

A comparative Analysis of the Efficacy of Inclusive Education of two Harare Secondary Schools

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Abstract

The strengthening of inclusive education in the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) in the early 1990s ignited hope that the needs of the various social groups were to be met, especially the elders, children, and disabled. This hope took a journey that was considerate of the plight of disadvantaged learners. Thus, this paper seeks to answer the question of the effectiveness of inclusive education in two secondary schools in Harare Metropolitan Province (Zimbabwe). The research study utilizes a qualitative approach, with data planned to be gathered using triangulation (interviews, questionnaires, and document analysis). Purposive sampling was used to select participants for the study. The social and socio-cultural learning theories guided the researchers toward getting answers to the concept being studied. Results show that inclusive education can be part of the school's curriculum. It was recommended that inclusive education should get enough attention and support. The concerned ministry needs to monitor inclusive education properly.

Keywords: *Inclusive, qualitative, learning theory, education, disabilities.*

Introduction

Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe, reflects a dynamic educational landscape where the principles of inclusive education are increasingly recognized and implemented. Inclusive education encompasses a range of strategies and initiatives accommodating the diverse learning needs of students, including those with disabilities, special educational needs, and socio-economic disadvantages. The effectiveness of inclusive education in

schools is influenced by various factors, including policy frameworks, teacher training, availability of resources, and community support (Ainscow, 2020; Chuchu & Chuchu, 2016; UNESCO, 2000).

The study decided on a comparative analysis between two secondary schools in Harare, driven by the need to explore how different approaches to inclusive education impact student learning outcomes and overall educational experiences. By selecting schools that represent varying degrees of inclusive education implementation, this study aims to identify promising practices, challenges, and opportunities for improvement. Such insights are crucial for informing evidence-based policies and practices that promote inclusive educational environments conducive to the holistic development of all students (Mueller, 2019). Disability has inherent discrimination, stigma, and labeling resulting in different treatment, including being a potential source of self or imposed exclusion from school and ostracism by the community this has the net effect of disadvantaging learners living with disabilities, and yet "... disability does not mean inability." (Dawadi et al, 2021; Nilholm, 2021).

Purpose of the Study

The study aims to investigate the effectiveness of inclusive education practices in two Harare secondary schools. The following research question guides the study:

How does the efficacy of inclusive education vary between two secondary schools in Harare and what factors contribute to this difference?

The research question allows for a comparative analysis of inclusive education implementation, exploring potential factors such as school policies, resources, teacher training, support structures, and attitudes toward inclusion that may influence outcomes.

Literature Review

Inclusive education practices can be implemented in secondary schools through various strategies and approaches. The aim is to create an environment where all students, regardless of their differences either mentally or physically have equal opportunities to learn and succeed (Muresherwa & Jita, 2023). Differences in school policies and practices related to inclusive education can significantly impact efficacy. For

example, one school may have well-developed policies that prioritize inclusion and provide comprehensive support for students with diverse learning needs, another may have limited or inconsistent practices in place (Lemeyu, Goshomi & Chikutuma, 2023).

Mutanga (2022) declares that limited funding for special education programs results in understaffing, inadequate instructional materials, and a lack of assistive technologies. Disparities in resource allocation, such as funding, staffing, and infrastructure, can influence the efficacy of inclusive education. This affects the development of inclusive education as it requires much support and attention. Schools with greater resources may be better equipped to provide specialized support services, assistive technologies, and professional development for teachers, resulting in higher levels of efficacy. This leaves those schools which are marginalized and poorly resourced failing to create an inclusive education environment for all learners (Chidarikire, 2023).

