

# An Analysis of Early Childhood Education (ECE) Lecturers' Competencies and Skills for Inclusion in 2 Selected Teachers' Colleges of Zimbabwe; A Contextual Approach

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**Abstract:** The concept 'Education for All' calls for all children to be afforded the chance to go to school, with an emphasis on ECD as their main driver of diverse elementary and formative learning experiences in the classroom. This inclusion movement concept was passed at the Jomtien Conference in 1990 and reaffirmed by the Salamanca statement in 1994. The Salamanca statement. Many governments, including Zimbabwe have developed interest in embracing inclusive education. There has not been emboldened research to establish the extent to which transformation in lecturer's competencies and skills been matched by a paradigm shift in their preparation of ECD teachers for diverse ECD settings. This qualitative case-study therefore was conducted in order to establish the knowledge, skills and competencies that ECD lecturers possess in the context of inclusivity in education. The study was informed by both the transformative paradigm and Mezirow's transformative learning theory. Ten (n=10) lecturers who train pre-service ECD teachers were purposively sampled from two teacher education colleges to participate in this study. Data was collected through interviews and analysis of documents and narratively presented to address the main research questions that were used for the study. Major findings of the study were that ECD lecturers were not competent enough to adequately prepare their products for inclusive teaching and were experiencing challenges during the training process. Thus, both andragogic and pedagogic issues of inclusivity and ICT skills were a major cause for concern. The study findings showed that the lecturers have a limited understanding of the concept of inclusion. Furthermore the findings indicated that most lecturers lack competencies, skills and confidence in imparting relevant knowledge. Research findings also highlighted that there are still challenges in the execution of the pre-service ECD teacher training hence the trainee teachers are not given quality time, which compromises the quality. Finally the study highlighted a need for a holistic approach encompassing all the relevant stakeholders. Hence the study recommended that inclusion should form the core of the teacher education curriculum with specialist professionals roped in to assist teach content/bodies of knowledge and inform practice on inclusive education. Serving ECD lecturers should be upgraded and equipped with inclusive teaching strategies through workshops and in-service training. Inclusive education practices should be practiced in colleges for transformation of both lecturers.

**Key words:** Inclusion, Early Childhood Development, teacher education, competencies

## I. INTRODUCTION

There have been persistent calls for restructuring of ECD education globally from the nature and diversity of today's ECD classes. The concept of inclusivity or diversity anchors on the view that learners are unique and diverse in nature, as such they learn differently and require varied pedagogic approaches for them to reach their full potential. The need for competent lecturers capable of implementing pre-service teacher preparation programs that capacitate ECD teachers with the requisite competences to incorporate inclusivity cannot be overemphasised. For all learners to benefit ECD teachers need to be trained on how to recognize and handle diversity in the classrooms. Little is known about the extent to which ECD lecturers possess the requisite competences and skills to capacitate student teachers to embrace inclusivity in their classroom practices. This study therefore sought to fulfil the compelling need to establish ECD lecturers' competencies, skills and attitudes in the preparation of pre-service ECD teachers for inclusion, in view of the diverse classes they will teach upon graduation. By identifying the gap in ECD lecturers' competencies, the areas of knowledge, skills and attitudes that need further upgrading may be identified. It attempted to shed light on this problem by addressing four questions, namely, the ECD lecturers' understanding of the concept inclusion, the nature of lecturer's competencies, knowledge, skills and attitudes in the preparation of pre-service ECD teachers for effective teaching of inclusive classes. It also sought to address the question on challenges experienced by ECD lecturers during the preparation of pre-service ECD teachers for inclusion and finally, improvements that should be made on ECD lecturers' profiles in view of inclusion.

### *Background to the study*

According to UNESCO (2014), including children with diverse educational needs in mainstream educational environments was a response to the Charter on Education for All (EFA) signed in 1990 and reaffirmed in the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action in 1994. As stated

above, this also required that teachers be trained to have knowledge, skills and competencies to handle learners with diverse learning difficulties (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2013). This has great educational implications to the quality of teacher training programs and their curriculum (European Agency 2010). Effective teacher training at ECD level is supported by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development teachers' review (OECD, 2005), which points to the need of specialised teachers to invest in intensive teacher education and training of teachers to deliver high-quality outcomes. As observed by the OECD (2006), specific knowledge, skills and competencies are expected of ECD practitioners. There is a consensus supported by research, that well educated and trained professionals are the key factor in providing high-quality inclusive ECD with the most favourable cognitive and social outcomes for children. Empirical studies have also shown beyond any reasonable doubt that the behaviour of those who work in inclusive ECD programs should be highly professional. The qualifications, education and training of ECD staff is, therefore, an important policy issue globally (Darling and Hammond, 2006). In the light of this discussion, there is a specific need for teacher training institutions to align their ECD teacher-training curriculum with the norm of diversity, so that they equip trainee student teachers with skills to manage inclusivity in classrooms. Hence the importance of ECD lecturers' competencies, skills and positive attitudes in implementation of preservice ECD curriculum with the context of inclusion.

