

The Teacher as a Sacrifice at “Alter” of Inclusive Education in South Africa’s Public Schools: Challenges of Inclusive Education

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Abstract

Inclusive education is one of the policy driving forces behind a transformative and democratic society of post-apartheid South Africa. This paper is a reflection on whether the policy is achieving its set goals by answering to the question: Are regular class teachers in South African public schools giving adequate attention to children with learning disabilities in their mainstream classes? As the cold face of the system, teachers always bear the brunt for the failure or success of any policy in education. Fore-grounded on a quantitative research paradigm, the paper adopted social learning theory as a lens through which both the theoretical and empirical parts of the study were conducted. The sample of the study consisted of one hundred and ten teachers all affected by the policy. Data analysis from the questionnaires indicated among other things that implementing the policy was not smooth sailing. With inadequate training on inclusivity, teachers were left by themselves and were grappling with a variety of challenges in implementing inclusivity in the mainstream classes. Recommendations are suggested to counteract the possible failure of this policy in South African public schools and elsewhere.

Keywords; *Inclusive education, social learning theory, children with learning disabilities, mainstream classes*

1. Introduction

The policy of inclusive education is the product of a humanitarian need which aims at treating all human beings as equal in all aspects of their lives. Educationally, inclusivity aims to teach all students under one roof regardless of their abilities. It is as opposed to the past practices of creating separate classes (special classes) for students who exhibited difficulties in one area or the other of their conceptual aptitude.

In pursuing the effectiveness of this policy, one realizes the existence of some glaring challenges that the regular class teachers have to overcome in trying to mitigate the problem. According to Schaik (2000: 72) “...the teacher has to have sufficient knowledge of the implications which each type of disability has for a particular child’s learning and growth towards adulthood in order to teach these children adequately.” The most difficult part faced by regular class teachers is that they are not trained in the field of special needs education; hence they do not possess the knowledge bases to help students with disabilities in their classes. It could therefore mean that these students are neglected in the regular classes, though not by commission but by omission.

The large class sizes could also be a major impediment in the implementation of the adjustments to the curriculum that are so required for students with disabilities. The teachers might be finding it tough to give individual attention or the individualized educational programmes to each child in their class due to their diversity in ability. As such, the educators in the regular classes might be just but a sacrificed lot. There is no enough time in a school day because the classes are big and the time tables are loaded.

Various support services have to be rendered to ensure the success of the policy of inclusivity. However, as these services may have been identified, their availability and provision seem to be far from the reach of the educators in as much as they are to the learners with disabilities themselves.

The playing field for the inclusive education policy in the South African public schools seems to be fraught with irregularities which impede the success thereof. The system of ‘subject teachers’ impacts negatively on the need for the

constant availability of teachers to the students with learning disabilities. Teachers spend only thirty minutes in a class and then move on to the next class giving them limited time to understand their students. This makes it difficult to plan, prepare, make adjustments and accommodations for students with learning disabilities. Contact with other stakeholders is also limited because the primary concern is for the teachers to complete the curriculum as it is prescribed, giving out standardized assessments. This throws out through the window the spirit of trying to 'water down' the curriculum to the levels of those children with learning disabilities.

Vaughn, Bos and Schumm (2006) aptly put it that the need to cover curriculum objectives, access to equipment and materials and lack of planning are major issues that inhibit planning thereby affecting the teaching/learning of students with disabilities within an inclusive setup.

2. Research Methodology

The researcher used the quantitative research methodology. The nature of the research influenced the researcher in choosing this method.

According to Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2005), the purpose of quantitative research is to evaluate objective data consisting of numbers. Since the outcome of the research will be analyzed in terms of how many teachers are facing challenges in teaching children with learning disabilities, it follows then that the data has to be statistically represented.

Catherine (2000: 16) notes that "Quantitative research generates statistics through the use of large scale survey research, using methods such as questionnaires or structured interviews." The researcher intended using the questionnaire as the instrument of collecting data hence the choice of the quantitative research methodology.

Bearing in mind the number of respondents to be chosen, (110 teachers), the researcher felt it was necessary to use a method that caters for a larger population. Catherine (2000: 16) states that the quantitative research design "...reaches many more people and the contact with these people is much quicker than it is in qualitative research."