In their study, Yuwono and Okech (2021) highlighted that attitudes and beliefs that are discriminatory or stigmatizing towards students with disabilities or diverse learning needs can create barriers to inclusion and undermine the efficacy of inclusive education efforts. Mitra and Dominik (2023) add that the teachers, school authorities, and the community must bring all groups of people into the school environment. To create an environment conducive to inclusive education, schools need to adopt a universal learning design (UDL) approach which involves designing curriculum, instruction, and assessment methods that are accessible and flexible to accommodate diverse learning needs. This removes barriers to learning, provides appropriate accommodation and support, and fosters an inclusive culture that celebrates diversity and promotes academic excellence for all (Kwizera, 2021; Chidarikire, 2023; Erdem & Kaya, 2020).

Impact of Inclusive Education in Secondary Schools

Inclusive education in secondary schools significantly impacts students, teachers, and the wider school environment. Academic, social, and emotional dimensions are all affected. Studies indicate that inclusive learning environments yield better results than those segregating. For instance, several studies revealed that compared to kids in segregated

environments, students with disabilities in inclusive settings were more likely to attain higher reading and math competency. According to Chidarikire (2023), peer support and exposure to a wider curriculum helped students with disabilities in inclusive secondary schools outperform their able-school counterparts academically.

According to Mavundukure and Nyatanga, (2018), inclusive classrooms offer more chances for friendship development and social contact than segregated ones. Learners come together and interact, building relationships and closing the isolation gap. In most schools in developed countries, inclusivity has strengthened peer relationships and decreased social isolation for children with impairments (Mueller, 2019). Zimbabwean schools that have adopted the program have seen a change in the atmosphere in and around the learning areas

Teachers must receive professional development to improve their ability to deliver instruction and manage classrooms to implement inclusive education. Not disabled learners only but all students gain from this professional development. Secondary schools in Finland that used inclusive policies made significant investments in teacher training programs, which enhanced the general quality of instruction and student outcomes. According to Muresherwa and Jita, (2023), Zimbabwean educators who practice inclusive education were trained to serve learners from varied backgrounds and benefit all students in the classroom.

Inclusive education promotes a healthy school culture where diversity is valued and all students feel included. When schools implement inclusive policies they are bound to notice a significant improvement in school climate, resulting in decreased bullying and increased student engagement. Research by Chidarikire, (2023) found that inclusive education initiatives in Zimbabwean secondary schools led to a more inclusive and friendly school climate, reducing incidents of bullying and promoting mutual respect among students (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE, 2017).

Furthermore, inclusive education helps reduce discrimination and prejudice by fostering early interactions and friendships among diverse student groups. Studies in various developed countries have shown that students who experienced inclusive education were more likely to support inclusive policies and practices in their communities as adults. This is

highlighted in a study by Mpofo and Sefotho (2024), who found that students who attended inclusive schools in Zimbabwe were more likely to spearhead the development of inclusive practices and policies in their communities as adults (Ainscow, 2020; Mueller, 2019; Tafirenyika et al, 2023).

Theoretical Approach

The study is informed by Social Learning theory and Socio-cultural theory (Miller, 2023). The social learning theory explains that learning is both cognitive and behavioral. It mainly takes place through observation, modeling, and imitation of others. Observation takes center stage during learning and consists of interactive observation, tripartite interaction of environment, person, behavior system, cognitive contributions, and self-efficacy (Lai, 2023). The theory proposes that modeling is attained through instruction (verbal or observation) with subsequent imitation by the learner through steps such as attention, retention, reproduction, and sustained motivation. These apply to both learners living with and without disabilities hence inclusion. Social learning theory enables the acquisition of useful social skills in action. It can be argued that this is action-based. Interaction of learners, teachers, and administrators is maximized (Miller, 2023).

Vygotsky proposed the sociocultural learning theory where the zone of proximal development was explained to have far-reaching implications for inclusive education at a school and in the classroom (Dervan, 2023). According to Vygotsky (1978), in the zone of proximal development, learners are better able to learn when guided by an adult (more knowledgeable others) or when working with a supportive and more knowledgeable or competent partner. For learning to take place there is the use of the following “prompts, clues, modeling, explanation, leading questions, discussion, joint participation, encouragement, and control of the child’s attention” (Miller, 2023).

