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# STAKEHOLDERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES: PERSPECTIVES OF PARENTS, TEACHERS AND STUDENTS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS OF ZIMBABWE

**DR SYLOD CHIMHENGA**

Zimbabwe Open University  
ZIMBABWE.

[chimhengas@gmail.com](mailto:chimhengas@gmail.com)

## ABSTRACT

This research examines the attitudes of stake holders towards students with learning disabilities in secondary schools of Zimbabwe. The opportunity for students with learning disabilities to participate in inclusive education in Zimbabwe secondary schools has increased steadily in recent years. Participants were 120 secondary school students, 30 teachers and 20 parents from ten selected secondary schools of Bulawayo province. A questionnaire was used for data collection. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse the data. The findings revealed that the secondary school students, teachers and parents viewed more negatively the attitude of the regular teachers in supporting the implementation of inclusive education for students with learning disabilities in Zimbabwe. The findings also showed that negative attitudes of the regular teachers in secondary schools were unlikely to support effective and efficient implementation of inclusive education for students with learning disabilities and to motivate other stakeholders such as parents and school heads to collaborate and corroborate in inclusive education services. The study recommended that there is need to cultivate and nurture positive attitudes towards the implementation of inclusive education to stakeholders such as teachers, parents and students in order to improve the implementation of inclusive education for students with learning disabilities in Zimbabwean secondary schools.

**Keywords:** attitudes, learning disabilities, inclusion, inclusive education, students with learning disabilities.

## 1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Inclusion describes the process of integrating children 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 (UNESCO, 1994: viii). Special needs education incorporates the proven principles of sound pedagogy from which all children may benefit. It assumes that human



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differences are normal and that learning must accordingly be adapted to the needs of the child rather than the child fitted to the preordained assumptions regarding the pace and nature of the learning process (The Salamanca Statement, 1994:7). Inclusion advocates that schools should seek out, welcome, nurture, respect and educate all children regardless of their gender, physical, intellectual, social, economic, emotional, linguistic or other characteristics.

Inclusive education is the practice of including everyone irrespective of talent, disability, socio-economic background, or cultural origin in supportive mainstream schools and classrooms where all student needs are met (Swart, Engelbrecht, Elloff&Pettipher, 2002:176). Inclusive education means that all students in a school regardless of their strengths, weakness or disabilities in any area become part of the school community. In this regard, inclusive schools should respond to the diverse needs of their children, accommodating all styles and rates of learning ensuring quality education to all. The basis of inclusion is that special needs pupils have a right to the benefits of a full school experience, with needed modifications and supports, alongside their peers without disabilities who receive general education (Mukhopadhyay, Nanty &Abosi, 2012:2). According to UNESCO (1994: viii), the concept of inclusion has evolved towards the idea that all children, 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. Ultimately, the vision of inclusion is the development of an inclusive society where all members participate optimally, and actively contribute in a democracy where respect for and appreciation of diversity are active values (Mathopa, 2007:1). Green and Engelbrecht (2007: 3) say that in inclusive education, the emphasis is on provision, within the mainstream school environment, of the conditions and support that will enable diverse individuals to achieve certain specified educational outcomes which may, or may not be understood to be the same for all learners. For an education system to be inclusive it should therefore be inherently capable of meeting the diverse needs of every learner as effectively as possible within schools.

This research examines the attitudes of stake holders towards students with learning disabilities. The opportunity for students with learning disabilities to participate in inclusive education in Zimbabwe secondary schools has increased steadily in recent years. The impact of inclusion on stakeholders within the education arena is, therefore, an important area of research. An attitude is a point of view that someone holds towards an idea or objects in his/her everyday life. Attitudes are usually seen as relatively stable constructs containing cognitive, affective and behavioural element (Beachman& Rouse, 2011:4).