However, there are factors that militate against the quantitative research methodology. According to Welman et al. (2005), quantitative research takes the outsider's perspective. This will keep the researcher detached from the phenomena under study. There is no room for first hand experiences which in a way may help provide some more detail where needed.

2.1 Population

The population of the study comprised three categories of teachers in Johannesburg South District School. The first category was that of teachers who have ten years teaching experience but with no basic training in special needs education. The second category was of teachers with nine years teaching experience and below but with no basic training in special needs education as well. The third category consisted of teachers who have received some training in special needs education. All in all, 110 teachers were chosen from one hundred and forty two schools in the district of Johannesburg South.

2.2 Sample

According to Canhao and Keogh (2003: 11), "an unbiased sample requires that each individual member of the population has an equal chance of being included in the sample." As such, the researchers used the random sampling method. This process is unbiased hence it is representative of the whole population.

2.3 Reliability

According to Gay (1996: 145), "reliability is the degree to which a test consistently measures whatever it measures." As such, the researcher tried to make sure that the instruments used measured precisely what they were supposed to measure so that the results would be trusted to produce the same outcomes even in a different setting. The researcher used a Likert scale type of questionnaire. The advantage of a Likert scale is that it facilitates well thought answers. The items on the questionnaire were the same for all the respondents. The aspect of representativeness was addressed during sampling. The stratified random sampling method used ensured that all the different categories of people in the population were represented.

2.4 Validity

Clark-Carter (1997: 38) defines content validity as "the degree to which the instrument measured an intended content area ...". In light of this assertion, content validity was put under scrutiny to avoid errors. The questionnaire set had questions that were directly linked to the research question. The researcher avoided questions that had no direct link to the question under study. All the questions were structured in such a way that their content directly sourced information with regards to the teaching of children with learning disabilities in the mainstream classes.

3. Data Collection

The researcher physically distributed the questionnaires to the respondents. After three days a follow up was done by way of a telephone. After a further three days, the researcher went around collecting the completed questionnaires physically.

4. Data Analysis

Tables with references and related percentages were used in the data presentation. Also, simple bar charts and pie charts were used. This helped to make the interpretation and analysis of data easier.

5. Ethical Considerations

The researcher guaranteed confidentiality in that no one else except himself has access to individual data or the names of the participants. The questionnaire given out did not require participants to indicate who they are by writing their names or the names of their schools.

The researcher took steps to make sure that the respondents understood the purpose of the study and the researcher as well. Respondents were informed of the status of the researcher through a covering letter that accompanied the questionnaire. The covering letter had all the information about the research and the researcher.

6. Literature Review

The objectives of the inclusive education are aimed at affording quality education to all learners in the mainstream classes in spite of their differences in ability. Armstrong, Armstrong and Spandagou (2010: 86) state that "The importance of mainstream schooling has been at the centre of inclusive education policy with an emphasis upon the provision of high quality education for all ...". Clear on its objectives as it is, the implementation part of it has a lot of gaps that need to be attended to.

In as much as the teachers in the mainstream schools in South African regular schools endeavour to avail quality education to all, there are however some untenable barriers to the achievement of such. The teaching of children with learning disabilities requires that their curriculum be watered down to their level of comprehension. The major challenge thereon is that simplifying the content matter in itself compromises the quality of work. It follows then that, if the accommodations and adaptations are executed in the regular classes, the assessments that are done in classes cease to portray a clear picture of the actual performances of the concerned children.

According to Smith, Polloway, Patton and Dowdy (2008: 184), "care must be taken in implementing these accommodations and adaptations ...". The challenges faced by the teachers emanate from the need to strike a balance between the provision of quality work and that of watering down the curriculum content to the level of mastery of the student with learning disabilities. The fast learners and the average are given more complex work while those with learning disabilities are subjected to some less challenging activities, hence the scores they will get out of those tests will not be a true reflection of the overall performance of the students. It may emerge that a student with learning disabilities may score a distinction in one learning area because he was subjected to some compromised assessment standards. In contrast, the average and above average may score lower marks because they were rigorously exposed to some very challenging tasks in terms of complexity. In other words, the marks for those with learning disabilities can be said to have been inflated. All the students, across the range, would not have been subjected to the same standardized assessments. This in turn tends to give some unrealistic and undependable results.