All learners will potentially learn from each other behaviourally, attitudinally, and academically. More importantly, the school is an extension of the community values and vice versa. Involving life experiences in learning helps to share knowledge promoting social interaction and communication. Vygotsky also alludes to scaffolding

where learning support is provided when new concepts are introduced with support being withdrawn as the learner gains confidence in executing tasks (Lai, 2023).

Research Methods and Approach

The study adopted an interpretive paradigm to have an in-depth understanding of the concept under study. The interpretive paradigm enables the researcher to collect data from different sources using multiple techniques such as questionnaires, interviews, and archived document analysis (Leavy, 2022). Furthermore, the data collected using the paradigm is subject to qualitative analysis and presentation with themes or clusters. In this study, purposive sampling is underpinned by criterion sampling. Triangulation was used in this study to obtain meaningful results that reflect participants' experiences through their worldview lenses. A sample size of 30 learners was selected purposively and given a pseudonym for confidentiality. The demographic is presented below:

Demographic characteristics of participants: Junior Secondary N=8; "O" Levels N=12; "A" Levels N=10.

Name	Gender	Age	Level
JN	Female	14	Junior
FC	Male	17	'O' Level
JE	Male	19	'A' Level
MR	Female	16	'O' Level
CP	Female	15	Junior
PT	Male	16	Junior
SR	Female	18	'A' Level
CT	Female	17	'O' Level
TK	Male	19	'A' Level

Results

Results were analysed through thematic analysis and show that students are aware of inclusive education issues. All are affected by the barriers that are posed in a discriminatory society towards disability. Most of the responses agreed on the collective responsibility to improve the quality of education through inclusivity. Participants called upon greater support for such programs as most agreed to inclusion. Results show that in the modern world, everyone

should be accorded the same chance to showcase their ability to contribute to development.

Discussion

The study's key results were discussed guided by the following themes in the search for answers regarding the effectiveness of educational inclusion. The activities created a pathway for obtaining suitable answers, considering issues arising during interviews, questionnaires, and document analysis (Leavy, 2022; Mutanga, 2022).

Zimbabwe's Obligations for Inclusive Education

Zimbabwe has an obligation under international conventions to ensure access to education for all children, including those with disabilities. It is crucial to effectively implement and comply with international conventions and domestic laws to achieve inclusive education. Zimbabwe has ratified several international instruments that promote the right to education for persons with disabilities. One of the most significant international treaties is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which Zimbabwe ratified in 2013. Article 24 of the CRPD explicitly states that persons with disabilities should have access to an inclusive education system at all levels, without discrimination and on an equal basis with others (Mitra & Dominik, 2023; Schwarz, 2023).

However, despite these legal frameworks, and compliance with these laws and conventions, implementing inclusivity in Zimbabwe has been challenging. The 2022 report by the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (ZHRC) noted that the country still faces significant barriers to providing inclusive education for children with disabilities, citing inadequate infrastructure, lack of specialized teachers, and insufficient funding (Erdem & Kaya, 2020).

Inclusive education is viewed with mixed reactions from the society and the schools. Most people do not accept that disability is just a condition and that those who are like that or in those situations can do something that leads to social development (Kopnina, 2020). The participants alluded to inclusive education as guided by international

declarations and conventions to which Zimbabwe is a member or signatory. PR articulated this position by saying:

“Zimbabwe being a signatory to many conventions on the rights of children, including those living with disabilities is bound to ensure that there is full compliance in making sure that learners access what they rightfully deserve. I am sure the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education has a department tasked with ensuring that issues to do with the latest changes in laws on disability and education be it local, regional, or international”.

The above precept shows that the new Zimbabwean Constitution has a section about children and adults with disabilities. It is important to note that disability in education needs to be evaluated. If left unattended there is less or no progress gained in terms of inclusivity (Erdem & Kaya 2020; Baidoo. Owasu, Fofie, Anokiyewaa & Gaisie, 2023). CT declared that:

“Schools are not complying with the government directives and no one is monitoring this program in education. This is deliberately leading to the concerns of the disabled persons in schools not being attended to. Also, we have never been consulted as the disabled in what we feel about making the schools friendlier. Disability is something that I do have today and you don’t, but tomorrow one can wake up disabled”.