Research by Engelbrecht et al. (2001:10) revealed that the attitudes of teachers towards educating learners with diverse barriers to learning have been put forward as a decisive factor for making schools more inclusive. Studies point out that teacher's attitudes towards the implementation of inclusive education for children with disabilities are typically positive (Avramidis et al., 2000:215; Kuester, 2000: 4), while other studies show that teacher's attitudes negatively affect the implementation of inclusive education for children with disabilities (Avramidis et al., 2000:215). Researchers also note that teachers may resist and develop negative attitudes towards inclusive education practices on account of inadequate training in the area of disabilities (Pottas, 2005:66; Hay, Smit& Paulsen, 2001: 216). Furthermore, the teachers' attitudes towards children with learning disabilities appear to influence the type and quality of teacher-learner interactions within the class and, directly impacts on the child with learning disabilities' educational experiences and opportunities (Cook, 2001: 204; Reynolds, 2001:466).

A review of literature on teachers' attitudes to the implementation of inclusive education in primary schools show that there are numerous variables which influence teachers' attitudes ( Engelbrecht, Eloff&Newmark, 1997: 82). The fact that teachers often feel that they have been compelled to make changes in their classroom teaching-learning situation as a result of policy decisions they would have not had any substantive participation from grassroots create negative attitudes for experienced teachers in the implementation of inclusive education in schools (Bothma,1997:25). A study in South Africa by Bothma (1997:50) revealed that general attitudes of teachers towards the implementation of inclusive education appear to be negative. The findings show that experienced teachers felt that one had to be a special type of a teacher who chooses to work with children with special needs. Furthermore, the teachers felt that they were being forced to work with children with special needs because of government policy which they had no say and that they have no training nor ability to work with such special children. Generally the government is expecting too much from the teachers as they think that they are to be specialists of everything (Tshifura, 2012:75). Students with disabilities may have negative attitudes towards the form of inclusion they will be experiencing in inclusive schools where their interaction with peers who understand their issues may be negatively influencing their potential attainment. Such situations may force them to opt for segregated settings while their parents prefer a mainstream class (Evans &Lant, 2002:8). Conflict of rights which are a result of both the child's and parent's attitudes will affect the implementation of inclusive education for children with learning disabilities. Norwich (2002:55) argues that in



dealing with significant differences or conflict of rights by parents and students with disabilities in an inclusive setup, there is need to find a way of balancing values such as the stigma or labelling versus access to provision.

The parents, as stakeholders, may believe that the included children may slow the pace of the teacher thus negatively affecting their children (Chireshe, 2011: 158). Some may even believe that their children may contract the disability. Previous studies in Zimbabwe for example; Nyanga and Nyanga (2013:167) also revealed that negative attitudes towards children with disability may isolate the included children because they may not have the social skills to interact properly with them. In light of the above literature review the present study seeks to establish whether the attitudes of parents, as part of the school system, will affect the implementation of inclusive education for children with learning disabilities in primary schools in Zimbabwe.

Attitudes and beliefs of school staff, students, parents and the local community have an impact on the school's effectiveness in implementing inclusive educational practices (Gwala, 2006:104). While the attitudes of the teachers, parents and learners are critical in most research, it is argued that the attitudes and beliefs of school Heads towards inclusive education is the key factor to successful implementations at school level (Avramidis et al., 2000:198). When the attitudes of teachers are not positive more damage than good may be done in the implementation of inclusive education for children with learning disabilities in primary schools. The success of implementing inclusive education in schools may be far from over if society hold negative attitudes towards people experiencing disabilities. The policy status in a country may affect attitudes towards Inclusive education. The following subsection discusses the policy/legislation and the implementation of inclusive education for children with learning disabilities in primary schools

Attitudes play a significant role in determining behaviour. It is therefore important to ascertain the impact of the attitudes of stakeholder in the implementation of inclusive education for learners with learning disabilities in primary schools. More specifically, this study is based on the premise that the attitudes of mainstream teachers toward the implementation of inclusive education of learners with learning disabilities in are influenced by past experiences (previous experience with teaching students with disabilities, previous knowledge training in the field of inclusive education) and newly acquired knowledge (professional development or training modules).

