all institutions provide services to persons with disabilities in the same manner as they provide to the non-disabled except where necessary (NDP, 2013)

The NDP gave effect to a range of international, regional and national instruments that were in place for the realisation of rights of persons with disabilities and to which the government of Eswatini is signatory. These included the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states that all humans are born free and equal in dignity and that everyone has the right to equal access to public services in his country. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) seeks to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with Disabilities and to promote respect for their inherent dignity, to name just a few.

Realizing the goal of successful education of children with special educational needs is not the task of the ministries of education and schools alone. It requires the co-operation of families, and the mobilization of the community and voluntary organizations as well as the support from the public at large. Experience from countries that have witnessed progress in equalizing educational opportunities for children and youth with special educational needs suggested several useful lessons (UNESCO 1994).

The inclusion of students with disabilities into general education settings has become a global trend. As a result, the number of students with disabilities receiving special education services in general education classrooms has steadily increased and consequently, general and special education teachers face the challenges associated with providing services and teaching students with disabilities within general education settings (Muwana, 2012). Inclusion means more than just the integration of students with disabilities into general education classes. Rather, it suggests that these students are part of the academic and social environment of the school (Wogamon, 2013). Wogamon

further states that, the inclusion movement has resulted in more general education teachers being presented with the task of educating students with disabilities.

Campbell, Gilmore and Cuskelly (2003) reported in their study that teachers with more positive views about inclusion are more confident in their abilities and commitment to accommodate students with disabilities in inclusive settings as evidenced by their willingness to adapt classroom materials and related procedures. On the other hand, teachers with negative attitudes were reported to have low expectations for students with disabilities (Muwana, 2012). IE involves bringing support services to the student in the regular classroom setting, rather than having the student receive support services in an isolated environment removed from nondisabled peers (Greene, 2017). The core principle of IE is that all students with disabilities are to be educated to the fullest extent possible in the regular classroom and the students are removed only when support services cannot be provided in the regular classroom setting.

The value behind inclusion is that students with disabilities have the right to meaningful participation in general education settings together with their typically developing peers (Muwana 2012). The history of special education has been one of exclusion and segregation. However, every child has the right to be supported by their parents and community to grow, learn, and develop in the early years, and, upon reaching school age, to go to school and be welcomed and included by teachers and peers alike. The cornerstone of inclusive education is to have all children educated regardless of their differences.

Historically, Barry-Power (2010) states that, the education of children with special needs has been one of exclusion and neglect where children with disabilities or special educational needs were educated in segregated special schools. Over the last two decades, inclusion has become central to the reform effort to improve the delivery of education and services to students with disabilities by focusing on the placement of these students in the general education setting. In Eswatini students with disabilities had their own schools where they were enrolled. This was before the passing of the inclusive education policy.

In alignment with the Constitution of the Kingdom of Eswatini and other international laws, Eswatini put in place policies and instruments relating to persons with disabilities and their rights. Such instruments included the Children's Protection Act and Welfare Part 2 of 2012. Section 1 of this act which states that a child with disability has a right to special care, medical treatment, rehabilitation, family and personal integrity, sports and recreation, education and training. The policy further promotes helping the disabled to enjoy a full and decent life and dignity and achieve the greatest degree of self-actualisation, self-reliance and social integration possible. (Children's Protection and Welfare The National Development Strategy (NDS) of 1997 is another

instrument that was put in place which recommends measures to improve the situation of persons with disabilities by 2022 and also called for special attention to members of society with disabilities in human resource and resource development (NDS, 1997). The Eswatini Education and Training Sector Policy of 2011 further states that all attitudinal and physical barriers to inclusive education should be removed in public and private educational institutions. The Eswatini National Sports Policy of 2012 provides for the promotion and identification of persons with disabilities in sports stating that "all sports associations must have disability sections within each of their sporting codes.

According to the Eswatini Education and Training Sector Policy (2011) inclusive Education (IE) is a policy approach that includes, and meets the needs of all learners regardless of their gender, life circumstance, state of health, disability, stage of development, capacity to learn, level of achievement, financial or any other circumstance. It enables schools to serve and welcome all learners. IE is rooted in the basic human right to education and shares many of the goals and approaches of the Education for All movement. The 2011 the Eswatini Education and Training Sector policy was the first document in the country to holistically address education and training issues. The primary mandate of the Ministry of Education and Training is to provide access to relevant quality education at all levels of the education system taking into account all issues of efficacy, equity and special needs. Realizing that education is the foundation and the main pillar of economic and social development and being cognisant of its core mandate, the Ministry of Education and Training continues to commit itself to providing accessible, affordable and relevant education of high quality (Eswatini Education and Training Sector Policy, 2011).

Purpose and objectives

The purpose of this study was to find out the perspectives of teachers in Eswatini schools on inclusion of disabled learners in practical classrooms and the overall understanding of teachers in Eswatini of inclusive education.