Faced with the above scenario, educators end up not giving adequate attention to students with learning disabilities in their classes. In fact, they end up resorting to giving out the same standardized activities, as they are

prescribed in the curriculum. They give out work that is grade appropriate and not learner appropriate as it should be with regards to those with learning disabilities.

Smith et al. (2008) suggest that teachers must change the amount of time allowed for, as well as the amount of time for completing assignments or tests. This is practically impossible putting into consideration the current 'subject teacher' system that is in practice in the South African public schools. In most cases, teachers are in particular classes for particular learning areas for a period of thirty minutes. Within those thirty minutes, the teacher must have gone through the content of the day. This leaves him with no time for the extension period for the completion of some unfinished tasks. This is so because the next teacher also wants to come in and have his lesson. Indeed, students with learning disabilities need more time to complete their work, but this would only be possible if they were to have one teacher for the whole day in their class, teaching them all the learning areas. That way, the teacher may create some time to allow the learners with learning disabilities to complete their work.

To add on to the above, the school/class timetables are too loaded to allow for the teacher to revisit some students with learning disabilities in a particular class. The teachers will be more concerned with preparing lessons for the next class as they do not even have enough free periods to dedicate to those who are struggling with their school work. Under such circumstances, educators find themselves being 'slaves' of their time tables and the curriculum content which they will be rushing to complete.

According to Schaik (2000: 400), "remediation of the problems of learning disabled children is a highly specialized subject area which demands specific knowledge and skills from practitioners." In the same vein, Polloway, Patton and Serna (2008: 3) state that "educators need know knowledge bases and skill sets to function effectively ... to address the needs of students with learning related needs." The point noted above is that a teacher must be knowledgeable of the different forms of disabilities in order to properly diagnose the challenges faced by the students and later on offer the right treatment to those challenges. The lack of such knowledge leads to the teacher developing a negative attitude towards those students thereby giving them less than adequate attention. This calls for capacity development to enhance the teachers' ability to handle students with learning disabilities in their classes.

Currently, many teachers have not received any training in special needs education in South Africa. A lot more who have some training in that area have done so in the form of a Module or two as part of their curriculum for the completion of a teachers' degree or diploma. Arguably, many teachers do possess neither the knowledge bases nor the skills to embrace the policy of inclusive education. Hence they feel sacrificed when they are required to have children with learning disabilities in their classes. Planning for these students will be a derailment for the conventional teaching methodologies for which they were trained. This is alluded to by Chimedza (1993) who notes that the obstacle prevailing currently is that teachers in the regular classes are not trained to handle pupils with learning disabilities.

According to Hallahan, Kauffman and Pullen (2009:158), teachers must use instructional methods to strengthen and compensate for deficits in perception, comprehension memory and retrieval. The requirement here is for the teacher to make use of all the child's senses in their mastery of concepts. Students must be able to explore the world in their quest for knowledge, use their tactile senses, auditory, visual and others to the optimum. They must not be confined to the four classroom walls for the whole day. Rather, they must be able to use their environment as the best learning platform for most of their curriculum content. This helps a lot in empowering and indeed in the learning of the student with learning disabilities.

Justified as it may, the teachers in South African public schools in particular just do not have enough time during the school day to embark on outdoor lessons for the betterment of learning of the child with learning disabilities. There are too many learning areas in the curriculum which leaves the timetables loaded. Besides, the thirty minute periods are too short to allow for outdoor lessons. As a remedy, the teachers resort to routinely conducting their lessons in their classes, undermining the need for the use of the 'hands on approach' for the child with learning disabilities. Sands, Kozleski and French (2000:316) state that "although we strongly believe that the curriculum must be individualized, we do not intend to convey images of classrooms of thirty or more children with thirty or more corresponding individualized curriculum plans." Children with learning disabilities need individualized educational programmes. The challenge is for the teacher to prepare for such programmes of learning for students with learning disabilities in his/her class when he/she still has to attend to the needs of those who are average and above average. The problem is further compounded by the generally huge class sizes in the South African government schools. On average, most classes have a student population of up to thirty eight. This puts a major strain on the educator to reach out to the needs of all his/her students in the class. Ideally, the teacher finds it insurmountable to do justice to all the students because they vary widely in ability. The teachers face difficulties finding time to prepare and implement the individual educational programmes.

