

Challenges of implementing inclusion in Zimbabwe's Education System

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The movement towards inclusion continues to dominate educational discourse the world over. Inclusion describes the process of integrating students with special education needs into the least restrictive environments as required by the United Nations declarations that give all children the right to receive appropriate education. Over approximately the last two decades, the concept of inclusion has evolved towards the idea that all children and young people, despite different cultural, social and learning backgrounds, should have equivalent learning opportunities in all kinds of schools. The focus is on generating inclusive settings, which should include – respecting, understanding and taking care of cultural, social and individual diversities; providing equal access to quality education and close co-ordination. In Zimbabwe, inclusion has been actively considered since 1994. However, there is still a lot of scepticism and ambivalence towards the implementation of inclusion in Zimbabwe, as in a number of sub-Saharan African countries. What are the challenges of achieving this educational ideal? This study aimed at exploring this question from the Zimbabwean context. The study adopted a qualitative methodology, where a case study design was used to generate data. The population consisted of public secondary school teachers in the Bulawayo Metropolitan Province. 25 teachers were purposively sampled for focus group discussions. Findings included lack of policy on inclusion, negative attitudes of stakeholders, inadequate resources and lack of suitable facilities, teachers' limited skills and lack of support from instructional supervisors. Recommendations were that: the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should come up with clear policies on inclusion, teacher development should focus on inclusive teaching, sensitising stakeholders on inclusion – what it is, its benefits and challenges and exposing educators to research findings on inclusion.

Key words: Implementation of inclusion, challenges, special education needs, cultural and social diversities, education system, Zimbabwe.

INTRODUCTION

During the last century, there have been enormous changes in the way society treats exceptional children, moving from rejection and charitable isolation of children with disabilities, to acceptance of them as members of society [1]. Wilson [2] notes that the current level of acceptance has few precedents representing a much more enlightened view that was not evident in the immediate past. At the 1990 Jomtien World Conference on Education For All, much emphasis was placed on inclusive education [3]. This inclusive tendency was also a strong feature of the Salamanca Statement on Principles, Policy and Practice in Special Needs Education, agreed by representatives of 92 governments and 25 international organisations in June 1994 [4]. Its

vision was unambiguous ' . . . those with special educational needs must have access to regular schools which should accommodate them within a child-centred pedagogy capable of meeting these needs' [4].

The resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on March 1994 in relation to standard rules on the equalization of opportunities for persons with disabilities reads:

"Education in mainstream schools presupposes the provision of interpreter and other appropriate support services. Adequate accessibility and support services, designed to meet the needs of persons with different disabilities, should be provided [4]".

What emerges is a strong international call for inclusive

education. In retrospect, the notion of educating every child to achieve his/her greatest potential is a relatively new idea [5]. Swan [6] puts it that the current use of the term exceptional is itself a reflection of radical changes in society's view of people who differ from the norm. The world has come a long way from the Spartan practice of killing infants who did not meet their standards of normalcy. The journey has been slow, moving from neglect and mistreatment to pity and overprotection then finally to acceptance and integration into society to the fullest extent possible.

The philosophy of inclusion results in the creation of classes composed of pupils having different abilities, rates of learning and understanding of concepts, learning styles, motivational levels, special education needs and socio-economic backgrounds. Pupils' different characteristics are bound to present teachers with organisational and didactic challenges. As opined by Vivian [7], questions likely to inundate the teacher's mind include:

- Should one pitch lessons at a basic level so that the slower pupils can follow, or at a more advanced level to make sure that the academically gifted are not bored?
- Should one pitch lessons at the imaginary average ability pupil?
- How can one keep the weaker student from feeling frustrated and the proficient pupils from feeling under-challenged?
- What does one do with pupils having special education needs?
- Should one speak the pupil's mother tongue in class so that one does not lose anyone along the way, or try to speak English (the official language of instruction in Zimbabwe), in spite of the protests from those who guarantee they cannot understand a word.

The teacher should try to resolve the above issues so that there is a win-win situation.