The objectives of the study were to:

1. examine challenges faced by Consumer Science teachers in teaching physically disabled learners

Significance of the Study

The study is expected to benefit educational planners, both public and private educational providers as it is one of the reference points to feed into their developmental plans to address the gaps in inclusion of physically disabled learners in Consumer Science in Eswatini. The study will provide an opportunity for relevant educational authorities to be aware of the challenges, and take initiatives to provide required support to improve the inclusive education provision.

II. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study employed the qualitative approach using the exploratory research design. This allowed the researchers to gain insight into the problem by investigating people’s views on the problem, how they interpreted it and how they could solve it since this was relatively a new area with no limited research studies (Zwane, 2016). The researcher explored the perspectives of Consumer Science teachers towards inclusion of physically disabled learners in Consumer Sciences.

Population, Sample and Techniques

The target populations for this study were Consumer Science teachers teaching in secondary schools in Eswatini. The population of the studies comprised of two hundred and eighty-eight (288) Consumer Science teachers in all the four regions of Eswatini. Sixteen (16) respondents were selected through purposive sampling technique while twenty (20) teachers were selected for the Focus Group Discussions where five (5) teachers were selected per region.

Research Instruments

The semi-structured face-to-face and focus group discussions were used to collect data for the study. A total of 20 interviews were conducted for this study and two (2) focus group discussions consisting of eight (8) respondents each.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was done using thematic analysis which is a method of analysis in qualitative research. Data were analysed using themes and sub-themes to facilitate interpretation.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Themes and Sub-themes

Themes	Sub-Themes
Challenges faced by Consumer Science teachers in Inclusion of disabled learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher understanding of inclusive education • Lack of teacher training • Infrastructure and accessibility • Availability of resources • Un-inclusive curriculum • Social Exclusion by Peers • Attitudes and Stereotypes schools

Teacher understanding of inclusive education

The analysis of data collected from Consumer Science teachers through interviews and focus group discussions indicated that most teachers have some bit of understanding of the meaning of inclusion and inclusive education. Findings from both the interviews and the focus groups revealed that teachers had little knowledge of inclusion and inclusive education and what it entails. Even though their definition of inclusive education and inclusion were not specific but the findings reveal that they had some understanding of the

concept of inclusion. However, the overall analysis made was that teachers did not have a grounded understanding of what inclusion meant. Their ideas were more on integration than inclusion. Inclusion necessitates that a teacher meet all learner needs in an inclusive environment (Gama and Thwala, 2016).

One of the teachers mentioned that:

“I have heard on national radio and on print media about government’s intention to mainstream inclusive education”.

Lack of teacher training

Findings from both interviews and focus group discussions revealed that almost all the teachers pointed out that lack of teacher training was a major challenge faced by teachers in inclusion of physically disabled learners.

One teacher echoed that:

“Details on teachers being trained weren’t available anywhere as such most of us teachers did not receive any training on inclusive education, not even at tertiary level”.

Another teacher also indicated that:

“Teachers were not trained on inclusion before it was introduced and some of the teachers who have some knowledge on it are based in the special schools and they are also a small number”.

Participant 10 indicated that:

“It’s only now that William Pitcher Teacher Training College and Ngwane Teacher Training Colleges have introduced courses in inclusive education but this will only benefit the upcoming teachers”.

Teachers do support inclusion but identified critical problems with its implementation. Research suggests that training and education are critical to the success of inclusion programs (Woodcock, 2013). Teachers are feeling ill equipped to teach in an inclusive setting because they did not receive appropriate training or professional development to properly implement inclusion into their classrooms. General education teachers feel increased demands on them when they are teaching in an inclusive setting because they are concerned that they lack the knowledge and training to effectively implement inclusion in their classrooms (McMillan, 2008). Thus, teachers expressed considerable difficulty addressing the needs of all learners in a regular classroom in Eswatini.

Infrastructure and accessibility

Environmental factors comprise a broader set of issues rather than just information and physical access (WHO, 2011). The environment has a massive influence on the experiences and level of disability. Inaccessible environments generate disability by constructing barriers to inclusion and participation.

A teacher from one school had this to say:

“For instance, lack of ramps and elevators for wheelchair users, lack of sign language interpreters for deaf children and lack of reading software for visually impaired persons are a big challenge to inclusion”.

Facilities and infrastructures are vital in serving special needs learners in schools as they allow ease of access for special needs students. The important issues in facilities and infrastructure in inclusive schools are arrangement of furniture; sporting equipment; height of tables and benches and access to sinks and other specialized classroom equipment. Visually impaired learners need guiding blocks to other rooms and other facilities; students with hearing impairment need some visual signs, students with physical disabilities need ramps and spacious room in order to make them move freely. Students with attention deficit disorder may need less distraction and students with autism may need well organized classrooms.