Haring and McCormick (1986:35 in Schaik 2000:75) note that "where a teacher normally followed a standard curriculum, he is now expected to make provisions for glaring individual differences such as in learning styles or

achievement." Due to the large class sizes, it is very difficult to make those adjustments to accommodate the different learning styles for all the children. Polloway, Patton and Serna (2008:4) note that "successful inclusion hinges on the provision of appropriate supports in the general education classroom as a basis for establishing a successful learning environment of students." These appropriate supports include the teaching/learning aids, textbooks, mobile charts, audio tapes and other relevant print media. The provision of these services makes the teaching/learning of the students with learning disabilities more meaningful and the objectives more achievable. The fact of the matter though is that these support services are rarely provided to the teachers in the regular classes. The teachers in the regular classes are left to make do with very limited resources. Others are left to scavenge for these support materials on their own compromising planning, preparation and lesson delivery time.

According to Jacobs, Gawe and Vakalisa (2000:196), "when groups are divided heterogeneously, they mirror the real world of encountering, accepting, appreciating and celebrating differences." The argument here is that grouping in the classes should be done in a way that cherishes diversity in that class. Ultimately, the purpose of grouping and the way it is done should be of benefit to all.

A major set back to the above view is that almost in most cases, the teachers know very little about their students because they do not have enough time with them. Some teachers may have the 'privilege' of being with certain students for only thirty minutes a day. This makes it hard for teachers to know much about their students in order to make a well informed group placement. Proper grouping which is beneficiary to all the students in the class is possible if the teacher has enough knowledge about his/her students' weaknesses and strengths. This is very hard to implement because of the lack of knowledge about the children's strengths, weaknesses and other factors that influence their performance at school.

The successful teaching of the child with learning disabilities requires a multi-disciplinary approach. The demand in this regard is for every stakeholder in the education of the child with learning disabilities to be involved. These include the regular class teacher himself/herself, the specialist teacher, parents, psychological services personnel, peers, counselors and other teachers within the school. Other structures within the school administration such as the school based support team, school assessment team and subject committees must be called into play. According to Learner (1993:115), "the environments of the home, the school, the social group, and the culture influence a student's desire and ability to learn". The argument is that the child's learning competencies depend very much on the positive interactions with the various environments.

The major stumbling block in respect of the above is that the above-mentioned various systems are almost non-existent or in other instances very dysfunctional. Most schools do not have specialized teachers or remedial teachers who would help the regular class teachers in planning for those with learning disabilities. Also, there is limited interaction between the teacher and the parent because of the "mobile teacher" system which limits the teacher's optimum time with the students. The school based support team needs to consist of people who have the knowledge bases in order to offer effective guidance to the teachers. In most cases, the principals, HODs and other senior teachers have difficulties themselves in understanding the child with learning disabilities in the regular class. In the end, teachers have nowhere to turn to for help as and when they need it.

7. Findings

The research found several gaps and spaces in the teaching of children with learning disabilities in the regular classes. It unearthed enormous challenges that need to be addressed if teachers are to meet the needs of the academically challenged students in their classes. In short, the research found that the regular class teachers in South African public schools are not giving adequate attention to children with learning disabilities in their mainstream classes due to a number of reasons as presented below.

Asked on whether the teaching of children with learning disabilities should be done by specialist teachers only, 75 percent of the respondents agreed. Only 25 percent felt otherwise. On this question, all the educators (respondents) agreed that the teaching of students with learning disabilities should be left out to those teachers who have received training in special needs education.

The other item on the questionnaire intended to find out if the teachers in the mainstream classes can help improve the performance of children with learning disabilities in their classes. About 65 percent from all the categories agreed that they can indeed improve the performance of those students. That is if only they receive the necessary support.

The respondents were asked if they feel that all educators in Johannesburg South District schools need new skills to function effectively in the teaching of children with learning disabilities in their classes. An overwhelming eighty three percent (83%) agreed that they must have the new skills. The numbers of respondents who agreed were quite high in all

the categories of teachers.