In Zimbabwe, inclusion has been considered after the realization that approaches such as integration and institutionalization did not reap expected results. The former approaches were dogged by a plethora of implementation problems *inter alia*: teachers' negative attitudes, lack of resources, lack of proper laid out policies to inform practice, social repercussions such as isolation and stigmatization of children with disabilities. Notwithstanding this development, inclusion in Zimbabwe has not been fully embraced. Very few children with special educational needs have been included in Zimbabwe's mainstream public schools, most are still institutionalized. More often than not, pupils with special education needs fail to be cultivated to the limit of their academic potential in the mainstream schools due to a number of factors that are both within and without them. Unfortunately, in most cases, the school system blames the children for their lack of performance. The

Presidential Commission on Education of 1999 also alluded to this unfortunate scenario [8]. The Commission noted that the Disabled Persons' Act Chapter 17.01 of 1992 is silent on education and training of people with disabilities. It is also silent on the language which helps people with disabilities to enjoy their rights as full citizens of Zimbabwe, e.g. the right to information by the Deaf.

The purpose of this study was to explore challenges of implementing inclusion in Zimbabwe's education system. The study was informed by the following two questions: First, what are the challenges affecting the implementation of inclusion in Zimbabwe's Secondary Schools? Second, how can these challenges be addressed? Identifying the challenges of implementation is of importance in that it assists in coming up with specific intervention strategies. In addition, effective inclusion will go a long way towards making it possible for Zimbabwe to achieve some of its targeted Millenium Development Goals and Education for All.

Literature Review

Inclusive education can be understood as a guiding principle to attain reasonable levels of school integration for all students. In the context of a broader vision of integration, inclusive education implies the conception and the implementation of a vast repertoire of learning strategies to respond in a personalised way to learners' diversities. In this sense, education systems have the obligation to the expectation and needs of children and young people, considering that the capacity to provide effective learning opportunities based on a rigid scheme of integration (placing special needs students in mainstream schools) is very limited. UNESCO [9] defines inclusion as:

"A process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, within a common vision which covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is responsibility of the regular system to educate all children".

Furthermore, Ainscow et al. [10] state that: "inclusion is about making schools supportive and stimulating places for staff as well as students . . . It is about building communities which support and celebrate their achievements". In general, UNESCO [11] views inclusive education as implying the following four key terms:

- It is essentially a process of looking for the most appropriate ways of responding to diversity, as well as of trying to learn how to learn from differences.
- It is linked to the motivation and development, through

multiple strategies, of students' creativity and their capacity to address and resolve problems.

- It comprises the right of the child to attend school, express his/her opinion, experience quality learning and attain valuable learning outcomes.
- It implies the moral responsibility of prioritising those students who are at risk of being marginalised and excluded from school, and of obtaining low learning outcomes.

Contemporary views on social justice and equality of opportunity for all led to the belief that all pupils have the right to be exposed to the mainstream curriculum in a reasonably unadulterated form [12]. Most reasons for inclusion of pupils with disabilities in the regular programmes fall within the following categories: social-ethical, legal-legislative and psychological-educational arguments [13]. The goal of inclusion is to enable all pupils to belong within an educational community that validates and values their individuality [9].

Extreme advocates of full inclusion for example Lipsky and Gartner [14] and Stainback et al. [15] argue that any form of segregation of pupils with special needs is socially unjust and a denial of their rights to be exposed to the same broad range of learning experiences enjoyed by all other students. They wish to see pupils with even the most severe forms of disability placed in regular settings.

Less extreme supporters of inclusion suggest that the needs of pupils with significant disabilities are best served by retaining the full range of placement options including special classes for those who need them. Special services should be organised in such a way that pupils with severe and multiple disabilities can more easily join mainstream pupils on a frequent and regular basis [16]. Farlow [17] states that there is evidence to suggest that where schools are prepared to accept the challenge of full inclusion, it is indeed possible to provide appropriate programmes for these pupils.