Although inclusivity is such an integral part of teaching and learning at ECD level, research shows that many countries are facing challenges in their efforts to implement inclusive education in ECD programs because of quality of workforce (OECD, 2012, Chinhara, 2015, Mafa, 2015, Chireshe, 2012, Mugweni and Dakwa, 2012,). This summons the need to identify solutions to the problem in different countries. Hence, this study that focused on lecturer competencies in the training of preservice ECD teachers in Zimbabwe. The Survey for the Quality Toolbox and ECEC Portal in Finland identified five common strategies to enhance implementation of inclusive ECD programs: improving staff qualifications, securing a high-quality workforce supply, retaining the workforce, development; and managing the quality of workforce in private ECD provision (OECD, 2012). Internationally, studies show that most strategies focus on developing the workforce and improving staff qualifications. This study therefore focuses on establishing the competencies, skills and attitudes that ECD lecturers possess which are a pre-requisite for the pre-service ECD teachers in as far as inclusion of learners with special needs is concerned. Two selected teacher education colleges that offer ECD programs in Zimbabwe have been used as case studies.

#### *Statement of the problem*

In today's classrooms, new teachers are teaching more diverse groups of learners than ever before. This applies to many countries the world over, Zimbabwe included. Classrooms are

diverse in terms of gender, race, religion, social and economic backgrounds and prior educational experiences among others. Children with special needs also form the core of this diverse group. In order to cater for this diversity, the government of Zimbabwe has developed inclusive ECD policies and has specified in blue print policy implementation in line with international guidelines (UNESCO, 2005; Mugweni and Dakwa, 2012, Gabbert, 2007). Models were adopted in teacher training colleges to prepare teachers for service and trainee teachers are expected to take courses on inclusivity, go into schools to practice and then return to college to merge theory and practice (UNESCO 2005). Although policies state clearly how inclusivity should be implemented when training ECD teachers, concerns have been raised in schools, colleges, and social media and by researchers in Zimbabwe on how the policies are being implemented in the classroom. It has been observed that teachers struggle to accommodate learners with diverse educational needs in ECD classes. ECD stakeholders also raised concerns on failure by ECD teachers to adopt and align pedagogy strategies, instructional media and display of positive means to meet Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP) with ECD policy guidelines. In line with the discussion above, this study explored how teacher education colleges prepare preservice ECD teachers to manage inclusive classes in Zimbabwe in order to identify missing links. Focus was on competencies, skills and attitudes that ECD lecturers possess which are a pre-requisite for the pre-service ECD teachers in as far as inclusion of learners with special needs is concerned. Two selected teacher education colleges that offer ECD programmes in Zimbabwe were used as case studies.

#### *Research Questions*

- What are ECD lecturers' understanding of the concept inclusion?
- What competencies, skills and attitudes do ECD lecturers possess to prepare pre-service ECD teachers for inclusion of learners with special educational needs?
- How does competencies, skills and attitudes of ECD lecturers affect the manner in which they prepare pre-service ECD teachers for inclusion of learners with special educational needs?
- What inclusion related challenges are experienced by ECD lecturers during preparation of pre-service ECD teachers for inclusion?
- What improvements can be made for effective preparation of pre-service ECD teachers in view of inclusion?

