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Contrasting Visions of Inclusive Education: Comparisons from Rural and Urban Settings in Botswana and Zimbabwe

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Settings in Botswana and Zimbabwe

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Abstract

This article explores similarities and differences in Botswana and Zimbabwe elementary school principals' understanding of what inclusive education involves. Using a cross-site case study research design, fifteen principals in the two countries' urban, semi-urban and rural areas were interviewed while naturalistic observations were also carried out at each school. Findings indicate no differences between the two countries as the principals were familiar with the concept of inclusive education and were favourable towards including learners with disabilities. However the increased visibility of students with disabilities in primary schools seems to overshadow other learners with various vulnerabilities. Inclusion seemed to present more complex challenges for the rural principals. Infrastructure in under-resourced rural and semi-urban schools was said to be denying children with disabilities access to learning. The principals, whether urban or rural, preferred to include learners with mild disabling conditions for whom they still expected greater social than academic inclusion.

Key words: Botswana, Zimbabwe, inclusive education, principals, qualitative research

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Introduction

In the past, children with disabilities were believed to be so inferior to non-disabled peers that it was deemed essential to teach them in separate special schools where they would not only receive specialist services but also avoid disturbing the learning of others (Green and Engelbrecht, 2007). These authors observed that 'special education' developed as a system parallel to mainstream education and conceptualized those with disabilities as 'abnormal' and in need of the attention of specialists. As the frontiers of ignorance gradually receded, it was realized that it might not be in the best interests of those with disabilities or even society, for them to be separated from the mainstream. There was a paradigm shift to the expression and promotion of egalitarian societal values of equal opportunity and access to the resources necessary for the acquisition of abilities and skills that enable meaningful societal participation by individuals in their communities.

UNESCO (1994) marked this turning point to inclusive education as the celebration of differences and the support for all learners. Focus had shifted from the individual's shortcomings and how they could be overcome to focusing on how the shortcomings of ordinary schools could be overcome to accommodate all learners. Support was now thought to be possible as there was the perception of children with disabilities as only having special educational needs which needed to be accommodated in least restrictive environments. This therefore paved the way for the education of children with disabilities together with non-disabled peers in ordinary schools rather than in the specialized institutions which had been founded by missionaries on charitable ethos.

Education Systems and Policy in Botswana

Botswana is a land-locked country, it shares borders with Namibia to the west, Zambia to the north, Zimbabwe to the northeast and South Africa to the south. According to the 2001 national population census, Botswana's population, which is small relative to the size of the country, was 1626796, of whom 634 400 were male and 692 400 were female (Census 2001). On September 30, 1966 Botswana attained its independence from the British. The post-colonial educational structure continued to follow that of the United Kingdom. When Botswana achieved its independence there were only 251 primary schools and 1624 teachers, only 20 percent of school age group were enrolled in primary school.

Botswana views the education of its citizens and access to basic education as a fundamental human right. It also believes that the role of education is to develop and maintain a society that promotes moral and social values; respect the cultures and languages of different ethnic groups within the country; promote unity; reject discrimination and uphold social justice (Republic of Botswana, 1993). In order to achieve all these goals, two major educational policies were formulated. These included the 1977 National Policy on Education (NPE) (Republic of Botswana, 1977), the Revised National Policy on Education (RNPE) of 1994. The basic ten years of education in Botswana is guided by the RNPE (Republic of Botswana, 1994) which introduced the Three Year Junior Certificate programme after the completion of the seven-year primary education by 1996. As universal primary education was adopted in 1980, Government of Botswana increased the budgetary allocation for education expenditure from 6.1% to 10.6% (Lisenda, 2005). Currently 24.5% of total government expenditures is budgeted for education; it is to improve infrastructure to provide access to education to all learners.