In a study by Howarth [18] which looked at the mainstreaming of physically disabled children into regular schools, parents noted the development of friendships with nondisabled children, the personal development and increased maturity and independence of their children, an increase in self-esteem and ability to take the rough with the smooth. They were conscious that other children were learning about disabilities and developing realistic attitudes towards them. She also notes that extra teaching resources and favourable staff-pupil ratios are important and the percentage of children with disabilities in relation to the general population of the school must be well balanced.

Lyons [19] studied mainstreamed hard of hearing children and found that the hard of hearing children preferred being in mainstreamed schools to being in special schools. They felt that regular schools had higher status and provided more language experiences. They welcomed the social interaction provided by hearing peers and felt that they were getting a better introduction

to life in a hearing world.

Confidence is greater in children in mainstream schools than in those in special schools, though less than that of their nondisabled peers [20]. They cite a teacher who commented that: 'Our experience has shown that even pupils with severe and complex needs can be educated in the ordinary schools, not only with no damage to their self-esteem but with a positive enhancement'.

Slavin [21] contends that when children with and without disabilities are educated together, they learn life-long lessons and skills necessary for positive relationship with each other. This argument is backed by research data which indicate that supported inclusion leads to higher frequency of interactions and fosters the development of social and adaptive skills of children with disabilities [22]. Research also indicates that when young children with disabilities attend inclusive programmes, their peers are more accepting of them than children with disabilities served in separate classrooms [23]. The inclusion model seems to be compatible with society's emphasis on pluralism.

Young children with disabilities can achieve their highest potential only when they are provided with 'normal' opportunities. This reflects a philosophy of normalization which has been promoted in the field of special education since the late 1960s. According to this philosophy, when people are segregated, labelled or treated in any way that sets them further apart for their differences, then their worth is devalued [24]. The normalization principle should apply to all persons with special needs, regardless of their degree of disability. While normalization will not remove a person's disability, or make them normal, it does make possible a more normal and non-stigmatised life style [25].

Some would argue that the practice of full inclusion is not something that should have to be justified on any other premise than that it is the 'right thing to do'. As expressed by a father of a child with a disability: 'Why must children prove they are ready to be in regular classroom? We do not ask that of any other members of our society' [24].

Referring children for placement is time consuming and costly. Time spent gathering assessment data, waiting for assessment outcomes and decision making is too often time not spent teaching children with special needs. But time spent developing, implementing and modifying classroom instructional practices prior to referral, is time well spent teaching children with special needs. If teachers believe that more education should be provided in general classrooms, the search for successful pre-referral interactions will be successful. Convincing teachers that this should be how it should be will not be easy because of years they have been told that the right place for students with disabilities is (outside) in special schools [26,27].

While inclusion of all pupils in regular schools is seen by many as a very positive opportunity for pupils with special

educational needs to benefit from mainstream curriculum, the move has also been regarded by some as a 'highly ideological crusade' which fails to take account of the realities of learning difficulties in this population of pupils [28]. Sebba and Ainscow [29] are of the view that much of the debate on inclusive schooling was conducted primarily from a philosophical, sociological as well as political perspective, without due considerations being given to practicalities of implementation at classroom level. More practical guidelines are beginning to emerge to see how pupils with various disabilities can be effectively served in the regular classroom [30,18].

One area which is contentious is the feasibility of providing specialised services such as speech therapy, physiotherapy, orientation and mobility training, self-care training and alternative modes of communication. It may be difficult to address these needs in the regular classroom. Kauffman et al. [31] argue that:

"Although it sounds very engaging and intriguing, we doubt that it is possible to provide all needed services in one place at the same time for all types of children one might have. People are eager to say that they don't exclude anybody from a particular classroom, there is no credible research evidence showing that the regular classroom can actually provide superior services for all kids and disabilities".

Research on inclusion is complex and at times arrives at conflicting conclusions. Some research, for example, indicate that while children who are higher performers do better in inclusive settings, lower performing pupils tend to perform better in more segregated settings [25]. Not all parents are in favour of inclusion. Some parents feel that separate schooling is necessary to protect children with disabilities from rejection by their typically developing peers. Parents of nondisabled children too will have their own fears about the inclusion of children with special needs if it is a new innovation. Their main fear is that such children will take the teacher's time away from their children [21].