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Global context*

Inclusive Education globally is guided by policies which consider education as a fundamental human right for all, including disabled children, as enshrined in international instruments following the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. According to Article

26 of this Declaration, ‘everyone has the right to education’. It also states that ‘education shall be free; at least in the elementary and fundamental stages and that elementary education shall be compulsory....’ The above legal framework promotes Diversity in Cultural Expressions. In both the above declarations, learners with special education needs have a right to education as also enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) of 1989 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) of 2006. However, even though these policy frameworks clearly support education for all, inclusive education in schools may be failing to ensure that learners who require assistance the most are helped, especially in developing countries (UNESCO, 2007). The challenge with the implementation of inclusive education is squarely on poor quality of teachers (OECD, 2012). Article 24 of the (UNCRPD), clearly states that children with diverse learning difficulties have the right to “an inclusive, quality and free primary and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live (UNCRPD, 2006). However, with poorly trained teachers, this may not be possible. Studies carried on Inclusive Education in most countries show that there has been no massive teacher training, especially those that focus on children with diverse educational needs (Darling and Hammond, 2006). A study by Nguyet and Ha, (2010) found that both schools and teachers lacked the capacity to meet the needs of learners with diverse educational needs. There is no doubt that teacher training for learners with special educational needs is in a limbo.

Studies in Australia (Department of Education, 2016) and New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 2016) on the state of Inclusive Education concluded that there is a dearth of qualified inclusive teachers in schools for all age groups. Notwithstanding, pre-service ECD lecturers and teachers. ECD teacher training is one of the fundamentals for capacity building for inclusive education (Nguyet and Ha, 2010). Shortages of ECD teachers and competencies of pre-service ECD lecturers have a significant negative impact on the implementation of inclusive education practices. According to the European Agency (2010), studies have not delved much into impact of lecturer competencies in pre-service ECD teacher education for inclusion for quality products. This is in spite of the various proposed teacher education-training models and curriculum for inclusivity (Kosnik and Beck, 2009). Countries therefore, have to tailor-make training models and recruit ECD lecturers that consider the country’s own social-economical-political-cultural-historical distinctions that are appropriate to implement inclusive education practices from the foundation phase (Mitchell 2005 cited in the European Agency, 2010).

#### *African context*

The right to education is also enshrined in the constitutions of all independent nations in Africa. The African Charter on the Human and People’s Rights (ACHPR) of 1981 clearly spells out in Article 17 that “every individual shall have the right to education. This implies that each child is viewed as a unique

individual whose learning abilities should be taken into consideration. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) 1990 protects the rights of children with disabilities to education. Article 11, Subsection 3 (d) highlights a special provision that “State parties to the present Charter shall take all appropriate measures with a view to achieving the full realization of this right and shall in particular, take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates” (Chinhara, 2015). This underscores the importance of affording every child access to education, more so children with disabilities. Such a move may be noble and welcomed, but the reality on the ground is different as there are few trained specialist teachers to support the implementation of these recommendations. This means there is critical needs for pre-service ECD teacher education programs that are designed to produce competent teachers that will manage the behaviours and learning styles of all young learners in their classes.

There are no specific ECD policies on lecturer recruitment in Teacher Education and Training in African countries. This means different countries are coming up with their own policies and programs (UNESCO, 2009). In the majority of cases, teacher education is the responsibility of the government and private partners (UNICEF, 2013). For instance, Namibia in 2013 created the Namibian Ministry of Education Sector Policy on Inclusive Education (Ministry of Education, 2013). The policy requires that all teachers acquire knowledge to teach learners with special educational needs in inclusive settings. In South Africa, Engel Brecht (2007) identified that all pre-service teachers are required to undergo training to deliver in inclusive education classes. The Department of Higher Education and Training has a mandate to ensure that all teachers have an appreciation of inclusive education, thus all institutions offer programs that have a bias towards inclusive education (Donohue and Bormann, 2014; Department of Education, 2001). However, regardless of the policies, the Department of Education has constantly observed that most teachers in schools lack the skills to deliver in inclusive education classes especially at the foundation phase; yet this is a critical stage. Young learners’ barriers to education need early identification and correction where necessary before they become intense. With regard to inclusive education practices, there is no doubt that many countries fail to put the initiative of policies into practice from the onset, UNICEF (2013) reported that in the sub-Sahara African countries, key actions that needed auctioning include; supporting the practice and culture of inclusion across the education systems, building or retrofitting schools to eliminate physical, communicational, informational and attitudinal barriers for people who interact with learners that have special educational needs. Training ECD teachers to foster a commitment to inclusion across schools and communities appears the major challenge in most African countries: a pointer to lecturer competencies.