About 66 percent of the respondents agreed that all students in the mainstream classes are placed in groups that are mixed in terms of ability while 44 percent disagreed. However, they did not state the nature of grouping that is taking place in the schools.

Asked on whether educators in the mainstream classes use instructional materials that cater for children with learning disabilities, an overwhelming 68 percent disagreed. Only 32 percent of the respondents said they do provide for the instructional materials that cater for children with learning disabilities in their classes.

The respondents were asked if children with learning disabilities in the mainstream classes are given more time to complete their work. In their responses, 54 percent of the 107 respondents agreed that they are given more time. On the contrary, 46 percent disagreed.

The other question looked at whether regular class teachers spend more time helping students with learning disabilities in their classes. About 46 percent of the 107 respondents said they do spend more time with those students. However, 54 percent disagreed.

The use of concrete media in the lessons was also probed. About 63 percent of the respondents said they use concrete media regularly in their lessons while thirty seven percent disagreed.

More than 60 percent of all the respondents disagreed that teachers sacrifice their time in the afternoon helping their students with learning disabilities. In other words, they are not given extra time in the afternoons to do their work.

More than 50 percent of the respondents from all the categories disagreed that teachers in the mainstream classes adjust the curriculum to the levels of children with learning disabilities in their classes. This means they just teach the content as it is without making the necessary adjustments.

About 61 percent of the respondents also said that teachers in the mainstream classes give the same tasks to all the students regardless of their different levels of operation. In contrast, 39 percent said they give different tasks. The majority of the teachers subject the students to the same tasks in terms of complexity regardless of the glaring differences in ability.

On individual tutoring, 54 percent of the respondents said they do not offer that compared to 46 percent who said they reach out to the individual children bearing in mind their diversity and unique needs.

8. Discussion

The purpose of the study was to find out if indeed there are challenges that are faced by regular class teachers in the teaching of children with learning disabilities. The findings thereto could give answers to the question: Are regular class teachers in South African public schools giving adequate attention to children with learning disabilities in their mainstream classes?

According to Gearheart, Weishahn and Gearheart (1992), there are specific teaching approaches that a normal classroom teacher cannot be expected to know. This means that the teaching of students with learning disabilities requires some specialization which helps equip the educators with the skills to teach these students. A look at the results from the responses affirms to this view point. About 75 percent of the respondents said the teaching of students with disabilities requires specialist teachers only. In other words, the respondents are saying the regular class teachers, with their training, have not been well prepared to teach students with disabilities.

The above view is supported by Schaik (2000: 400) who states that "remediation of the problems of learning disabled children is a highly specialized subject area which demands specific knowledge and skills from practitioners." In the light of this argument, it is prudent to note that the recognition of the need for students with learning disabilities to be taught by specialist teachers only gives credence to the fact that placing students with disabilities in the mainstream class is just but expecting too much from the regular class teachers.

Conversely, there could be some other reasons as to why the respondents feel that way. In a way, it could have something to do with the attitudes of the regular class teachers towards such students. Whatever the reasons, the 75 percent of those who said they must be taught by specialist teachers only mean that the majority of regular class teachers are not comfortable in having these students in their classes.

About 65 percent of the respondents feel that the regular class teachers can help improve the level of performance of students with learning disabilities. This means that, with proper support services, training and a whole host of other needs, children with learning disabilities can benefit a lot from their teachers in the mainstream classes. With the provision of these support services, the teachers feel that indeed the children's levels of performance can be uplifted.

The 35 percent of respondents who disagreed to the notion that teachers in the mainstream classes can help improve the performance of children with learning disabilities in their classes may be raising their concern as well.

According to Choate (2004:16), "survey studies indicate that general classroom teachers who express negative views towards inclusion often feel ill prepared and unsupported in that effort, and not all administrators have been adequately prepared to support inclusive practices." It can be argued that where the attitude is negative, the desire to help is certainly not there.

About 83 percent of the respondents feel that the regular class teachers must be equipped with the new skills to enable them to appropriately teach students with learning disabilities. The responses in this regard are an indicator of the general feelings by regular class teachers in relation to their ability to teach children with disabilities. Teacher training is a very important aspect in an endeavour to meaningfully teach the students. Schaik (2000:72) notes that "... the teacher has to have sufficient knowledge of the implications which each type of disability has for a particular child's learning growth towards adulthood in order to teach these children adequately." Without the proper skills, it may be very difficult to teach these students in the regular classes.