Dean [32] documents a number of challenges that children with disabilities are likely to encounter in inclusive settings. Some children with special needs, particularly those who have spent a lot of time in hospitals, may be less able to relate to their peer group than other children because of their previous experiences or practical problems. Children with behaviour problems may find it difficult to relate to other people. Deaf children and those with communication problems may have difficulties in finding an appropriate mode of communication. Children in wheelchairs may need time to demonstrate to their peers that they have similar interests.

Mainstream children, like teachers, may fear those who look different and this may make the inclusion of children with disabilities especially difficult. Children will also be influenced by their parents' concerns and fears. Howarth [18] makes the point that the nondisabled can project deep feelings of inadequacy onto the disabled and regard

them as causing fear and anxiety – the roots of prejudice.

Hegarty et al. [20] found that pupils generally accepted those with special needs, but ascribed them to 'out-group status' and tended to form friendship with other pupils who had education similar needs. The relationship with mainstream pupils tended to be an unequal one of helping and caring.

The effective teaching of inclusive classes is influenced by a number of conditions which include teachers and teaching methods, school organization, resource provision and in-service training [5]. The suggestion on school organization is that school heads should adopt the block time-tabling approach, to allow ample time for lessons. In addition, enough space should be created in the classrooms to facilitate group activities, buildings and facilities should also be accessible for pupils with different disabilities. In addition, record keeping [33]; social-skills training [32] and parental involvement [34] are all pivotal for the success of inclusion. It should be noted that benefits of inclusion do not occur without purposeful and careful supports to promote them [35].

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a qualitative case study design. The population consisted of secondary school teachers who were teaching in Government schools in the Bulawayo Metropolitan Province during term one of 2012. 25 teachers (15 female and 10 male) were purposively sampled from three secondary schools for focus group discussions. Generally in Zimbabwean schools there are more female than male teachers. Two schools contributed 8 teachers each, while 9 teachers were sampled from the third school. Teachers in each of the sampled schools constituted a focus group. The participants in all the three focus groups were drawn from teachers who were teaching the following subjects: Mathematics, English, History, Geography, and Science. These five subjects are some of the core subjects, done by all the students enrolled in any Government secondary school in Zimbabwe. The schools from where the teachers were sampled were all core-education schools.

Composition of Focus Group One

The group was composed of 8 participants, three male and five female teachers. Two longest serving members had been teaching at the secondary school level for more than twenty three years, four had three years teaching experience, while the remaining two were in their first year of teaching. Five members had first degrees, while the rest were teaching diploma holders.

Composition of Focus Group Two

The group was made up of 8 participants, four male and

four female. Four members had teaching experience of between fifteen and twenty years. Two members had six years teaching experience, while two were three years in the teaching field. Three members held postgraduate qualifications. Two held first degrees, while the remaining three were pursuing their first degree studies through open and distance learning.

Composition of Focus Group Three

The group consisted of nine participants, six female and three male teachers. Four longest serving members had twenty years teaching experience, two had twelve years teaching experience, while three had five years teaching experience. One participant held a postgraduate qualification, five were first degree holders, while three were diploma holders.

All the focus groups were composed of members who were deemed to have appreciable experiences in teaching and being of relevant qualifications to competently discuss the phenomenon under investigation.

Data collection procedures

The researcher made appointments with the three groups. The discussions were conducted over a period of three days. This arrangement made it possible for the researcher to transcribe proceedings from the preceding discussion, before going on to the next discussion. This approach afforded the researcher the opportunity to go over the transcripts, and identify issues the researcher wanted to pursue during the succeeding discussion. The venues of the discussions were the staffrooms of the schools from where the focus group members were drawn. The discussions were premised on two themes – the challenges of implementing inclusion and strategies that can be put in place to mitigate the challenges. The focus group discussions lasted between one and half to two hours each. The proceedings were recorded verbatim by the use of a dictaphone, transcribed and sent back to participants for verification before analysis. After verification, the data were segmented, coded, enumerated and categorised into sub-themes under each theme. Data analysis was based on thematic content analysis.