*Zimbabwean context*

Since there are no universal policies in sub-Saharan countries that guide teacher preparation for inclusion, each country has the autonomy to design contextual policies, Zimbabwe designed operational policies on inclusive education. Government documents show that as early as 1992, the government coined a policy of inclusive education regarded as Secretary's Circular Number 12, that directed schools to include children with special educational needs in mainstream schools (Chinhara, 2015). In 2003, it designed another policy, specifically, for ECD and revised it in 2007. This policy directed all primary schools to have inclusive education classes. In addition, Zimbabwe is a signatory to many international charters and conventions on inclusion in educational sectors (Chireshe, 2011; Delca Tramontane and Kett, 2014, Chinhara, 2015). This shows that Zimbabwe supports the establishment of inclusive schools (Musengi, Mudyahoto and Chireshe 2010). The above policies are however silent on lecturer competencies with regards teacher preparation for inclusion. Meaning these initiatives are not commensurate with teacher education initiatives to train ECD teachers for these classes. Until 2012, Zimbabwe teacher education colleges had not established ECD inclusive teacher education-training programs (Mafa, 2015).

Regardless of these initiatives, there are concerns that teacher education models and curriculum appear good on paper while in practice they are not implemented effectively. A study conducted by Chireshe (2013) revealed that most teachers said that they had not done inclusive education during their training. He recommends that if the quality of learning for learners with diverse needs has to be enhanced, then the quality of teacher education must be continuously upgraded; constant support and monitoring of both trainee students and qualified teachers as their mentors have to be provided and lecturer competencies, skills and attitudes critically considered. Based on the observations made above, the actual ECD teacher preparation for inclusion at the foundation phase needs close examination. Mafa (2012) also reiterates, it is not only the manner of teaching that has to be supported and monitored but also the content that is being taught should be reviewed and its implementation supervised as well. He further says that trainee ECD teachers should be provided with guidance and support to make sure that they acquire necessary skills, uses correct teaching methods, media and language. This clearly spells out that pre-service ECD teachers need on-going support and scaffolding from competent lecturers as they learn new techniques such as those related to the inclusive education.

Although Zimbabwe crafted own policies on inclusive training, they have been concerns on the effectiveness of trainee teachers in the ECD program. These concerns have been highlighted in schools, colleges and social media, where it has been revealed that teachers struggled to accommodate learners with diverse educational needs in ECD classes (Mafa, 2012). Policy documents are formulated to guide implementation of programs towards realization of set goals.

However, for effective implementation, implementers should be capacitated and empowered. In light of the concerns, it is clear that there is a missing link, either the curriculum employed to prepare the students is weak and does not include salient issues of inclusion or the educators (lecturers) are not knowledgeable, competent or do not possess positive attitudes on inclusion or environmental factors, hence the product produced has challenges in handling learners with diverse needs.

This study therefore investigated ECD competencies, skills and attitudes possessed by ECD lecturers in training pre-service ECD teachers to manage inclusive classes in two teacher education colleges in Zimbabwe. The study aimed to ascertain what is actually happening in these teachers' colleges concerning ECD lecturers' recruitment procedures, curriculum implementation by lecturers, the monitoring and assessment of the trainee teachers including the model of training. It is envisaged that with necessary training by competent staff, support, monitoring and evaluation, successful implementation of the inclusive ECD education program could take place. This would in turn improve the performance and practices of ECD teachers and the experiences of learners and communities in Zimbabwe.

### III. METHODOLOGY

*Paradigm*

This research was located within the qualitative research paradigm. Chiromo (2006) observes that in qualitative research, the researcher develops interest in collecting data from his/her respondents in an interactive manner and in their natural settings. Sibanda and Hlatywayo (2014) further posit that in qualitative research, the researcher believes in the uniqueness and individuality of human beings, where these are capable of constructing subjective social reality. Creswell (2010) also add that the major purpose of qualitative research is to describe, interpret, verify and evaluate the nature of reality.

*Design*

A qualitative case-study research design was employed to explore competencies, skills and attitudes that ECD lecturers possess which are a pre-requisite for the pre-service ECD teachers in as far as inclusion of learners with special needs is concerned. This design allowed the researcher to generate in-depth knowledge about the feelings, views and opinions of the participants (Chiromo, 2006, McMillan and Schumacher, 2009).

*Target population and sample*

The respondents to this study were drawn from the department of ECD from two selected teachers' colleges in Zimbabwe. These were conveniently and purposively targeted as the information-rich respondents for the study and hence 10 lecturers were taken on board. (Borg and Gall 1989, Chiromo 2006, Creswell 2013). These comprised the 2 Head of



Department (HODs) and other 4 members of the department from each college.

