



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Support Provided to Lecturers towards the Implementation of Inclusive Education in Zimbabwean Teachers' Colleges

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**ARTICLE INFO****ABSTRACT**

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This study examines lecturer support in implementing inclusive education in Zimbabwean teacher colleges. Using an interpretivist paradigm, qualitative approach, and case study design, 24 participants (three principals and 21 lecturers) were purposively sampled from three colleges transitioning to inclusive education. Guided by Sherman and Wood's classical liberal theory of equal opportunity, data were collected through interviews, focus groups, and document analysis, then thematically analysed. Findings reveal insufficient support for lecturers, non-inclusive infrastructure, and inadequate resources due to economic challenges. The Ministry of Education's limited assistance compounds these issues. Recommendations include providing assistive aids, personalised materials, and further research.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Inclusive education has become a global imperative, yet many higher education institutions still struggle to implement it fully. Lecturers play a critical role in the successful implementation of inclusive education, but they often lack the necessary support and resources to do so effectively. There is no explicit legislation or policy on inclusive education in Zimbabwe. However, research has revealed that policy difficulties are congruent with the aim of inclusive education. The article explores the support provided to lecturers in a Zimbabwean teachers' training college for implementing inclusive education. Since the 1980s, children with impairments in Zimbabwe have been integrated into regular education settings (Samkange, 2013). Because of its perceived and recognised contribution to socioeconomic growth and development, inclusive education has recently been a topic of interest worldwide (Mutepfa, Mpofu and Chataika, 2007). However, little has been said about educator training in implementing inclusive education (/ \* Other vulnerabilities, such as students from low-income families, students living in isolated and marginalised rural areas, and those afflicted by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, receive little or no attention (Spratt & Florian, 2015). Zimbabwe lacks a defined policy or legislation governing inclusive education (Mutepfa, Mpofu and Chataika, 2007; Magumise & Sefotho, 2020).

Zimbabwe has a range of Acts that support and promote the inclusion of children with disabilities, including the Zimbabwe Education Act (Zimbabwe, 1996) which introduced free education and compulsory education for all; the Zimbabwe Disabled Persons Act (1996 cited in Mutepfa, Mpofu and Chataika, 2007) that addresses rights of people with disabilities in a range of sectors, including the education sector; the Secretary's circular number P36 of 1990, which provides guidelines to placement procedures for special classes, resource units and institutions; the Secretary's Circular number 2 of 2000, on the inclusion of learners with albinism with reference to meaningful inclusion in schooling and co-curricular activities; and the Director's Circular number 7 of 2005, which offers guidelines for the inclusion of learners with disabilities in all school competitions (Mpofu & Molosiva, 2017). This evidence supports the assertion that inclusive education is being implemented in Zimbabwe and that the teachers get in-service training with inclusive teaching strategies, which

obviously do not match world standards (Chireshe, 2013). However, there is no mention of college lecturers in the training programmes.

This study examined the support given to lecturers and student teachers for implementing inclusive education in teachers' training colleges. Recent research on inclusive education has revealed that most lecturers in teachers' training colleges face many challenges, such as a lack of specific policies on inclusive education, a lack of resources, a lack of inclusive teaching strategies, a lack of counselling expertise, and negative attitudes among lecturers (Chireshe, 2013; Magumise & Sefotho, 2020). Inclusive education's successes depend primarily on a country's commitment to adopting appropriate legislation, developing policies, and providing adequate funding for implementation (Watkins, De Vroey and Symeonidou, 2016). According to Janney and Snell (2013:2–3,9), there is a need to find out what works for a particular college and class situation to offer effective inclusive education. In addition, teachers' colleges in Zimbabwe need adequate financial assistance in running the inclusive education programme. However, such challenges were also found in other countries, such as China, as shown by Xie, Potměšil and Peters (2014), where many teachers reported that they had not received adequate support in terms of collaboration with colleagues, teaching and learning materials, administration, infrastructure, and finance.