Resources

However, it should be noted that even countries endowed with resources are struggling with inclusion. Thus, the financial challenge could be an unfounded fear and instead efforts should be directed to structures that will gradually lead to an inclusive schooling system (Mulinge, 2016). Inadequate teacher aide time and curriculum support in the form of modified materials were highlighted by a number of researchers (Tyagi, 2016). Teachers need greater access to differentiated resources. Konza (2008) notes that teachers were not convinced of the benefits for either the regular students or those with disabilities due to their lack of appropriate teacher preparation and resourcing.

Un-inclusive curriculum

Most teachers highlighted academic aspects such as an un-inclusive curriculum. Although it seems very beneficial to be exposing students with disabilities to age appropriate curriculum, many argue that it is not realistic to have these students keep pace with all of the other students without disabilities and be successful.

Participant 5 indicated that:

“The most pressing issue is mostly with the long syllabus in Consumer Science and too little time allocated to the subject. This is worsened in an inclusive classroom with disabled learners in schools who need more time than their peers, yet the allocated time is also not enough for the other students without disabilities”.

This is especially true, if curriculum planners are not modifying the curriculum to meet these students' needs (McMillan, 2008). Research in the field of integration and inclusion has identified some of the causes leading to the widespread resistance of teachers to the inclusion of students with significant disabilities. Konza (2008) proposed early in the discourse surrounding integration that teachers' resistance

reflected a lack of confidence in their own instructional methodologies, and in the quality and amount of support offered to them, this led to reluctance to integrate any students who placed additional demands on the teachers.

Social Exclusion by Peers

Students with disabilities can face many hardships when they come into the general education classroom. Becoming socially accepted by their peers in this classroom setting can be very difficult. This is true for students who are experiencing inclusion for the first time. These students are used to being around their peers without disabilities so it is difficult for them to socially interact with them (McMillan, 2008).

One teacher opined that:

“The responsibility for the academic progress of students with disabilities remains with special education personnel and that the purpose of placing these students in mainstream classrooms was for socialisation purposes only”.

In many classrooms the teacher's aide is the person who spends most time with the student with special needs, often being solely responsible for the implementation of the student's instructional program. Classroom climate is very important for the learners to learn effectively in an inclusive classroom. Teachers should be welcoming and accommodative to all learners regardless of their abilities. Improving the classroom climate can be beneficial to the learners especially the ones with physical disabilities.

Attitudes and Stereotypes

Some of the greatest barriers associated with inclusion in education are people's attitudes towards the disabled. As with society in general, these attitudes and stereotypes are often caused by a lack of knowledge and understanding.

One of the teachers interviewed indicated that:

“The attitudes and abilities of general education teachers and para-educators in particular can be major limitations in inclusive education. Like myself I honestly don't know how to deal with students that are disabled as I feel I might offend them or they may get me wrongly, so I am afraid of involving with them”.

Training teachers and para-educators to understand and work with children with disabilities is often inadequate and usually fragmented and uncoordinated. If educators have negative attitudes toward students with special needs or have low expectations of them, children will unlikely receive a satisfactory, inclusive education. Woodcock (2013) claimed that the connection between teacher beliefs and their behaviours in the classroom are linked to personally-based beliefs, values and principles. By studying current general education teacher attitudes, perceptions and beliefs about the inclusion of students with disabilities in their classrooms it

will be possible to identify ways that may improve the process of inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms (Monje, 2017).

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The current study concluded that there has not been any in-service training for teachers who never received inclusive education training at tertiary level, who form the majority of teachers including Consumer Science teachers. What emerged from the study is that two teacher training colleges in the country introduced inclusive education courses as part of their training programmes and by implication; new teachers will be well equipped to teach inclusive classes. The researchers also concluded that the importance of inclusive education is considered good and aimed at involving all learners and their learning needs in the achievement of education. Most teachers were not opposed to the idea of inclusion, but did indicate that without training and support structures in the field, they were not confident and competent enough to work in inclusive classrooms. The majority of the teachers had no experience in teaching disabled learners in schools. Therefore, even though inclusion had been rolled out in the country, most schools still do not have learners with disabilities in the general classrooms.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

From the data gathered during this study, it is evident that the mainstreaming of inclusive education into schools in the country has indeed been affected by inadequate training of teachers in the field. As Eswatini moves with inclusion, the following suggestions may be considered:

- The Ministry of Education and Training should invest more in the in-service training endeavour.
- Education authorities in the country should consider setting up support teams for teachers who would be based at the REO offices to liaise with schools in teacher training and inclusive education support matters in schools.
- The curriculum should be re-designed to accommodate learning needs of children with different abilities and with diverse learning needs.
- More school resources need to be channelled towards improving infrastructure to accommodate free movement, access and participation of all learners in education.
- Teaching and learning materials suitable for the learning of all learners and their specific learning needs should be made available to all schools. Scholarships should be provided for teachers wishing to pursue special and inclusive education studies. Currently the country has a shortage of specialists in braille, teachers for deaf and mute learners and those trained in using assistive technology for learners with disabilities. The Ministry of Education and Training should collaborate on inclusive education with other countries that have successfully implemented

inclusive education. Consultation with successful nations could be vital for information sharing in teacher training matters and more.

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