#### *Data generating instruments*

For the purpose of generating data for this study, document analysis and interview guides were administered to the respondents. Triangulation of these instruments was meant to validate the generated data (McMillan and Schumacher, 2009).

#### IV. PRESENTATION, DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS

Findings of this study made focus on the major questions that provided the framework for this whole process.

##### *Understanding the concept of inclusive education*

With regards to the concept of inclusive education, participants were asked to explain what they understood by the term inclusive education. Below are some of the excerpts that were captured by this research triangulated data from document analysis and interviews. The data revealed that lecturers have varied conceptions of inclusive education. Theme; Lecturers revealed an admixture of the concept inclusive education

CL2 revealed that,

*It is a curriculum designed to cover collective needs for learners of diverse disabilities and responding to their educational and social needs.*

CL3 had this to say,

*It is that curriculum that is designed to cater for the learners' diversity, which includes normal children, children with disabilities (various forms of disabilities). All this is providing instruction in the same environment irrespective of their various/diverse backgrounds and needs.*

CL4 explained that,

*Inclusive education is a concept that aims to include children regardless of their race, colour; creed and ability orientation aims at nurturing appropriately integrate learners with visible and invisible challenges.*

*CL 7 I believe that inclusion is that entailment of providing educational services to children of diverse needs and orientation within the same school, same classroom, same teacher and environment.*

CL9 had this to say,

*I believe that the inclusive education is the kind of teaching and learning process whereby learners of varied disability orientation learn together in ordinary classroom within a school that is in their neighbourhood.*

Participants' responses indicate that they had an understanding of the definition of the concept inclusion.

Definitions from lecturers however, seem to focus particularly on the group of learners with disabilities.

##### *The competency of lecturers*

As stated earlier, in as much as lecturing is important, it follows that the competency of the lecturer to conduct lectures is also at top notch lest the training exercise becomes futile. The researcher went further and sought to establish the capacity of the lecturers in preparing and delivering lectures to pre-service ECD teachers. The participants' responses to the question on capacity to prepare, lecture and supervise pre-service ECD teachers were as recorded below,

*Theme: Some lecturers displayed a lack of working knowledge and skills*

CL1 noted that;

*I do have partial understanding on inclusive education hence inability to effectively teach, supervise and assist students within our training institutions.*

CL3 had this to say

*I believe that I have some understanding of inclusive education. I however observe that I am not well capacitated to effectively teach, supervise and assist both pre-service teachers and mentors in our schools. I resort to referring and asking for support from other peers where I face challenges or get puzzled.*

*CL4 Inclusive education is a new phenomenon, with pertinent issues that need to be addressed, hence specialisation in the area can assist in capacitating me as an ECD lecturer.*

*CL5 I have an understanding of inclusion to a minimum extent. When planning for inclusive lectures I go an extra mile researching so that I equip students with adequate knowledge.*

*CL7 I have some understanding of inclusive education although am not really comfortable in some areas. When teaching some topics I engage colleagues from the SNE department.*

*C10 Yes I do have knowledge on inclusive education, however I am not adequately capacitated especially use of certain assistive devices.*

The responses and remarks made by lecturers seem to highlight that they have little knowledge concerning inclusive education. From their statements, it is clear that they struggle to keep their heads well above the deep waters. All the above remarks have implications when it comes to preparation of pre-service ECD teachers. What can be noted is that lecturers are ill equipped hence trainees are not well guided or corrected, equipped with skills and do not have good inclusive practices modelled during their training.

##### *Gaps in skills and competencies of lecturers*

The researcher further explored the competency and skills gaps of the lecturers by requiring the participants, to identify these gaps. The participants identified a number of gaps with a

skew to brail and sign language. Response were recorded and presented below,

*Theme: lecturers singled out knowledge and skills gaps*

Data from document analysis and interviews revealed some knowledge gaps.....