Scruggs and Mastopieri (1996:62) concluded that mainstream educators generally lacked confidence as they attempted to include students with disabilities into their classes. This may be as a result of lacking proficiency about modifying the regular education curriculum to suit students with individual learning needs (Scruggs & Mastopieri, 1996:63). Further, Briggs et al. (2002:88), support the view that teachers who perceive themselves as competent inclusive educators, often have more positive attitudes toward inclusive education.

## 1.1 Statement of the problem

The study was designed to find an answer to the following main research question: What is the impact of stakeholders' attitudes on the implementation of inclusive education for learners with learning disabilities in primary schools in Zimbabwe?

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1. Design

The survey design which was mainly quantitative in nature was used. The survey was used to provide a clear picture of how stakeholders' attitudes affected the implementation of inclusive education for children with learning disabilities as observed by parents, teachers and students in secondary schools settings of Zimbabwe. Surveys are normally appropriate for studies that seek to obtain participants' perceptions, opinions and beliefs on a phenomenon (Slavin 2007). Since the present study sought to establish the impact of stakeholders' attitudes in the implementation of inclusive education for children with learning disabilities in secondary schools of Zimbabwe, the survey design was chosen as the most appropriate design for the study.

### 2.2 Sample

The secondary school teachers, students and parents were used in this study because they are involved in the implementation of inclusive education in secondary schools of Zimbabwe. They are in a position to give the required information on how stakeholders' attitudes affected the implementation of inclusive education for children with learning disabilities in secondary schools of Zimbabwe.



The sample was drawn from ten conveniently selected secondary schools of Bulawayo. The sample consisted of 250 secondary school students, 30 secondary school teachers and 20 parents. The participants were randomly chosen from secondary schools in their respective schools. Randomised samples in the survey designs facilitate the generalisability of results to the target population (Neuman & Neuman, 2000:247).

### 2.3 Instrumentation

Questionnaires were used in this research in an effort to reach as many respondents as possible. The questionnaire items for this study are in the form of a four or five point Likert-Scale. The Likert scales were used in this study for the structured items to allow for fairly accurate assessments of beliefs and opinions from the respondents.

### 2.4 Procedure

Permission to conduct the study was sought from and granted by the Head Offices of the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education of Zimbabwe. The researcher personally distributed and collected the questionnaires. He explained the purpose of the study to potential participants. Participants were informed that participation was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw from the study at any stage during the study.

### 2.5 Data Analysis

The researcher used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 16 to perform the descriptive and inferential statistical analyses. The SPSS package allowed the researcher to summarize and display data in graphics, particularly tables.

## 3. FINDINGS

The findings are presented in Table 1 in accordance to the categories that emerged. The findings of the present study on how the stakeholders' attitudes affected the implementation of inclusive education for learners with learning disabilities in secondary schools are presented and analyzed below.

**TABLE 1:** The secondary school teachers', parents' and students' perception on the extent to which attitudes of the stakeholders are supportive of the implementation of inclusive education for children with learning disabilities in primary schools