By most developing countries standards, primary schools in Botswana are relatively well equipped (Dart, two010). Chalk, textbooks and exercise books are normally readily available. Most of the schools have electricity and water. Learners receive meals during the break and lunch. Pupil Teacher Ratio throughout the districts ranges from 19.0 in the rural area to 27.5 in the urban areas (Central Statistics Office, 2006). It is important to note that over the year's number of enrolment in 1st grade increased. Currently the primary school enrolment rate is 87% (Unicef, 2009) and primary school dropout rates also decreased. However, recently, the introduction of school fees contributed to an increase in the dropout rates by .05%. Other reasons for dropouts from the primary school are expulsion, illness, pregnancy and desertion

In 2006, there were 770 primary schools and total number of student enrolment in primary schools was 330,417. The total numbers of primary school teachers were 13,012; out of them only 722 were untrained. Majority of them have diploma in primary education and some a degree (Central Statistics Office). About 94% of the Botswana's total student population are enrolled in Government aided schools. In most of the primary schools, there is a position of responsibility called Senior Teachers Advisor for Learning Disability to help learners with special educational needs. However, only a few of them are trained in special education and very few of the regular teachers have had any exposure to special needs education in their pre-service training, though this is now changing (Dart, 2006).

Education of Learners with Disabilities in Botswana Initially, educating learners with SENs was not a priority in Botswana (Abosi, 2000). Non-Governmental Organisations were responsible for catering the needs of these learners. The first educational policy which is commonly known as *Education for Kgahisano* was developed in 1977 (Republic of Botswana, 1977). It recommended that every child should have the right to education, but it was silent on the issues of education for learners with disabilities (Republic of Botswana,

1993; Dart, 2007, Otlhogile, 1998). The 2nd National Commission on Education was established in 1992 to review the entire education system in Botswana and to address the gaps. Following the submission of its report in 1993, the Revised National Policy on Education (RNPE) was formulated and approved by the National Assembly as Government White Paper No 2 of 1994 (Republic of Botswana, 1994). The RNPE recommended that as far as possible learners with SENs should be placed integrated settings. The RNPE remained the major policy framework for promoting access and teacher development for last two decades. In 2011, in alignment with global trend, a comprehensive policy document on Inclusive Education for Botswana has been developed (Republic of Botswana, 2011).

Education of Learners with Disabilities in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe is a multicultural, landlocked country situated south of the Sahara in southern Africa. It shares its borders with Mozambique to the east, South Africa to the south, Botswana and Namibia to the west, and Zambia to the north. It has a total area of about 350 000 square kilometres (or about 150 875 square miles). The country has an estimated population of approximately 12 million people (52 per cent female) comprising about eight major cultural-linguistic communities (i.e. Asians, Kalanga, Ndebele, Shangaani, Shona, Tonga, Venda and Whites). About 96 per cent of the population are Black Africans and among these, it is estimated that the Shona and Ndebele together make up 98 per cent of the population, with the Shona comprising about 85 per cent of that (Mpofu, et al. 2007a). The country was a British colony (known as Southern Rhodesia and then Rhodesia) from the 1890s to 1965, when a period of Unilateral Declaration of independence (UDI) was declared under Ian Smith's white minority regime which was internationally isolated through economic sanctions. After a 15-year guerrilla war, independence was achieved in 1980 and international isolation ended.

Historically before independence there were no formal policies for the education of black African students with disabilities although white and coloured students were catered for. Devlieger (1998b) says a small proportion of black students with disabilities who attended school did so from family initiative or with the help of missionary philanthropic programmes. Mpofu et al. (2007:68a) observe that after independence the government adopted a formal policy to educate students with disabilities in ordinary schools, providing for specialist teacher and resource room instruction for those who were experiencing significant barriers to learning. The exact number of students with disabilities who benefitted from inclusive education is unknown but Mpofu et al. (2007b) estimate more than 17 000 students with significant intellectual and or sensory disabilities and more than 50 000 students experiencing learning disabilities in any one school year since 1995.