According to Saloviita (2020), inclusive education, as defined initially by the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994 cited in Ainscow and César, 2006), refers to schooling in which all children, including children with severe disabilities, have access to regular classrooms with the help of adequate support. However, a study by Nel, Tlale, Engelbrecht, and Nel (2016) found that teachers reported that implementing inclusive education was stressful and experienced contextual dilemmas such as lacking formal support structures. Similarly, the colleges in Zimbabwe are facing challenges in implementing inclusive education, such as lecturers' attitudes towards learners with disabilities, the professional competence of lecturers, the shortage of qualified lecturers and the lack of a national system for special education certification (Magumise & Sefotho, 2020). The results of the study by Mokaleng and Möwes (2020:1) indicate that numerous issues, such as inappropriate policy development issues, teacher attitudes, a lack of teacher training, inadequate support and resources, and curriculum issues, hindered inclusive education implementation. As a result, these problems exacerbated the difficulties in implementing inclusive education (Mokaleng & Möwes, 2020). The lecturers in teachers' training colleges need a positive attitude towards including children with special educational needs in mainstream classrooms (Addy, Dube, Mitchell and SoRelle, 2023). Muresherwa and Jita (2023) and Mandina (2012) agree that developing high-quality inclusive education instruction in teachers' training colleges is imperative. However, this must include relevant educational opportunities for continuing professional development for all lecturers (Watkins, De Vroey and Symeonidou, 2016).

Research suggests that teachers, parents, learners, and governments do not fully understand inclusive education (Knowles, 2013; Paaso & Korento, 2010). This is in line with studies by Turner-Cmuchal and Aitken (2016) that show that most people understand inclusive education as the integration of people with disabilities but are not aware that it goes beyond that to include abused children, orphans, HIV/AIDS and learners, children with poor backgrounds, religion, politics, language, immigrants and gender. Thus, the term 'inclusive education' needs to be clarified for educators, governmental and non-governmental organisations, policymakers, and social actors (UNESCO 2009 cited in Acedo, Ferrer & Pamies, 2009).

This indicates that inclusive education has a wide gap in its implementation (Helmer, Kasa, Somerton, Makoelle and Hernández-Torrano, 2023; Damianidou & Phtiaka, 2018; Chikwature et al., 2016; Genova, 2015). UNESCO's session No. 48 of the International Conference on Education (ICE) held in 2008 in Geneva put the implementation and support of inclusive education at the top of its agenda (UNESCO, 2011). In addition, Paul Vallejo, President of the International Bureau of Education at that time, commented that inclusive education was a critical issue that needed immediate attention as a global agenda and full support from all stakeholders (UNESCO, 2011).

In the Salamanca Statement, UNESCO (2019 cited in Ydo, 2020) recommends continued progress toward the goals of inclusive education for all by ensuring that lecturers and teachers are supported in promoting inclusion and equity (Merrigan & Senior, 2023). However, several challenges were identified in the African context of inclusive education, include negative attitudes towards disability,

poor capacity with Disabled People's Organisations, little domestication of conventions on the rights of people with disabilities, little aggregation of disabilities with other vulnerable groups; a lack of research in inclusive education; poor co-ordination between Disabled People's Organisations; and educators who lack the expertise to handle learners with disabilities (Forlin, Sharma, Loreman and Sprunt, 2015). The purpose of this article is to address the current state of inclusion in teachers' colleges and to contextualise how higher and tertiary education is currently supporting and responding to the issue of inclusive education as 'The classical liberal theory of equal opportunities model is established to construct sustainable support systems for the implementation of inclusive education' (Sherman and Wood, 1992 cited in Mwangi, 2012).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Inclusive education encompasses political, social, psychological, economic, cultural, and educational dimensions (Samkange, 2013; UNICEF, 2023). It aims to integrate individuals with disabilities into mainstream education while eliminating exclusionary practices (Samkange, 2013). UNICEF defines it as providing real learning opportunities to all, including marginalised groups like minority language speakers. The study also examines Zimbabwe's support structures within the framework of classical liberal theory on equal opportunities.