*CL2: The skills that I lag behind in is thriving for excellent delivery and efficiency in inclusive education are braille, sign language, technical use of various inclusive education devices, preparation of stimulating, safe and healthy environments for all learners and in-service training.*

*CL3 I do have knowledge, skills and competencies with regards delivery on inclusive education. However, I am more inclined towards theory as compared to practical. There is a gap on the in-service training.*

*CL5 As a newly recruited lecturers I to lack confidence in lecturer delivery and supervision to pre-service students both at college and when in schools during practicum. The problem emanates from the kind of training that I received.*

*CL 8 I have challenges in delivering lectures practical lectures such as sign language and brail. I have no confidence because am still learning from colleagues in the specialist department.*

*CL 9 My serious problem is effective planning and demonstrating use of inclusive assistive devises like braille.*

The participants' responses illustrate that most lecturers lack competencies, skills and confidence in imparting relevant concept knowledge, skills and positive attitudes on inclusive issues to pre-service ECD teachers. It also emerged from the data gathered that lecturers lack crucial skills like sign language, braille, operation of assistive devices and equipment, creation of stimulating, safe and healthy environments for all learners as well as lesson preparation and delivery. This suggests that there is possibility of improper inclusion practices taking place in some institutions. These gaps point to a need for continuous training to impart necessary skills to the lecturers.

*Inclusion related challenges are experienced by ECD lecturers during preparation of pre-service ECD teachers for inclusion*

The researcher also sought to establish the challenges that lecturers come across in their quest to implement inclusion at work stations. Responses were noted and shown as presented below,

*9CL 1: The key challenge noted regarding implementation of the inclusive curriculum has to do with lack of expertise and skills on inclusive practices hence challenging the impartation of relevant skills to handle diverse learners.*

*CL2: Mitigating factors include incompetence with regards inclusive practices and knowledge gap.*

*CL7: In my own opinion I feel that I do not have the complete capacity to train ECD trainee teachers to operate well in inclusive settings. I still require more capacity building to be able to effectively train pre-service teachers on inclusive settings. I also face with challenges relating to lack of training materials and funding constraints.*

*CL8: I am faced with challenges related to knowledge as well as adequate equipment for me to operate efficiently in the inclusive education settings.*

*CL9: I lack knowledge preparation of Individualised Education Plans for some categories of special needs learners and faced with inadequate resources to ensure effective delivery and implementation of inclusion.*

*CL 10 I lack practical experience in the area of inclusion. However I have a very positive attitude towards inclusive education.*

What came out as the major challenge from the participants was the issue of lack of knowledge and practical experience in the area of inclusive education. Implications are that most ECD pre-service teachers may not receive quality provision of services while training in colleges.

The researcher further sought to establish the challenges that the lecturers in institutions face when the stakeholders assist in the of pre-service ECD teachers for inclusive practices. The participants gave related responses as shown below,

*CL1: The most common challenge that we have when outside community assist in the support and monitoring is that we do not have enough time as the curriculum is packed. There are also negative attitudes towards the inclusive education programme.*

*CL3: The new curriculum is time consuming and too packed hence, there is limited time and space for extra work, this makes the lecturers have negative attitudes towards any monitoring mechanisms from outside the college system.*

*CL6: I have noted that the responsible authorities at college, school and community are taking too long to improve basic infrastructure, this could be as a result of inadequate financial resources or political will. This political will may be a result of the stigmatization that the parents, community and stakeholders have especially on the disabled children.*

*CL 7 The major challenge is the packed college curriculum coupled with unfriendly environments both social and physical caused by lack of finances.*

*CL 8 Responsible authorities have made efforts to adapt the physical environment, however the social environment still needs improvement as some stakeholders still continue to exhibit negative attitudes towards the issue of inclusion.*

The lecturers' sentiments indicate that despite external support and monitoring rendered in the preparation of pre-service ECD teachers, challenges still arise. The respondents' comments seem to point out issues of insufficient time when

experts visit because of the packed updated curriculum. Other challenges include inadequate finances for provision of materials for use, negative attitudes towards specialists by lecturers. Implications of the mentioned remarks are that pre-service ECD teachers are not given quality time, hence quality is compromised.

*Improvements that can be made for effective preparation of pre-service ECD teachers in view of inclusion*

Having established the strategies employed in the lecturers in the training of pre-service ECD teachers for inclusion and also examining the methods, categories of students with special education, a number of challenges surfaced in the process. The participants also highlighted challenges that they faced as they practice inclusion and those envisaged in their desire to achieve the best results. The researcher therefore went further to establish what the participants viewed as the best possible solutions to circumvent these highlighted challenges. These responses were recorded as shown below,

*CL1: I believe that part of the solution will be to improve funding efforts and redesigning the curriculum.*

*CL2: I believe the colleges should lobby the government for increased funding; this should also be supported by improved localized fundraising efforts to cater for all the financial needs thereof. Impartation of knowledge of ICT to these special needs learners.*