Stakeholders	Secondary School Students' Responses							Chi-square (X <sup>2</sup> )
	Very great extent	Great extent	Un decided	Little Extent	Very little extent	Total	Ratio	
1. Regulars Teachers	27(1.1 %)	10(0.4%)	4(0.2 %)	112(4.5 %)	97(3.9 %)	<b>250(10%)</b>	0.2	<b>X<sup>2</sup>=1466.56</b> <b>df=39</b> <b>p&lt;0.01</b> <b>(significant)</b>
2. Other children in class	61(2.4 %)	42(1.7%)	16(0.6 %)	49(2.0 %)	82(3.3 %)	<b>250(10 %)</b>	0.8	
3. The Parents	44(1.8 %)	28(1.1%)	11(0.4%)	58(2.3 %)	109(4.4 %)	<b>250(10 %)</b>	0.4	
4. The School Heads	62(2.5 %)	36(1.4 %)	6(0.2%)	59(2.4 %)	87(3.5 %)	<b>250(10 %)</b>	0.7	
5. The Government	32(1.3 %)	19(0.8%)	13(0.5%)	82(3.3 %)	104(4.2 %)	<b>250(10 %)</b>	0.3	
6. Specialist teachers	82(3.3 %)	75(3.0 %)	24(1.0%)	22(0.9%)	47(1.9 %)	<b>250(10 %)</b>	2.3	
7. Therapists	86(3.4 %)	72(2.9%)	14(0.6%)	18(0.7 %)	60(2.4 %)	<b>250(10 %)</b>	2.0	
8. Children with disabilities	76(3.0 %)	49(2.0 %)	17(0.7%)	34(1.4 %)	74(3.0%)	<b>250(10 %)</b>	1.2	
9. Siblings	31(1.2%)	20(0.8 %)	23(0.9 %)	74(3.0%)	102(4.1 %)	<b>250(10 %)</b>	0.3	
10. Female Teachers	76(3.0 %)	49(2.0 %)	17(0.7)	34(1.4 %)	74(3.0%)	<b>250(10%)</b>	1.2	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>577(23.1%)</b>	<b>400(16%)</b>	<b>145(5.8%)</b>	<b>542(21.7%)</b>	<b>836(33.4%)</b>	<b>2500(100%)</b>		



Stakeholders	Responses from Students							Chi-square (X <sup>2</sup> )
	Very great extent		Un decided	Little Extent	Very little extent	Total	Ratio	
1. Regulars Teachers	4(1.3%)		0(0%)	8(2.7%)	18(6%)	<b>30(10%)</b>	0.2	<b>X<sup>2</sup>=178.60</b> <b>df=35</b> <b>P&gt;0.01</b> <b>(non significant)</b>
2. Other children in class	7(2.3 %)		0(0%)	5(1.7%)	15(5.0 %)	<b>30(10%)</b>	0.5	
3. The Parents	9(3.0 %)		1(0.3%)	11(3.7 %)	8(2.7 %)	<b>30(10%)</b>	0.5	
4. The School Heads	5(1.7%)		0(0%)	8(2.7%)	15(5.0%)	<b>30(10%)</b>	0.3	
5. The Government	4(1.3%)		0(0%)	4(1.3 %)	19(4.9%)	<b>30(10%)</b>	0.3	
6. Specialist teachers	9(3.0 %)		0(0%)	7(2.3%)	13(4.3%)	<b>30(10%)</b>	0.5	
7. Therapists	8(2.7)		0(0%)	3(1.0%)	18(6.0%)	<b>30(10%)</b>	0.4	
8. Children with disabilities	5(1.7%)		0(0%)	8(2.7%)	14(4.7 %)	<b>30(10%)</b>	0.4	
9. Siblings	5(1.7 %)		0(0%)	4(1.3%)	20(6.7%)	<b>30(10%)</b>	0.3	
10. Female Teachers	8(2.7%)	)	0(0%)	8(2.7%)	14(4.7 %)	<b>30(10%)</b>	0.4	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>64(21.3%)</b>		<b>1(0.3%)</b>	<b>66(22.0%)</b>	<b>154(51.3%)</b>	<b>300(100%)</b>		
Stakeholders	Responses from Parents							Chi-square (X <sup>2</sup> )
	Very great extent		Un decided	Little Extent	Very little extent	Total	Ratio	
1. Regulars Teachers	5(2.5 %)		0(0%)	9(4.5 %)	6(3.0 %)	<b>20(10%)</b>	.03	<b>X<sup>2</sup>=50.50</b> <b>df=32</b> <b>p&gt;0.01</b> <b>(non significant)</b>
2. Other children in class	4(2.0 %)		1(0.5%)	2(1.0 %)	7(3.5 %)	<b>20(10%)</b>	1.1	
3. The Parents	4(2.0 %)		0(0%)	9(4.5 %)	6(3.0 %)	<b>20(10%)</b>	0.3	
4. The School Heads	6(3.0 %)		0(0%)	10(5.0 %)	4(2.0 %)	<b>20(10%)</b>	0.4	
5. The Government	9(4.5 %)		0(0%)	3(1.5%)	4(2.0 %)	<b>20(10%)</b>	1.9	
6. Specialist teachers	5(2.5 %)		0(0%)	8(4.0 %)	5(2.5%)	<b>20(10%)</b>	0.5	
7. Therapists	8(4.0 %)		0(0%)	5(2.5 %)	2(1.0 %)	<b>20(10%)</b>	1.9	
8. Children with disabilities	8(4.0 %)	3(1.5%)	3(1.5%)	4(2.0 %)	2(1.0 %)	<b>20(10%)</b>	1.8	
9. Siblings	5(2.5%)	4(2.0 %)	0(0%)	7(3.5%)	4(2.0 %)	<b>20(10%)</b>	0.8	
10. Female Teachers	3(1.5%)	3(1.5%)	0(0%)	10(5.0 %)	4(2.0 %)	<b>20(10%)</b>	0.4	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>57(28.5%)</b>	<b>28(14.0%)</b>	<b>4(2.0%)</b>	<b>67(33.5 %)</b>	<b>44(22.0%)</b>	<b>200(100%)</b>		