### **Classical Liberal Theory of Equal Opportunities**

Sherman and Wood's classical liberal theory (1992) positions education as an essential right for all individuals, emphasising the inherent dignity, autonomy, and societal contributions of students. The theory advocates for removing barriers within educational systems that arise from socio-economic, cultural, geographical, or institutional factors (Xie et al., 2023). Inclusive education prioritises the instruction of students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms alongside their peers (Bellamy, 2019; Shaukat, 2023). This theoretical framework asserts that "disability is not inability" and promotes stakeholder collaboration to address challenges such as curriculum reform and resource development (Resch & Schritteser, 2023).

Globally, the adoption of inclusive education faces significant obstacles, with limited progress in diminishing segregated educational systems (EADSNE, 2012; Saloviita, 2020). In Zimbabwe, research indicates a lack of adequate support, training, and resources for both lecturers and trainee teachers, which impedes the effective implementation of inclusive practices (Addy et al., 2023). This study investigates the support mechanisms in place, the challenges encountered, and the disparity between theoretical frameworks and practical applications within Zimbabwe's teachers' colleges.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The study on which this article is based investigated the support provided to lecturers and student teachers during the implementation of inclusive education in teachers' colleges in Zimbabwe. A qualitative approach was adopted in the study, where the researcher understood the events and individuals in their natural state (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2018). Findings by Thanh and Thanh (2015:25) Interpretivists utilise qualitative methods like case studies and ethnography to comprehensively understand contexts. This approach views reality as socially constructed, complex, and dynamic. In this study, purposive sampling identified 24 participants, including three principals and 21 lecturers from three colleges implementing inclusive education. The lecturers were organised into three focus groups (A, B, and C) based on their roles. Data collection included interviews with principals, documentary analysis, and focus group discussions with lecturers.

### **Data analysis**

The data were analysed and organised around six themes related to the support given to lecturers and student teachers during the implementation of inclusive education: (a) promoting equal opportunity among students; (b) collaborations among lecturers; (c) strategies used to support the implementation of inclusive education; (d) training of lecturers; (e) material, economic, social political and moral support; and (f) the college environment and its accessibility. Interview reflections, triangulation, comparison of voice recordings and field notes, and member checks ensured the trustworthiness of the data.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the study's findings and discusses their implications, organised thematically to reflect the critical areas identified through data analysis. Each theme highlights significant aspects of inclusive education within teachers' colleges, offering insights into the challenges and opportunities in its implementation.

### Equal Opportunity for Students

The study's findings strongly emphasise the importance of equal opportunity in education, guided by Sherman and Wood's classical liberal theory of equal opportunities (1992, cited in Mwangi, 2012). This theoretical foundation underscores equitable access to education as a vital goal, which aligns with the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2016, cited in Roche, 2016), advocating inclusive education as a fundamental human right. Participants consistently highlighted the necessity of non-discrimination, emphasizing that all students must be treated equally. For instance, one participant noted, "Colleges should prevent student and lecturer discrimination," while another stressed, "Equality is crucial; all learners must be treated without segregation." Supporting literature corroborates these perspectives, affirming that inclusive education promotes equal participation and fosters institutional reform by removing barriers and embracing diversity (Bellamy, 2019; Cobley, 2018; Florian et al., 2017). Achieving this goal necessitates revisiting and reforming institutional cultures, policies, and practices to ensure inclusivity (Slee, 2011).

### Strategies for Implementing Inclusive Education

The findings also indicate a need for structured institutional strategies to support inclusive education. Participants suggested measures such as orientation sessions and mentorship programs to facilitate implementation (Messiou, 2017). However, some expressed concerns about the lack of formal strategies, with one participant stating, "Inclusive education was imposed without adequate teacher training," while another emphasized the importance of annual program reviews involving lecturers, principals, and the Ministry.