*CL4: What could also be the solution is to engage the community to participate in out-reach programmes and stakeholder engagement and participation. There is need to also have aggressive advocacy, awareness campaigns and twining of schools.*

*CL6: Solutions vary with geographical location of institutions socio-economic status of communities. There is need for awareness campaigns, outreach programmes and development of culture of sharing and caring.*

*CL7: Institutions and communities as embassies of education could role model inclusive education practices by encouraging enrolment of all children and closely monitoring and supporting their welfare.*

*CL9: Part of the solution to the challenges would be provision of workshops to empower the teachers, creation of resource centres and the reduction of teacher pupil ratio.*

*CL10: I am proposing Government intervention through support of the children with special needs, media coverage on new strategies adapted to concretize the nation and door-to-door invitations to families affected and infected.*

The participants suggested solutions that include engagement in fund raising activities, cascading issue of inclusion through outreach programmes, collaboration and active participation by government together with stakeholders, advocacy on inclusive practices, and creation of resource centres for evidence-based practices, networking and exchange programmes. Holding staff development programmes as well

as empowering lecturers and students with ICT skills. These solutions show that the lecturers are aware of what needs to be done, but they are limited by financial constraints in solving most of the challenges. The government therefore needs to engage with stakeholders and donors to raise funds for the inclusion programmes.

The researcher also sought to establish the areas of improvement on the curriculum for effectiveness operation in the inclusive settings. Participants had to give their opinions on how inclusive settings can be improved. The responses are as shown below,

*CL3: There are a number of areas needing attention for effectiveness of the curriculum in the inclusive settings. These areas are inclusive of teaching learners with Special Education Needs (SEN) for example brail and sign language, also have detailed in-depth content on teaching Special Needs Education (SNE). There is also need for media and technology literacy, adapting learning environment as well as modes of instruction, also to have teaching/learning materials, gadgets and knowledge of operating various machines and issues on inclusivity.*

*CL5: The curriculum should also cater in-depth for different forms of disabilities inclusive of handling them. It should also deal with the issues that affect the girl child as well as the disadvantaged children.*

*CL8 There has to be adaptation of both physical and social environment to meet the diverse needs of learners. Lecturer competencies, supervision by experts and support of the inclusion programme should be a deliberate collaborative effort by relevant stakeholders.*

Responses and comments from the different groups highlight an array of measures to note for improvement of pre-service ECD teacher education curriculum towards their preparation for inclusion. These include, developing content for SNE, brail, sign language, curriculum that caters for different types of diversity and adapting the physical and social environment to meet the diverse needs of learners. In a nutshell, all parties, felt that the curriculum is still falling short in addressing pertinent issues of inclusion, thereby lagging behind in global village milestones. An analysis of lecturers programmes. Schemes and plans revealed that there are a few topics covering issues of inclusion. Students' notes and handouts showed that focus was on the different types of disabilities, their causes, ways of identifying them at an early age and referral procedures. Issues of preparation of intervention programmes and their management in inclusive settings were silent. Data collected from the participants and observations made from documents analysis show that there are gaps in the curriculum used to prepare pre-service teachers for inclusion. There is need to address these gaps in curriculum

## V. CONCLUSION

The findings of the study revealed that lecturers had an understanding of inclusive education, however that understanding had limitations as it left a gap when juxtaposed



against literature. They understood diversity in terms of learners with disabilities which is a limited view. Inclusivity in other countries encompasses boys and girls, minority ethnic and faith groups, travellers, asylum seekers and refugees, those who need support to learn English, learners with special educational needs, gifted and talented learners, children from families under stress, children of teenage mothers and fathers, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, intersexual, queer learners and other learners at risk of dissatisfaction and exclusion.

In the study, it was noted that lecturers are recruited based on set criteria and all the participants met the set criteria in terms of qualifications. They were highly qualified but most had knowledge gaps pertaining to inclusion. This is because they were trained at a time when inclusion was not a norm. To mitigate the challenge of lack of skills and competencies, the study also revealed that external experts are sought to assist the lecturers and teachers in a number of areas such as teaching special needs children.

## VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Lecturers should be encouraged to further their studies and gain new knowledge and skills on current trends and topical issues. They have to constantly engage in research and contribute immensely in generation of new knowledge pertaining to topical issues like inclusion. As shop floor sweepers, lecturers should have the autonomy to constantly review the syllabus and align it with current trends.

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