In their analysis of research on inclusive education in Zimbabwe Mpofu et al. (2007b) found that such research had addressed several aspects including attitudes, curriculum and accessibility. Majoko (2005) and Hungwe (2005) reported negative teacher attitudes towards educating students with disabilities in inclusive settings. The severity of the negative teacher attitudes was mediated by type of disability, school and/or classroom accessibility, training and experience with educating students with disabilities and seniority of school personnel. Maunganidze and Kasayira (2002) observed a higher level of acceptance of students with physical disabilities compared to those hearing or intellectual disabilities. Peters (2001) and Majoko (2005) found that school personnel with training or experience in teaching students with disabilities had more favourable attitudes towards the students. Mtetwa (2004) found that school principals had more favourable attitudes towards students with disabilities than general education classroom teachers.

The global egalitarian foundations of education which were laid in such conventions as Education for All (1990) and UNESCO (1994) found expression in Zimbabwean

legislation such as the Education Act (1987; 1996) which institutionalized the right of every Zimbabwean child to school education at the nearest school. Mpofu, Kasayira, Mhaka, Chireshe and Maunganidze (2007) observed that inclusive education is one of several ways in which the Zimbabwean education authorities sought to enhance citizen rights for people with disabilities. Emphasis was on universalizing access and promoting equity for disadvantaged groups with special attention on removing educational disparities. Green and Engelbrecht (2007,p.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. Chakuchichi, Chimedza and Chiinze (2003) view inclusion as fostering an even learning environment for all children in their beliefs, values and norms. Thus, inclusion may be viewed as a tool for cultivating cultural and social values in hearing children and their deaf peers.

The challenge is whether ordinary schools are the least restrictive environment for many learners with disabilities. School environments in which all pupils can participate as fully as possible might arguably be considered less restrictive. As Green and Engelbrecht (2007,p4) point out inclusive education emphasizes provision, within the mainstream school environment, of the conditions and support that will enable diverse individuals to achieve certain specified educational outcomes. The focus is firmly on changing the schools to make them more accommodating to all children (Skrtic, 1995). Even though this approach to education is on the face of it quite attractive as it is based on human rights, there are still considerable differences establishing a shared understanding of what it actually means in practice (Ainscow, 2003; Hodkinson, 2005). As Green and Engelbrecht (2007) show, an understanding of inclusive education referring specifically to the teaching of disabled and non-disabled children within the same class suggests an understanding that is still founded on

the premise of medical deficits. As Hodkinson (2005) observes, a broader understanding of inclusion is based on a diversity perspective which relates not only to disability but to other barriers to learning such as gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, culture and socio-economic background. This study intends to explore the extent to which the education systems in Botswana and Zimbabwe not only accommodate learners with various disabilities in mainstream schools but also encompass a broad understanding of inclusive education.

In light of the foregoing, this study was initiated to examine how principals' perceptions and attitudes about inclusion influenced inclusive education on campuses in the cross-cultural settings of Botswana and Zimbabwe. Brislin (1983) notes the emic-etic advantage of cross-cultural research. An emic analysis allows the documenting of valid principles that describe behavior in any one culture, taking into account what the people themselves value as meaningful and important. Etic analysis makes generalizations across cultures that take into account all human behavior.

Methodology

Research settings

Schools in Botswana and Zimbabwe are grouped into administrative regions. Both Botswana and Zimbabwe have ten administrative regions each. The Botswana data were collected from the South Central Region and the Zimbabwe data were collected from selected primary schools in Masvingo Educational region in the south-east of the country. In terms of the location, the schools were categorised into three groups namely urban, semi-urban and rural. The language of instruction in these schools was predominantly English but the local language (Setswana in Botswana and Shona in Zimbabwe) were also used. Data collection took place between January and March 2009 in Botswana and between September and November 2011 in Zimbabwe.

Research design

A qualitative approach was used. The qualitative methodology was selected for this investigation because of its unique appropriateness in meeting the purpose of the study. Miles and Huberman (1994) say qualitative research occurs in natural settings, which allows the researchers to gather non-obvious issues and allows for holistic, rich, and complex findings which focus on the lived experiences of participants. This research gave a platform to principals to express their lived experiences, challenges and opinions about inclusion of diverse learners in the natural settings of their schools.