The first column of Table 1 represents the stakeholders stated on the questionnaires. The second column in the table represents responses to the rating scale of the particular questionnaire item relating the stakeholders' attitudes towards the implementation of inclusive education for children with learning disabilities. The rating scale shows the level of agreement on the various statements from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. The last two columns represent ratios and Chi square calculations respectively.

The number of responses observed for each questionnaire item has been indicated and the percentage each cell contributes towards the total frequency is provided in brackets. A Chi-square test was done to establish whether the pattern of response with reference to statements.

Table 1 shows a p value of less than 0.01 for secondary school students. Such a current difference is extremely statistically significant by conventional criteria. The calculated Chi-square test for secondary school students reveals significant differences in secondary school students' responses on stakeholders' attitudes and the implementation of inclusive education for students with learning disabilities in secondary schools. From the table, the secondary school students rated the attitudes of regular teachers, the government, parents and siblings substantially more negative. On the other hand, the ratios also indicate that secondary school students viewed the attitudes of specialist teachers, therapists, children with disabilities and female teachers as relatively more positive and supportive of the implementation of inclusive education for students with learning disabilities in secondary schools of Zimbabwe.



Table 1 above also has a p value of more than 0.01 for secondary school teachers in the current study. The calculated Chi-square test for secondary school teachers reveals no significant differences in secondary school teachers' responses on the stake holders' attitudes in the implementation of inclusive education for children with learning disabilities in secondary schools of Zimbabwe. The ratios in Table 1 also show that secondary school teachers negatively viewed the attitudes of regular teachers, specialist teachers, the government, other children in class, and children with disabilities, the parents, school heads, siblings, therapists and female teachers in the implementation of inclusive education for students with learning disabilities in primary schools of Zimbabwe. The more negative reaction in the secondary school teachers' response according to these ratios was the attitudes of regular teachers.

The information from Table 1 also shows a p value of greater than 0.01 for parents. Such a current difference is extremely statistically not significant by conventional criteria. The computed Chi-square test for parents shows no significant differences in parents' responses on the attitudes of stakeholders in the implementation of inclusive education for students with learning disabilities in secondary schools. The ratios in the table indicate that parents negatively rated the attitudes of regular teachers, school heads, specialist teachers, siblings and female teachers in the implementation of inclusive education for students with learning disabilities in primary schools of Zimbabwe.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