Literature highlights effective strategies such as curriculum reform, a focus on practicum, and the enhancement of human resources (Chhetric et al., 2023). These findings point to the necessity of workshops, regular training sessions, and structured programs to build institutional capacity and address gaps in implementation.

### Lecturer Capacity Building

A recurring theme in the study is the insufficient support for lecturers in implementing inclusive education. Participants emphasised the importance of professional development, with one participant suggesting, "Workshops should address the new inclusive education curriculum," and another adding, "Regular staff development workshops are vital."

This aligns with existing research, which underscores the critical role of faculty sensitisation and training in fostering inclusive pedagogy (Pliner & Johnson, 2004; Spratt & Florian, 2015). Addressing barriers such as inadequate policies, resource constraints, and negative attitudes is essential for effectively empowering lecturers to support inclusive education (Mokaleng & Möwes, 2020).

### Collaboration Among Lecturers and Students

The findings also reveal limited collaboration between lecturers and external stakeholders, particularly specialists in inclusive education. One participant observed, "There is no specialist support for students with disabilities." This highlights the need for more substantial engagement with inclusive education experts and the establishment of structured opportunities for collaboration.

Research emphasises the importance of collaborative efforts, suggesting that partnerships with stakeholders can enhance the implementation of inclusive education (Negash & Gasa, 2022; Samkange, 2013).

### Support Systems: Material, Economic, Social, and Emotional

Participants identified a pressing need for comprehensive support systems encompassing financial, material, moral, and social dimensions. For example, one participant noted, "Support can be financial, material, moral, or social," while another emphasised, "Financial constraints hinder infrastructure and resource development."

Barriers such as insufficient funding, inadequate infrastructure, and limited training were commonly reported (Genova, 2015; Mokaleng & Möwes, 2020). Recommendations include providing incentives, enhancing facilities, and improving working conditions to ensure a conducive environment for inclusive education (Merrigan & Senior, 2023; Slee, 2011).

### **Accessibility of the College Environment**

Accessibility emerged as a critical challenge, particularly for students with disabilities. Participants noted the lack of wheelchair-friendly facilities and resources for visually impaired students, with one stating, "Colleges provide material resources but lack support from the Ministry." As the literature emphasises, improving accessibility requires focusing on infrastructure development and resource allocation (Xue, 2023; Yu et al., 2011).

### **Synthesis of Findings**

The study identifies limited support for inclusive education in teachers' colleges, highlighting the need for material resources, professional development, program reviews, and improved accessibility. Key recommendations include providing diverse support systems (moral, material, social, academic, and psychosocial) and conducting induction programs to establish inclusive education networks (Mokaleng & Möwes, 2020; Genova, 2015). Additionally, equipping educators with practical strategies through structured training and fostering stakeholder collaboration are essential to advancing inclusive education.

In conclusion, addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach involving strategic resource allocation, institutional reforms, and continuous stakeholder engagement. Teachers' colleges can create a more inclusive and equitable educational environment by implementing these measures.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study concluded that teachers' colleges face significant challenges in implementing inclusive education due to insufficient facilities for physically challenged students and a lack of understanding among lecturers and student teachers. Key barriers include discrimination, financial constraints, inadequate resources, limited parental awareness, and insufficient knowledge among lecturers. Although some support, such as material, emotional, and moral assistance, is occasionally provided, it remains inadequate to implement inclusive education effectively. To address these challenges, the study recommends enhancing support systems by providing material resources, conducting workshops for all stakeholders, offering regular updates and supervision, reviewing inclusive education programs, and introducing incentives to motivate educators. Structured orientation and induction for student teachers and capacity-building initiatives for mentors are also essential. Furthermore, future research should explore the effectiveness of mentorship programs in inclusive education, assess the role of community engagement in supporting inclusivity, and investigate the impact of policy reforms on reducing barriers to inclusive education. A firm, comprehensive policy framework on inclusive education is critical to ensuring sustainable progress in fostering inclusivity within teachers' colleges.

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