Grouping in the regular classes determine how the children interact within their classes and how the teachers reach out to them. Mixed grouping enhances the spirit of inclusivity in the classes. This, in a way, can boost the spirits of children with disability. Mixed grouping helps students with disability to feel wanted rather than segregated in as much as it makes them feel equal with the rest. The result from the research show that 66 percent of the respondents do favour mixed grouping in their classes. More importantly, mixed grouping helps students with disabilities to get help from their peers. That being the case, mixed grouping can also impact negatively on the child with disabilities. For example, those with disabilities may not like it when they always watch their more able peers finishing their tasks with ease whilst they struggle. It is either they will resort to coping or truancy.

It is also important to probe the reasons that motivate teachers to place students in mixed groups. It could be that the teachers are shifting the responsibility of helping these students to their peers. Whether these students copy from their more able peers or not, the teachers would not mind, as long as the burden of following up on these students has been taken away from them. Thus, the grouping system itself is not the major concern, but the reasons that motivated that grouping system.

According to Mercer and Mercer (2005:21), "some of the realities facing general education teachers included pressure to cover a lot of content ..." As such, teachers end up giving the necessary instructional materials to those with the average and above average. About 68 percent of the respondents said teachers in the regular classes do not give students with learning disabilities appropriate instructional materials for their learning. This is tantamount to neglecting them. Their learning styles are not considered and everything is generalized.

About 54 percent of the 107 respondents said they give students with learning disabilities more time to completing their work. On the other hand, 46 percent indicated the contrary. The closeness in responses between those who do and those who do not suggest that justice is not being done to those students. The percentage of those who do not give more time for the completion of the work is too high.

Over 60 percent of the respondents indicated that they do not sacrifice their afternoons to help students with learning disabilities. The trend is the same with regards to curriculum adjustments. According to Mercer and Mercer (2005:21), pressure escalates when parents and community leaders claim that instructional programming for inclusive classrooms risks compromising the quality of education for student's disabilities." This could be a plausible explanation as to why regular class educators do not sacrifice their afternoons to help students with disabilities as well as to make some curriculum adjustments to cater for their needs. It could mean that the teachers will be primarily concerned with meeting the needs of those without disabilities as they are "pressured" by the various stakeholders.

In support of the above, Choate (2005:15) notes that "general education teachers are assuming more responsibilities for the education of all students, including large numbers of those formerly excluded on the basis of an identified disability."

It could also be that teachers have loaded time tables during the day that they use the afternoons for preparing work for the next day as well as marking. They will be busy the whole day moving from class to class teaching the students. This does not leave them with much time to do the marking after every lesson in each class.

According to Mercer and Mercer (2005:22) "...when students with disabilities are placed in inclusive settings their teachers are unlikely to alter their whole - group instructional strategies in favour of specific individualized adaptations." This could be because, more than often, teachers do their planning in advance. When they go to the classes they will be primarily concerned with implementing what they would have planned rather than 're-planning' with the intention of accommodating the students with learning disabilities.

9. Conclusion

According to Sigammony (1999:43), "learners with special educational needs have a right to equal access to education at all levels in a single inclusive education system that is responsive to the diverse needs of all learners, accommodating both different styles and rates of learning as well as different language needs ..., and ensuring quality education for all through appropriate curricula, organizational arrangements, technical strategies, resource use and partnership with their communities ."

From the research findings it can be noted that there are numerous challenges that are faced by the regular class teachers in the public schools. The research findings show that most regular class teachers do not have enough time to interact extensively with their students. This emanates from the fact that the teachers have limited time during the school day to interact with their students because of the current system of the subject teacher. This system works well at secondary level where the students are better matured to independently work on some tasks. At primary levels, most students are still at their formative stages of development, meaning they would need to have one class teacher for the whole day, teaching them all the learning areas and whom the children can confide in. Because of the 'subject teacher' system, most regular class teachers do not find more time to revisit those students with learning disabilities and help them in areas of need. As such, the students are not given more time to complete their tasks as should be the case.