In this discussion, reference is made to available literature on stakeholders' attitudes and the implementation of inclusive education for children with learning disabilities. The secondary school students, teachers and parents viewed more negatively the attitude of the regular teachers in supporting the implementation of inclusive education for students with learning disabilities in Zimbabwe. The negative attitudes of the regular teachers meant that they were unlikely to support effective and efficient implementation of inclusive education for students with learning disabilities and to motivate other stakeholders such as parents and school heads to collaborate and corroborate in inclusive education services. The regular teachers were likely not to be trained in the implementation of inclusive education for students with disabilities and maybe lacking confidence that may contribute to the negative attitudes towards the implementation of inclusive education in schools. The findings of the current study that regular teachers, as stakeholders, are non-supportive of the implementation of inclusive education for children with learning disabilities in primary schools of Zimbabwe, concur with Mahlo (2011: 195), Pottas (2005:66), Subban and Sharma (2005:4), Beyene and Tizazu (2010:92) and Hay, Smit and Paulsen (2001: 216) who revealed that classroom teachers did not believe they had the ability, skill or knowledge to teach learners with diverse needs in their classes, and these teachers believed that learners experiencing barriers were supposed to be taught by a person with specialized training. In Botswana, Mukhopadhyay (2013:80) also concluded that lack of confidence among the teachers without adequate training is also a contributory factor to the negative attitudes towards the implementation of inclusive education for children with learning disabilities in schools. In South Africa, Engelbrecht et al. (2001:10) revealed that the attitudes of teachers towards educating learners with diverse barriers to learning have been put forward as a decisive factor for making schools more inclusive. Attitudes and beliefs of classroom teachers are important regarding inclusive educational practices because they are considered as the most influential aspects in determining the success of inclusion.

The study also revealed that secondary school students, teachers and parents perceived the attitudes of school heads negatively. The attitudes and beliefs of school heads towards inclusive education for students with learning disabilities is the key factor to successful implementation of inclusive education at school level. The attitudes of school heads determine the teachers' implementation of inclusive education for children with learning disabilities in primary schools. The finding of the current study that school heads had negative attitudes towards the implementation of inclusive education for students with learning disabilities in primary schools is consistent with Avramidis et al. (2000:198) who revealed that the attitudes and beliefs of school heads towards inclusive education is the key factor to successful implementations at school level. Majoko (2013: 174) concurs with the above findings when he revealed that governments and school heads with negative attitudes towards disabilities do not encourage the involvement and participation of all stakeholders of inclusive education and this negatively affects the implementation of inclusive education for students with learning disabilities in primary schools. Cook (2004:316), Landbrook (2009:67) and Engelbrecht et al. 2003:71) revealed that teachers and school heads adjusted expectations for learners with severe or obvious disabilities and developed relatively low accountability and concern about the academic and behavioural performance of children with disabilities.





## 5. CONCLUSION

It can also be concluded that stakeholders, specifically, the government, school heads, regular teachers and specialist teachers, parents, students with disabilities and regular teachers had negative attitudes towards the implementation of inclusive education for children with learning disabilities in primary schools in Zimbabwe. It can further be concluded that Zimbabwean secondary schools lacked mandatory policy and legislation for the implementation of inclusive education for children with learning disabilities.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings from this study, it is recommended that there is need to cultivate and nurture positive attitudes towards the implementation of inclusive education to stakeholders such as teachers, parents and other children with disabilities in order to improve the implementation of inclusive education for students with learning disabilities in Zimbabwean secondary schools. Secondary school students, teachers, and parents who participated in this research recommended that there was a need to have more inclusive education awareness campaigns for teachers and parents which may result in more positive attitudes towards students with learning disabilities. The awareness campaigns on disabilities may overcome public prejudice and misinformation on children with learning disabilities and infuse greater optimism and imagination about the capabilities of persons with learning disabilities. It is also recommended that teachers need to be trained to understand the challenges of teaching children with learning disabilities and be empowered to accept responsibility to act as agents of change in the development of children with learning disabilities in their classes.

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