Participants

Table 1 displays the characteristics of the participants from both countries.

Table 1: Zimbabwe and Botswana participating principals' characteristics

Participants	Gender	Education	Years of Experience	Years in the current school
Botswana	Female	Degree in Education	26	3
	Female	Diploma in Education	25	2
	Female	Diploma in Education	21	2
	Female	Diploma in Education	26	3
	Female	Diploma in Education	25	2
	Female	Diploma in Spl Education	21	2
Zimbabwe	Female	Degree in education	21	4
	Female	Diploma in education	20	3
	Female	Degree in education	24	2

Male	Degree in education	26	2
Male	Degree in education	28	5
Male	Degree in education	23	3
Male	Diploma in education	28	7
Female	Degree in education	20	2
Male	Degree in education	22	4

Careful attention was paid to the process of gaining entry, selection of informants, developing and maintaining rapport and maintaining ethical protocol. Seven out of 9 Zimbabwe principals had Bachelor of Education degrees in Educational Management and had more than 20 years of experience as classroom teachers and more than 2 years as principal in the same school. Two principals had Diplomas in Education. None of the principals had any Special Education training. Of the six Botswana principals, two were trained in the area of Special Education at a diploma level and one of them did a Degree in Educational Management. All 6 principals were experienced in working as principals in the same school for more than 2 years.

Instruments

A semi-structured interview guide was specifically designed for this study. The intent of the interview guide was to provide an overall direction for the session and stimulate discussion. The interview guide focused on a) principal's beliefs towards inclusion of diverse learners in regular schools b) the challenges faced by the principals in the process of

including diverse learners in their regular schools. The interview schedule was piloted with one principal in each country and the data from the pilot interview were not included in the final analysis. The pilot interview resulted in some minor changes to the interview format. The final interview guide consisted of 17 open-ended questions to obtain information about principals' beliefs towards inclusion of diverse learners in regular schools. The interview schedule included   demographic information (educational qualifications, years of experience) and warm-up questions aimed to put the principals at ease before moving on to substantive areas. Subsidiary questions and prompts were also used to clarify participants' responses.

Data collection and ethical considerations

Permission to carry out the research was sought from and granted by the research division of the MoESD of Botswana and from the Ministry of Education, Sports, Arts and Culture in Zimbabwe. Informed consent was obtained from the participants. Information on the aims of the research and the potential topics that would be discussed during the interview was provided through a letter linked to the consent form. The participants received this information on the first day of the school visit by the researcher. In the subsequent visit an interview was conducted. Each principal was interviewed face-to-face, by the investigators. Interviews were conducted in English at the respective schools and lasted around one hour. Each interview was audio-recorded and later on fully transcribed.

In addition to the interviews, naturalistic observations were also made. In Botswana six site visits were conducted in the six schools used in the study during the course of the data collection. In Zimbabwe three site visits were conducted at the nine schools for the purposes of observation. Site visit times were pre-arranged with each principal. Each site visit lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. The site visits were conducted in an effort to obtain consensus

between what was said during interviews and what occurred in the natural setting. During the site visits the researchers utilized observation checklists to gather field notes.

Data Analysis

A constant-comparison method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990*)* was used to examine the similarities and differences in reflections across the participants. Data were analysed in step by step fashion. In step one the data from each participant were analysed employing line by line open-coding. In step two, each transcript was examined separately, and whenever a new theme emerged, it was highlighted. The identified themes within the transcript were then compared across transcripts in step three. Overall, themes were then developed in step four. Selective coding was employed, which enabled the researcher to confirm themes so as to organize the results. A summary of all the transcripts was compiled in which sub-themes were compared to come up with overall themes that were later used to report the findings of the study. The major themes that were identified were presented to the participants to comment on. This stimulated recall and further evoked the participants to discuss and add on the existing information.