Segmenting

Segmenting involved dividing the data into meaningful analytic units. This was done by carefully reading the transcribed data one line at a time, taking cognisance of the following questions:

- Is there a segment of the text which is important for this study?
- Does it differ in any way from the text which precedes or

succeeds it?

- Where does the segment begin and end? Such segments (words, sentences or several sentences) were bracketed as a way of indicating their starting and ending points.

Coding

According to Johnson and Christensen [36] codes are labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study. Key words are attached to chunks of varying sizes – words, phrases, sentences, or whole paragraphs - these are referred to as “units of meaning”. Coding is the process of marking these units of meaning with symbols, descriptive words or category meanings. All the category names developed, together with their symbolic codes were placed on a master list. The codes on the master list were reapplied to new sections of text each time appropriate sections were discovered. New categories and new codes were added to the master list as the need arose.

Enumeration

The frequency with which observations were made was noted in order to help the researcher identify and take note of important ideas and prominent themes, occurring in the research group as whole, or between different focus groups.

Categorisation of data into sub-themes

Coded data were categorised into the following sub-themes:

- Facilities and resources;
- Methodological problems;
- Student-related problems;
- Lack of support and guidance from instructional leaders;
- Class sizes;
- The curriculum and its assessment;
- Attitudinal problems;
- Lack of a policy on inclusion;
- Distance from schools and transport problems; and
- Teacher suggested strategies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Facilities and Resources

These resonated in the three focus group discussions. A good number of teachers pointed out that buildings in most mainstream schools were not constructed with people with disabilities in mind. For example, wheelchair users found it difficult to access most school buildings.

Resource availability in mainstream schools was also frequently mentioned, with examples of the absence of equipment like Braille being mentioned by most teachers. Most teachers were of the view that the effective teaching of inclusive classes requires a lot of resources which are not available in most public mainstream schools.

The importance of facilities and resources is underscored by a number of authors, among them Kirk et al. [5] and Wolery and Wilbers [35]. Without suitable facilities and adequate resources, it will always be difficult to implement inclusion properly. Teachers need resources to produce teaching aids and to differentiate instruction. Other students in the inclusive classes may require assistive technology – for example computers and Braille equipment to cater for their special education. In addition, school buildings in most of Zimbabwe's urban secondary schools will always pose a challenge for students with physical disabilities, especially wheelchair users and those who walk on crutches.

Methodological issues

Teachers pointed out that it was hard to successfully manage inclusive classes due to competing demands. Special mention was also made of specific skills to deal with specific forms of disabilities, for example teachers not being in a position to read and write Braille when handling students with visual impairments and teachers not being able to use sign language when interacting with children with hearing impairments. Most teachers pointed out that lesson preparation, writing of resource materials, planning how to organise lessons, actual teaching, variety of work to be marked, and other means of assessment of students' work place heavy demands on teachers.

Other methodological problems cited were that; Lessons may fail to cope with the whole range of ability; teachers may use whole class instructional strategies that may not be appropriate for the different pupils and their different needs; teachers may fail to meet the needs of students occupying the extreme ends of the ability range continuum as well as addressing special educational needs of some students. Most teachers reiterated that contrary to the widely held belief that group work benefits pupils of different abilities, more often than not, slow learners and those challenged intellectually, look up to the academically gifted to solve problems and accomplish tasks when in groups. Teachers pointed out that attempting to teach inclusive classes is like juggling several balls at the same time, a feat which requires a lot of training and practice.

Teacher-related problems bring to the fore, the suitability of the teachers training programme that teachers go during their training period. It would appear as if teachers' colleges have not responded to the pupils' demographic changes being ushered into the schools by inclusion. As a result, teachers graduate from training

without the requisite skills and competences necessary for the effective teaching of inclusive classes [37]. Teachers will always find it difficult to effectively teach inclusive classes if they do not have the relevant competences. The assumption is that skilled teachers will be in a position to select appropriate teaching methods, differentiate instruction accordingly and reach out to meet the special education needs of pupils.