From the above response, a holistic approach needs more attention for a successful inclusive education. Collectively education needs to work together on issues around disability. It should be everyone’s duty to see to it that disability is given preference. This aligns with a study by Erdem and Kaya (2020) which advocates for inclusivity as it creates acceptance and human synergy which accepts people with disability.

Inclusion and Access to Education

According to Muresherwa & Jita (2023), children with disabilities should have equal access to education and their right to education should be respected. It is important to ensure that schools and education systems are restructured to eliminate barriers and provide the necessary support to the needs of these children. This is reinforced by MR who echoed these sentiments:

“I discovered that people shun those who are disabled and in most cases, you see that they are not even comfortable to be around the disabled. In most situations, you hear people saying that having a disabled child is a case from God. This makes it hard for these disadvantaged ones to be included in social life, especially in schools where you find learners who do not understand what life is all about. “

It is so disheartening given MR’s assertion that inclusive education has no room in most people’s minds from the way they view those who are disabled. In most schools, facilities such as classrooms, libraries, ablutions, and sporting did not have a provision for learners and teachers who use wheelchairs. This means the infusion of inclusive education is not standardised across the system. Yet, all buildings are required by law to have ramps and appropriate ablution facilities that are accessible using wheelchairs among other assistive devices for people with disabilities (Baidoo et al, 2023). TK had this to say:

“Yes, we are aware that buildings and facilities must accommodate learners and staff with disabilities but our schools were constructed a long time ago. Currently, we don’t have funds to alter buildings and sporting facilities. Unless we are funded the status quo remains, which puts learners and staff living with disabilities at a disadvantage. It is an unfortunate situation, which hopefully will be corrected shortly”.

The above calls for a refocus of the perception towards inclusivity such that an equal society is realised, which embraces everyone’s effort regardless of ability. Collaboration among all stakeholders is vital for creating an inclusive environment that supports the development of social skills and reduces stigma. Upholding the rights of all children, particularly those with disabilities, is of utmost importance. Upon adoption, inclusive education shows there was no action in most schools, (Mukuna & Maizere, 2022). CP highlighted:

“The teachers specialize in subjects in generality they do not go deeper into the aspects of inclusive education and this creates gaps in knowledge and practice. In addition, I have never heard of a workshop on inclusive education. Teachers need to know the area.

Teacher development is needed for them to appreciate the demands and necessities of inclusion education. Chireshe (2022) highlighted the need to acquire knowledge and have an attitude towards creating inclusion in schools.

Implementation and compliance

Implementing and complying with laws and regulations regarding the rights and education of children with disabilities at national and global levels is crucial (Mitra & Dominik, 2023; Schwarz, 2023). There is evidence of non-compliance with government directives, particularly in schools failing to adhere to government guidelines for accommodating and addressing the needs of students with disabilities. This is achievable through continuous professional development as lamented by JE:

“Every teacher has a personal responsibility to upgrade their knowledge in line with modern teaching and learning processes which includes the inclusive education system. It is good to have professionally minded teachers to take care of our education as it needs extra care on disability concerns of the current society.

This is supported by FC whose response was:

“The responsible ministry must ensure that teachers undergo regular workshops on inclusive education. Being disabled is not a choice. It can happen even to parents, teachers, and learners so there is a need to capacitate the teachers on inclusive education.”

The nation's benefit is the success in the inclusion process and the subsequent reduction of the reliance on the government will be realised (Ainscow 2020). If given proper skills every human being can be self-reliant and champion development.