Results

Support for inclusive education

In both Zimbabwe and Botswana most principals thought that it was a good idea to educate children with disabilities together with non-disabled peers in the same school. They generally said this was in line with local legislation and would enable equal access to education by all. One Zimbabwean principal said, "*Every child has a right to education as shown in the Education Act. Everyone should get an education at the nearest school so that he or she can improve chances in life whether disabled or not*". Many principals however

objected to the inclusion of students with sensory disabilities in the same classes as children without disabilities. They said that most of their staff were not specially trained and so would not be able to meet the needs of such learners. One principal said, "*Those who are deaf and those who are blind in the same classes as non-disabled pupils would cause serious problems for the teachers. They are not trained for it. It just would not work.*" These principals preferred that such learners be placed in special classes at these mainstream schools so that they would get the most assistance from specialists. One explained, "*A properly trained specialist teacher with a few deaf or blind pupils in the special class would give those a much better education than what would happen if they were left to their own devices in a large class of many other children who are not disabled. We are using that system here and it works very well for all.*" A few suggested that children with more severe disabilities were better off in special schools. One these said, "*If the disability is serious, then the child has better chances of getting appropriate assistance even at (*name supplied*) special school where there is special equipment and many professionals specializing in different aspects of disability*". The Botswana principals were also supportive of the concept of inclusive education but preferred the partially inclusive education model rather than full-inclusive education. They were of the opinion that Botswana is not yet ready for fully inclusive education. Their statements giving their reasons best illustrate their position(s) on inclusive education:

> *I don't mind having learners with disabilities in my school, but it would be better if we have a unit, I would know that they would be trained by special educators. If you place them in regular classroom, it will disadvantage them. It would be most likely be taught by a regular teacher who is not trained in special education.*

In sharp contrast to this view, one principal preferred the full inclusive model. She strongly felt that inclusive education was the best educational option, which could be easily

practised in Botswana primary schools. In addition, she was of the opinion that learners with disabilities should receive education in the neighbourhood school(s) so that they receive '*parental love and care*' for the overall development of every child. She went on to say that in an ideal situation "*the child with a disability in the general classroom should receive all the necessary support either from support professionals or from class teacher*".

Preferred categories of learners

In Zimbabwe physical disabilities were thought to be easier to manage in the mainstream. Most principals did not view children with health impairments or other vulnerabilities as having disabilities or special educational needs and so thought there would be no problem in including these in ordinary classes. One said, "*Albino and asthma? I am surprised you should bring that up because I know we have two albinos in the school but they just get on with the learning activities like everyone else. Actually one of them is quite bright.*" Another said, "*I do not know of any of our pupils with asthma and diabetes. In any case I think if we have them, they just get on with learning as those conditions do not interfere with learning.*" Orphans and children from child-headed or poor families were also thought not to have special educational needs but that they needed material support from donor agencies in order for them to learn normally with other children. A principal said, "*Orphans and those from very poor families just needed assistance from the government through the BEAM* (Basic Education Assistance Module) *and also from NGOs* (Non-governmental organizations)". These children were generally thought to be able to learn alongside others without extra assistance once their material needs were taken care of. Children with learning difficulties were also said to be relatively easy to work with in mainstream classes where teachers were expected to use various teaching strategies to improve learning. A principal said, "*Of course slow learners can be taught comfortably*

together with high flyers, so that they cooperate. Otherwise what kind of teaching would it be if it targeted only average and high flyers?" However, children with more severe learning difficulties were thought to be suitable for special class placement rather than in the mainstream classes. One principal explained, "*Of course there are those few special cases who are so backward that they would benefit from special classes*." Another said, "*Remedial sessions are done at this school twice a week to remediate the few who would have been left behind in the mainstream teaching. It works very well*."