Class sizes are also a major factor in further complicating the efforts being made by the regular class teachers in the inclusive class. The classes are generally too big to allow for among other things, the preparation of individualized educational programmes which are needed for the successful teaching of children with learning disabilities. Under the current class sizes in most schools, teachers are tempted to neglect the students with disabilities opting to focus on those without disabilities. Teachers end up giving the same tasks to all the students regardless of their diversity in ability. More importantly, the curriculum adjustments and accommodations are not addressed because there is overcrowding in the classes and the students vary widely in ability. This, together with the loaded timetables for each day, tempts the teacher to teach the curriculum content as it is prescribed in the work schedules, giving little consideration for those students with learning disabilities in the mainstream class.

One major issue that was noted in the research findings is that of teacher training. Most teachers in the regular classes have not received any training in special needs education. This impacts negatively on their efforts to teach children with learning disabilities in their classes. The teachers do not possess the skills or the technical knowledge to deal with the various disabilities that are found in the regular classes. That being the case, the teachers find it hard to help the students with learning disabilities improve on their performance. The lack of knowledge on how to handle these students also breeds the feeling of negativity towards such students by the teachers in those classes.

The provision of teaching/learning media in the classes is not satisfactory. Children with learning disabilities learn better through the use of such media. The non-availability makes learning objectives unachievable especially by those with learning disabilities. These teaching/learning media include charts, textbooks and audio tapes.

10. Recommendations

The research findings highlighted the key areas that need to be attended to in order to ease the burden that has been placed on the regular class teachers' shoulders by the policy of inclusive education. The intent of inclusive policy is an excellent ideological move that needs serious considerations for it to succeed. The four key areas identified by the research findings are as follows: 1. Fulltime class teachers as opposed to subject teachers. 2. Class sizes. 3. Teacher training. 4. Support services.

10.1 Full class teachers as opposed to subject teachers.

The current practice in South African public schools at primary level is that teachers teach one or two learning areas for which they purportedly trained. The argument could be that the teachers may, in some cases, not be able to adequately deliver in all the learning areas. This has added value to the argument of having 'subject teachers.' However, if looked at from a different angle, this could be putting a serious strain on those particular teachers when it comes to dealing with students with learning disabilities in their classes. Thus, the idea of having a full time class teacher teaching all the learning areas in a particular grade is being recommended.

If a teacher is placed in one class teaching all the learning areas in that class, he is more likely going to have a much more positive attitude towards all his/her students in that class. A mutual understanding between the teacher, pupils and the parents is most likely to develop and this will be for the benefit of the particular children. At primary school

levels, students are still at their formative stages of development hence they depend much on their elders, in this case, the teachers. They need to be shown that care and love in as much as they also need someone they can trust and confide in. The 'class teacher' system creates that perfect platform for a good teacher-pupil as well as teacher - parent relationship. The students also get to understand their teachers and what they expect from them.

A teacher who is placed in one particular class for the whole day teaching all the learning areas has the opportunity to juggle around with the class timetable in order to address the children's needs. Thus, it will be easier for the teacher to be able to reserve some periods for the completion of work by those who are struggling as well as helping them by way of remediation.

The implementation of the class teacher system as opposed to the learning area educator also makes it easy for the teacher to make some curriculum adaptations to meet the needs of those students with learning disabilities in their classes. This is against the backdrop that they know their students better and therefore are better placed to plan in advance with those adjustments and accommodations in place.

The idea of class teachers motivates the teachers because they will feel that all the teachers are equally shouldering the burden of teaching students with learning disabilities. If there are five grade four classes, for example, all the five teachers will be sharing the burden of teaching students with learning disabilities in all the learning areas. This in itself can encourage competition among the teachers, thereby helping in raising the performance levels of all their students in their classes.

It can also be noted that critics of this strategy of having one teacher in a particular class for the whole day may argue that it actually undermines the teacher's delivery in learning areas that he/she is not good at. However, the curriculum content in all the learning areas at primary school level is not all that challenging as to put off a well trained teacher, especially one who has gone up to matriculation level. Thus, primary school teachers should be able to teach all the learning areas.