Pupil-related problems

The general consensus was that the speed of teaching may frustrate either the fast learners or the slow learners and those having special education needs. This may also breed disciplinary problems. Other teachers were concerned that inclusion may impact negatively on the self-esteem and confidence of slow learners and those having special needs, especially in instances where fast learners and the gifted ridicule the academically challenged and those pupils having special education needs.

Inclusion results in the creation of heterogenous classes in terms of ability, attitude to school work, motivational levels, readiness to learn, among other characteristics. In such classes, 'One size fits all' approach to teaching does not work. Teachers must be prepared to differentiate instruction [5,26]. This can be achieved through ensuring that all pupils are engaged in learning by assigning extension work to the gifted, scaffolding and remediation in cases of the academically challenged. In the absence of these didactic arrangements, teachers are likely to experience behaviour problems in inclusive classes. Behaviour may be a way of seeking attention from the teacher.

Lack of support and guidance from instructional leaders

Some teachers were of the view that their instructional supervisors offered them little help on inclusive teaching, in some cases, the help was non-existent. Their argument was premised on the realisation that when most of the instructional leaders went for teachers' training, inclusive education was not on the educational radar then. The teachers reiterated that they may actually be better informed than their instructional leaders, on the issue of inclusion. Other teachers commented that if the school head was to pass through and hear children's voices for instance during debate or class discussion, the teacher may be reprimanded for not being in control of the class. It will appear that to most school heads, learning takes place in a very quiet classroom, where the teacher's voice is the only one which should be heard.

For most teachers, inclusive classes may be synonymous to uncharted waters. Teachers may not be confident to experiment with new methods. It is at this time that they should get assurance, assistance,

guidance, direction and support from their instructional supervisors.

Class sizes (Teacher-Pupil ratio)

Teachers highlighted that in public schools the average class size was 45. They argued that this, coupled with special education needs of some pupils was bound to present teachers with headaches. They stated that it was difficult to give each pupil individual attention. Lack of such attention may mean that most pupils' educational concerns will remain unresolved.

Howarth [18] posits that class size impacts on inclusion implementation due to the difficulties that teachers have in attending to individual needs, class management dynamics and the marking load they exert on teachers. Faced with large classes, teachers may end up assigning work that is easy to mark, for example short answer questions and multiple choice assignments. If they assign essay questions, it is either marking will not be effective or they will take an excessively long period before giving pupils feedback. All these eventualities interfere with pupils' learning, earning inclusion a bad name. Yet with effective teaching, inclusion benefits all the pupils, regardless of their individual differences.

The curriculum and its assessment

Most teachers concurred that the curriculum was content-laden and examination oriented and should be covered in a set period – say four years in the case of an 'O' Level curriculum. Teachers confessed that they taught in order to cover the syllabi in preparation for the school leaving examinations. They said no wonder that they ended up drilling students, resorting to the banking concept of teaching. Teachers further stated that, for some pupils with special needs, the curriculum offered in mainstream schools may not be suitable, since they may never pass the school leaving examinations. They suggested that such pupils could benefit from a curriculum that teaches them everyday survival skills. Teachers also pointed out that pupils having learning disabilities and other forms of special education needs may require more than the stipulated time to complete the syllabi. Such pupils' needs should also be taken cognisance of during examinations. The suitability of Zimbabwe's secondary school curriculum was questioned by Nyagura [38] as far back as 1993. He pointed out that the increase in access to secondary education which allowed academically challenged pupils to proceed to secondary schools indiscriminately, whilst the academically biased curriculum remained unchanged, was a recipe for the decline of the quality of education.

Attitudinal problems

In all the three focus group discussions, attitudes of some

teachers, instructional supervisors, the community and pupils were identified as one of the biggest barriers to inclusion. Teachers noted that the attitude problem was epitomised by the attempts to stream pupils being witnessed in some Zimbabwean schools. In addition, teachers felt that some academically gifted pupils just as some teachers, resented being in the same class with pupils having learning disabilities and difficulties.