In Botswana similar views were expressed by the principals as many of the principals preferred learners with learning disabilities to those with any other disability. The reason for this preference for learners with learning disability was expressed as "*it is easy to manage and accommodate*". Mobility impairment was less preferred as they demand infrastructure accommodation. It emerged from the data that although learners with mobility impairments did not create serious demands on the instructional accommodation, the problem was providing structural accommodation; as some of these learners demand structural accommodation for which the principals were highly apprehensive. It was also observed during the school visits that majority of the primary schools are not structurally accommodative.

Principals' leadership style

Principals in both countries described themselves as key members in the implementation process and understood that they are responsible for education of all students. One of the Botswana principals emphasized that "*we need to focus on all learners not a specific group or category of learners*". Therefore, principals' leadership is very critical for the implementation process. However, the leadership style of these principals could be categorized into three models; disciplinarian, effective listeners and encourager. One of the principals who preferred discipline commented:

I usually visit every classroom with an understanding that teachers are teaching and students are learning. I believe students need to perform; therefore, teachers need to deliver the content. I told the entire school what I expect, the acceptable and unacceptable behaviours.

The majority of the principals who participated in this research also emphasised the importance of effective listening strategy. One of them said "*I maintain open-door policy so that teachers can talk and share their ideas*".

Concerns

In Zimbabwe the principals at the schools in rural areas did not think that ethnicity, language and culture were a problem as all the students and most teachers were Shona speaking. One of them however complained that the local dialect of Shona spoken in the province tended to be underrepresented in many grade seven public examinations, thereby disadvantaging candidates on many occasions. She said, "*The so-called standardization of Shona seems to have given advantage to other dialects which are given prominence in the examination. Over several years I have noticed many of our pupils do not do well simply because the questions demand an understanding of dialects other than Karanga.*"   The principals at two urban schools observed that because of the generally cosmopolitan nature of the urban population, they could not use Shona as the medium of instruction in the early grades but used English from the first grade which is what most parents preferred. One them explained, "*We are in an urban area where people from many different cultural and language backgrounds stay together. We settled on the use of English as medium of instruction right from grade one because it is what everyone would understand and so it is less contentious than any of the other local languages.*"

Gender equity was not considered to be a problem. A principal explained, "*Actually my enrollment shows that I have slightly more girls than boys in the school.*" Another said, "*The girls tend to outperform the boys especially in the first few grades. So there is no problem there.*" Parental HIV status and sexual orientation were also not considered to be problems. A principal said, "*We do not even have that kind of information about the pupils' parents as it is not educationally relevant.*" Another explained, "*For almost all orphans here we do not record AIDS as cause of death. Even the NGOs we work just need to know that the child is orphaned before they offer assistance.*"

All principals were concerned about the teacher to pupil ratio as they said classrooms were overcrowded which did not allow for more efficient monitoring of students. One principal said, "*The problem with having students with disabilities in these classes is that they are already overloaded. They might not benefit as much because the teacher is trying to cater for many other students.*"

Training of mainstream teachers to handle learners with diverse needs was considered to be a challenge. One principal said, "*The major problem in the ordinary classes is that these teachers do not have the skills to properly deal with learners with special educational needs. They need to be properly trained for that if this inclusion program is to work.*" Another said, "*Government needs to have a clear policy in place to ensure all pre-service and in-service training has a component of inclusive education so that teachers can handle all kinds of learners with ease.*"

Botswana principals who had learners with disabilities in their schools emphasised the need to address structural problems in order to facilitate effective implementation of inclusive education. These findings were corroborated by data from classroom and school observations.

Lack of classrooms. It was observed during fieldwork that, most of the primary schools in urban and semi- urban areas of the South Central Region did not have adequate classrooms to accommodate the large number of students. In one of the urban primary schools where a learner with hearing impairment was attending, the classes were conducted under a tree. It was also observed that the class was situated next to the principal's office where there was a lot of movement and noise.

Physical access to school facilities: In most schools, there had been some structural modifications made such as ramps and assisted toilets. However, the gradients of the ramps were so steep that the learners with physical impairments had to be helped by other students in order to get physical access to buildings. In one of the rural school, the new classrooms that were built did not have any provision for learners with physical impairments. In one school, it was worrying to observe that there were no ramps to access the toilets. For instance, a student with physical impairment had to depend on peers to gain access.