The researcher has noted a marked disparity in performance between the grade threes and grade fours at a school where he is currently teaching. The grade threes' books are always very neat, both outside and inside. The handwriting is admirable and the quality of work is excellent in all their learning areas. Apparently, the grade three classes have full time class teachers. In contrast, the grade four exercise books are pathetic. The grade fours have subject teachers. It can therefore be argued that class management is more effective if the teacher is resident in that particular class for the whole day.

10.2 Class sizes

The demands of an inclusive class may be so huge that the teachers may end up overlooking the difficulties of students with learning disabilities. This could be particularly so because of the huge class sizes in most regular classes which stands at around 38 students on average.

The high teacher- pupil ratio could be attributed to the high student population as compared to the classroom structures that are available within the schools. Overcrowding in the classes works negatively against the policy of inclusivity. Teachers find it hard to reach out to all the students in their classes. As such, bold moves must be taken in order to make these classes more manageable.

The class sizes must be drastically reduced to as far as 25 students. This will make it possible for the teacher to make himself/herself available to all the students in the class. This calls for the government to build more schools annually so that the students can be accommodated in classes in small numbers.

Oblivious of the budgetary constraints this will put on the government, mobile classrooms can be a cheaper alternative. Whichever move taken it should be motivated by the fact that the class sizes must be made smaller in order to promote effective teaching to all the students in the mainstream class.

10.3 Teacher training

The results from the research have shown that teachers feel uncomfortable in handling students with learning disabilities in their classes if they are not trained. The results have also shown that the same teachers are more than willing to help those students with learning disabilities achieve their educational goals to undergo some form of training in that regard.

In light of the above, all teachers must have some basic training in special needs education/inclusive education if the mainstream classes are to be successfully inclusive. Training in inclusive education can help equip the teachers with the skills to teach children with learning disabilities in their classes.

Those teachers who are already practicing must be availed to regular workshops at either school or cluster levels.

The aims and objectives of these workshops will be to adequately equip the teachers with the skills to teach their classes which are all inclusive. However, these workshops must not be limited to the class teachers only. Principals and HODs must also be trained in this regard since they are the ones the teachers turn to for support and advice.

The curriculum for teacher training should be more biased towards the teaching of students with learning disabilities. Since the policy of inclusive education is about having students with disabilities in the mainstream classes, it follows that the teachers should be well equipped to handle these students. Thus, an intensive teacher training programme will require that the colleges or universities give up to three modules on inclusive education that deal with methodologies and techniques of handling students with disabilities.

10.4 Support services

According to Choate (2004: 16), "survey studies indicate that general classroom teachers who express negative views towards inclusion often feel ill-prepared and unsupported in that effort, and not all administrators have been adequately prepared to support inclusive practices." The above view point suggests that regular class teachers are often left alone to battle with the challenges of inclusive education without any support being given to them. Indeed the research findings have shown that the various necessary support services are rarely made available to the regular class teachers.

The Department of Education through the districts of education must make sure that schools receive textbooks, charts and other supports well in advance for use by the teachers. In addition, that teaching/learning media must be relative in terms of grade appropriateness and content coverage. The classroom must be made quite attractive and educative in all aspects. This will increase the children's appetite to learn in all the learning areas. If the charts are displayed in the classes, the students, more often than not, feel attracted to them. Furthermore, these charts may in a way mirror the real world that the children live in thereby increasing the children's levels of understanding.

It is prudent for each school to have a specialist teacher who will act as a resource person to the rest of the teachers in most cases. Specialist teachers have done special needs education/inclusive education in more depth than those who have just studied a module or two. As such, they have a deeper understanding of the challenges involved in the teaching of children with learning disabilities. If every school is given a specialist teacher to function with, that particular teacher would always act as a resource person at that school. He will be giving other teachers useful tips on how to help students with learning disabilities in their classes. In other instances, he/she may also pull out such students from mainstream classes to give them his/her own interventions in certain areas where the students would need extra support.

The role of educational psychologists must not be undermined. They must be given their space in the multi-disciplinary team. The psychologists must be able to attend to the students with learning disabilities as and when it becomes necessary. In so doing, the educational psychologists will be able to advise both the parents and the educators on better ways to handle the students with learning disabilities in the mainstream classes.

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