The success of inclusion hinges to a greater extent on whether or not education stakeholders are prepared for a shift in their mind set. Farlow [7] argues that if schools accept fully the challenges of inclusion, it is possible to provide all students with appropriate learning opportunities, notwithstanding their diversities. Unfortunately, at present, the thinking that those pupils having special education should be educated apart is rife in some of Zimbabwe's secondary schools. Where teachers are forced to teach inclusive classes, they may simply concentrate on pupils whose chances of passing are high ignoring those who are academically challenged. Similarly, school heads having a negative attitude towards inclusion may scuttle the efforts of positive teachers by denying them resources and support. Struggling pupils may be subjected to ridiculing and labelling in school, which may lead to the development of low self-esteem and truancy. All these undesirable outcomes have nothing to do with inclusion as an educational philosophy, but are a result of attitudinal problems.

Lack of a policy on inclusion

Teachers lamented lack of policy on inclusion. They said that a lot has been said about inclusion, yet there was no clear cut policy. In their views, policy will make inclusion mandatory, and force authorities to deploy resources and other support services to ensure implementation. In addition, policy may result in clear directions and implementation strategies.

Distance from schools and transport problems

The general feeling among teachers was that distance from school brings about transport problem, especially in rural areas and non-boarding schools. They pointed out that this could be compounded by unfavourable terrain, for example, rivers, sand paths/roads (for wheelchair users) and mountains. In addition, sight challenged students will require assistance to and from school. In the absence of such help, these children will end up swelling the ranks of children who are out of school in Zimbabwe.

Teacher suggested strategies

The following were the frequently mentioned strategies:

- The parent Ministry should come up with a clear policy on inclusion;

- Pre- and in-service training of teachers on inclusive teaching;
- Sensitising parents on inclusion during PTA meetings, parents' evenings and any other events that bring teachers and parents together;
- Providing facilities for children with disabilities; and
- Exposing teachers, school heads and other instructional supervisors to research findings on inclusion.

The strategies suggested by teachers could go a long way towards the successful implementation of inclusion. Unfortunately, apart from strategies focusing on teacher-related problems, most of the suggested strategies are not within the teachers' spheres of influence. Therefore, even if teachers were to employ teaching strategies that are consistent with inclusion, other non-classroom based challenges may scuttle their efforts.

CONCLUSION

Proponents of inclusion - a philosophy which calls for the mainstreaming of pupils with special education needs, are convinced that inclusion benefits all pupils notwithstanding their diversities and special education needs. However, if the promises of inclusion are to be realised, certain conditions must hold in the schools and their communities – skilled and competent teachers, adequately resourced schools, positive attitudes among all stakeholders, suitable curriculum backed by proper assessment methods, pro-inclusion educational policies that are properly implemented, reasonable teacher-pupil ratios, and instructional leaders who are well versed and prepared to implement inclusion. Basing on findings from this study, the non-existence of these conditions in Zimbabwe's government secondary schools, constitute the challenges hindering the successful implementation of inclusion. While challenges related to teaching methodology, pupils and class sizes can be managed at school level, most of the challenges need to be addressed at the systems (Ministerial) level.

If inclusion is to take root in Zimbabwe's government secondary schools, there is need for the promulgation of pro-inclusive policies and effective implementation of the policies. Pro-inclusion policies will then cascade to teacher education institutions, so that pre-service teacher training focuses on inclusive teaching. Practicing teachers can be equipped with inclusive teaching skills through in-service teacher development and workshops. The proposed policy will also ensure that pupil assessment takes cognisance of inclusion and that existing and future facilities such as classrooms, libraries, workshops and laboratories are easily accessed by pupils with different forms of disabilities. Education stakeholders must also be sensitised on inclusion and its philosophy. If the concerns raised by teachers are not addressed expeditiously, inclusion in Zimbabwe will remain rhetoric,

similar to mirage to the thirsty weary traveller. Assuming that conditions necessary for the effective implementation of inclusion have been met, future research on inclusion implementation in Zimbabwe's government secondary schools must provide clear practical guidelines on how inclusion ought to be implemented.

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