Support mechanisms for implementation

In Zimbabwe personnel from the department of Schools Psychological Services and Special Needs Education were thought to be too far removed from the action on the ground as they were based at the district and provincial offices. One principal said, "*Those people are not accessible and on the rare occasions when they come, it is as if they have come to supervise us whereas they should be working together with the teachers as colleagues.*" Supporting material such as the Zimbabwe Sign Language dictionary and other audio-visual equipment were also said to be difficult to get.

In Botswana it emerged that the Division of Special Education, which is charged with the responsibility of playing a leading role in supporting the implementation of inclusive education did not adequately support teachers, as indicated in one statement made by a principal:

We do not have any resource materials, books, infrastructure to implement inclusive education. Children with disabilities do not have access to computers or TV.

While it is the responsibility of government's Division of Special Education, support mechanisms such as implementation workshops appeared to be lacking. None of the school development plans reflected the holding of implementation workshops on inclusive education. Instead, it was observed that there was an effort by schools to organize workshops on inclusive education. Such efforts were frustrated by lack of funds and shortage of resource personnel to mount workshops.

Discussion

Although, most of the principals who were interviewed were in general favourable about the inclusion of learners with disabilities, they prefer learners with certain categories of disabilities. The principals preferred to include learners with learning disabilities. The least preferred group were those who require major curriculum accommodation such as those with hearing, visual and intellectual impairments. Moreover, they preferred 'social integration' over the 'full-inclusion model' and therefore recommended pull-out methods by placing these students in special units in regular schools. This study is in agreement with an earlier study done by Praisner (2003) who found that placement decisions were made based on beliefs and experience, therefore students with certain disabilities were not given the same opportunity to be placed in regular education classes. Praisner's study also found that principals were in favour of including students with 'speech and language impairment' 'physical disability 'and 'learning disability' in the regular classroom.

It was found that the inclusive education programme has been successfully implemented in those schools where principals were regularly meeting with parents and staff, sharing information, engaging in problem-solving with staff, building and maintaining interpersonal relationships with staff and community. All principals in this study indicated that they play critical roles in the implementation process. They also emphasised various strategies such as communication, care and sincerity and collaboration. In one of the schools visited during the fieldwork, the principal was found to be supportive and creating awareness on disability issues. It clearly indicated that inclusive education hinged on the principals' leadership in creating the culture and practice of inclusive education. However, this initiative would not be sustainable if it was not well supported by the MoESD. The point that needs to be underscored here is that this critical aspect of fostering the success of inclusive education should be well planned and built into the philosophy of the inclusive education service delivery. However, some principals were unsure to serve learners with disabilities and many tended to see the issues of inclusion as the responsibilities of special educators.

As shown in this study, principals with more positive attitude towards inclusion were more likely to believe that regular classrooms were the most appropriate placement option for learners with disabilities. Praisner (2003) reported similar findings regarding attitude and placement decisions for learners with disabilities. It is important to note that this particular principal was trained in the area of special education and was experienced working with individuals with disabilities. This means that, experiences with students with disabilities is an important factor for positive principal's attitude towards inclusive education. This finding supports previous research (Praisner, 2003, Villa, Thousand, Meyers, & Nevin, 1996) that showed experience with individuals with disabilities is related to positive attitudes towards inclusion.

The finding of the study shows that principals who were formally trained as special educators shown favourable attitude. Therefore, they were familiar with characteristics of disabilities and strategies and processes that could support inclusion. On the contrary, principals who attended only in-service training seriously lacked the concept of inclusion. Patterson, Bowling and Marshal (2000) also found that principals are ill-prepared for inclusion and special education leadership. Principals are key members in the development and implementation of inclusion programmes, therefore should be adequately prepared.