Overcoming Societal Stigma and Empowering Disabled Learners

The society holds discriminatory attitudes towards people with disabilities. Many community members lack an understanding of what it means to be disabled. As a result, disabled individuals are often shunned or made to feel uncomfortable. There is a prevailing

belief that having a disabled child is a "curse from God." These attitudes make it challenging for disabled individuals to fully participate in social life, particularly in schools (Mutanga, 2022; Lemeyu, Goshomi & Chikutuma, 2023). SR concurs:

“Our society used to shun those who have disabilities but recently we have started to accept them giving them enough attention and opportunities to live. Some of them are good and capable of doing things that those able-bodied are failing to do. If we support each other we are bound to have a stigma-free society”

The above response shows that through persistent monitoring and encouragement non-inclusivity will be a thing of the past. The collaboration will create a society that embraces all and shuns none. We need to fight stigmatisation and be accommodative of differences. FC declares:

“Society is suffering because of a few mistakes we are making which is the stigma against those who are disadvantaged. They have a contribution to make and empowering these people through formal education is the greatest weapon towards attaining a happy society.”

This shows that the young generation is eager to partner with anyone to change how the disadvantaged are perceived and work together. The planning and implementation of various programs should be inclusive and promote an equal society. This aligns well with a study by Mitra and Dominik (2023) on accelerating transformative change for persons with disabilities in the peace and security pillar. There are even calls for stiffer penalties against those still embroidered in the stigmatisation philosophy.

Recommendations

It is commended that all concerned parties such as government, social organizations, parents and society should work together toward an inclusive goal. Laws should be obligatory and active for the operation to sail through. The above foundation of inclusivity should be firm from technical to infrastructure availability. The government should be the key sponsor of teacher professional enrichment in areas of

inclusion (Kopnina, 2020; Van Mieghem, Verschueren, Petry & Struyf, 2020). Teachers play a crucial role in the success of inclusive education. It is essential to provide ongoing training and professional development opportunities for teachers to equip them with the necessary knowledge, skills, and strategies to effectively support and accommodate diverse learners in their classrooms (Chidarikire, 2023).

Teaching and learning environments to employ differentiated instruction, assistive technologies, and alternative information formats to cater to diverse learning styles and abilities (Kwizera, 2021). Each individual should be catered for his or her needs. Collaborative efforts among various stakeholders, such as teachers, school administrators, parents, and community members, are crucial. Creating partnerships and fostering open communication can facilitate the exchange of resources, expertise, and support systems (Mpfu & Sefotho, 2024). Kopnina (2020) argues that empowering society relieves pressure off the government coffers and this is easy if inclusive education is promoted into a result-oriented program. All stakeholders are important and frequent monitoring and evaluation are the key to the successful adoption of inclusive education principles (Nilholm, 2021; Triviño-Amigo, Mendoza-Munoz, Mayordomo-Pinilla, Barrios, Contreras-Barraza, Gil-Marin & Rojo-Ramos, 2022).

Creating and maintaining a positive and inclusive school culture is of importance for the well-being and success of all students. Implementing educational programs is crucial in addressing and eradicating stigma, promoting empathy and understanding, and nurturing an environment that embraces diversity and celebrates each student's unique abilities and background (Chireshe, 2022).

It is also recommended that education should encompass an extensive approach to gathering and analyzing data on various facets of student performance, encompassing academic achievements, attendance metrics, and the overall school environment (Chireshe et al, 2022; Tiernan, 2022). Embracing these recommendations within Harare's secondary schools enhances the effectiveness of inclusive education, ensuring that every student has equitable opportunities to flourish and realize their full potential.

Conclusion

The study concluded that a myriad of laws guiding inclusive education needs to be crafted in synch with the constitution in Zimbabwe. These laws are adequate for the smooth implementation of inclusive education. The study further concluded that inclusive education in secondary education is addressed in a lukewarm and indirect manner leaving disabled students in a crisis, hence most failing to complete their secondary education. Also, the study concluded that unsuitable infrastructure and facilities indirectly exclude them from secondary learning space leading to an exclusionary approach instead of inclusion. More financial injection into the education system will improve the delivery concept of inclusive education.

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