Currently, students with disabilities are already placed in the primary schools in Botswana. Data revealed that access to the curriculum and other facilities remained complex and out of reach for most of them. Overwhelmingly, respondents voiced strong concerns about the lack of resources and infrastructural facilities as well as the unfavourable attitudes of regular teachers towards individuals with disabilities. Principals often mentioned barriers such as lack of trained personnel, lack of time, lack of parental involvement, large class-size, and general resistance to change by regular teachers, all of which limit including learners with disabilities in the South Central Region primary schools. Principals were also concerned about teachers' inability to meet the learning needs of students with disabilities who are currently placed in their schools.

Implementation of inclusive education is multifaceted, complex and demands extraordinary commitment from all the stakeholders. Educational leaders, specifically school principals are crucial in creating an environment that promotes access and participation. Principals are now expected to design, lead, manage, and implement programs for all students, including those with disabilities. Literature is replete with the role of school principal as a leader, facilitator, change agent, evaluator, personnel manager, teacher, cheerleader, business manager, and many such roles (Bertrand & Bratberg, 2007; Boscardin, 2005; Cruzeiro & Morgan, 2006; DiPaola, & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Mackey, Pitcher, &

Decman, 2006). Various studies on principals' beliefs regarding inclusive education (Avissar, Reiter & Leyser, 2003; Barnett & Monda-Amaya, 1998; Daane, Beirne-Smith & Latham, 2000; Praisner, 2003; Robert, White & Roberts, 2008; Salisbury, 2006) certainly influence successful implementation of inclusive education.

School principals are the key players for school reforms (Avissar, Reiter, & Leyser, 2003; Bertrand, & Bratberg, 2007), and they are responsible for promoting and or blocking the inclusive process (Cook, Semmel & Gerber, 1999; Fullan, 2001; Barnett, & Monda-Amaya, 1998). However, understanding and implementing of inclusive education is the most complex and difficult task (Livingstone, Reed & Good, 2001); it requires collaborative planning among all the stakeholders of the school. In order for schools to become more successful in including learners with disabilities, attitudinal, organisational, and instructional changes must take place.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The overall conclusion from the present study is that principals play a critical role in the implementation of inclusive education. The success of inclusive education depends on their beliefs and leadership style and commitment. Principals in primary schools are generally supportive of the philosophy of inclusive education, but they prefer specific groups of children with disabilities in their schools. Inclusive education is more or less perceived as alternate to special education and it is an add-on responsibility to classroom teachers; as a result the principals are likely to encounter great amount of resistance in the implementation process. It is therefore necessary for the principals to be convinced with ethos of inclusive education. It was found that schools are limited by infrastructural facilities, inadequate resources (personnel and instructional material), negative attitudes and inadequate funds.

These findings are not unique to these countries; many developing countries are facing a similar situation.

It is needless to highlight that the principals can be influential in creating inclusive service delivery model that provides support to staffs, students and parents and thus increase the likelihood of successful implementation. It is equally critical to understand the context, the challenges the principals face, their leadership styles and strategies to overcome such challenges. Based on this study it could be recommended that:

- Principals should provide constructive leadership and working conditions that focus on promoting positive attitude, assisting, encouraging and scheduling teacher duties so that they have time to plan together and/or share information with the special educators, support service professionals and parents.

- Principals should promote collaboration between special educators and regular teachers, assistant teachers and other service providers in the day-to-day implementation of inclusive education.

- Principals in collaboration with special educators should take a wider focus to include methods of teaching, how teachers relate to students and how teachers reflect on their practices.

- Ministry of education should organise more staff development workshops related to inclusive education for principals.

- Regular in-service officers should organise implementation workshops to enhance the teachers' knowledge and skills on the strategies for teaching students with special needs. In addition, these workshops should equip teachers with practical skills on instruction, collaboration, alternate evaluation, classroom management, conflict resolution and on how to adapt the curriculum.

- Adequate resources, equipment, and teaching material suitable for learners with diverse learning needs should be provided.

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