

## **The Inclusion of Children with Mental Disabilities: A Teacher'S Perspective**

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**Abstract:** *This study focused on teachers' perceptions towards the inclusion of learners with mental disabilities in schools. The study employed questionnaires as instruments to gather data which was presented in graphs, pie charts and tables. The total population for the current study was 85 teachers drawn from five schools. Out of the total population, fifty respondents were chosen into the sample. Results show that while teachers can define the concept of inclusion, they have scanty knowledge of the issues obtaining in special needs education more so in inclusion of learners with mental disabilities. In spite of the scanty knowledge, most teachers agree with the idea that inclusive education is the ideal placement for learners with mental disabilities. Students with mental disabilities do not have learner support they need for learning in inclusive settings due to unavailability of resources. Learners with mental disabilities benefit in a number of ways from inclusion. Teachers feel that learners with mental disabilities benefit educationally and socially from inclusion. Respondents perceive that learners with mental disabilities are not readily accepted by their peers in inclusive settings while teachers are very forthcoming. There are many challenges that influence teachers' perceptions towards the inclusion of learners with mental disabilities in the regular classrooms which include lack of expertise, inadequate resources, lack of policy direction and lack of supervision. From the findings it was recommended were made basing on the research findings and conclusions the Schools Psychological Services should organise in-service courses or workshops for regular teachers on Special education. Teacher training programmes should help inculcate positive attitudes among teachers and provide knowledge and skills to handle students with mental disabilities in regular classrooms. In-service training through seminars, workshops or courses should help teachers acquire knowledge and skills to be competent inclusive. There should be an inclusive education policy to fully cater for the educational needs of learners with mental disabilities in inclusive settings.*

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### **1. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

There has been a tendency to subject people with disabilities to inhumane practices (Hardman, Drew and Egan 1999). Society tends to disregard their abilities let alone their psychosocial needs. However, humanitarian's practices took place in the last half of the nineteenth century where institutions for educational and custodial care purposes were put in place. Mpfu (2000) asserts that people with mental disabilities are a powerless group that has been culturally and economically victimised. This position has been perpetuated by attitudes of society which give rise to the perception of mentally challenged persons as weak and semi- competent components of the society. This perception makes people with mental retardation a group to be tolerated and cared for. With the passage of time, the humanism philosophy was superseded by the one of empowerment. The new philosophy of empowerment enables people with mental disabilities to overcome biases and barriers (Blaska in Nagler, 1999).

That being the case, education has taken centre stage in the development and empowerment of people with mental disabilities. Thus there has been the change of educational provision from exclusion to inclusion. Anscow (2003) posit that in an inclusive movement the environment should be least restrictive to accommodate students with disabilities and to afford them the right to learn in environments that are conducive to their social, academic, physical and psychological

needs. The concept of inclusion was effectively realized after the Jomtien and Salamanca conferences on Intellectual Disabilities. The outcomes of the Jomtien and Salamanca conferences spelt out the need for inclusion as opposed to mere integration of students with mental disabilities. According to Zindi (1997) the Government of Zimbabwe uses the Education Act (1987) revised (1996) to operationalise special needs education. The Education Act (1987) outlines that every child has the right to education and that primary education must be free and compulsory. The Education Act (1987) has formed the basis for the increase of Special Need Education provision in the country (Hadebe, 1993; Dakwa 1988). The education Act (1987) is backed by the Disabled Persons' Act (1992) which is designed to guard against discrimination of people with disabilities in public places and employment sectors.

However, this view has received mixed feelings even among those in the education fraternity. This study therefore sought to examine the teachers' perceptions towards the inclusion of learners with mental disabilities in schools.

## **2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The successful implementation of educational programmes mostly hinges on the teachers who are the chief implementers of the programmes. As such, the perceptions of teachers may affect the learning outcomes of students with mental disabilities in the regular school. To this end, this study sought to find out the teachers' perceptions towards the inclusion of students with mental disabilities.

## **3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The study sought to answer the following sub problems that stood as research questions:

- What is the level of teachers' understanding of inclusive education?
- What are teachers' perceptions about inclusion of learners with mental disabilities?
- To what extent are learners with mental disabilities included in regular schools?
- Which challenges affect the inclusion of learners with mental disabilities?
- What needs to be done to improve teachers understanding of inclusive education?

## **Review of Literature**

### **3.1 Inclusive education**

The National Association of State Boards on Education in USA regards inclusion as where students with disabilities attend their home school with their grades and age peers with educational support services. The National Centre for Educational Restructuring and Inclusion (NCERI) in Hardman et al (1999:39) defined inclusive education as:

Providing to all students including those with severe handicaps equitable opportunities to receive effective educational services with the needed supplementary aids and support services in age appropriate classes in their neighborhood schools in order to prepare students for productive lives as full members of the society.

Inclusion can be viewed as the placement of a child with mental disabilities in a general education classroom with supplemental supports and adaption that allow the child to benefit from that placement (Coots, Bishop and Grenot- Scheyer, 1998). Inclusion, therefore, involves whole communities and ensures full participation of people with disabilities at all levels of the community's cultural and economic life. Inclusion also entails participation of learners with mental disabilities in all the activities of the classroom or school done by non-disabled peers (Coots, Bishop and Grenot- Scheyer, 1998).

A study by Ryndak, Jackson, and Billingsley (2000) involving educational experts to find out their understanding of the concept of inclusion for students with disabilities identified seven components in the definitions of inclusion. Five issues raised on inclusion were (a) placement in natural general education settings; (b) all students together for instruction and learning; (c) supports and modifications within general education to meet appropriate learner outcomes; (d) belongingness, equal membership, acceptance, and being valued; and (e) collaborative integrated

services by education teams. Generally, all the experts demonstrated a clear understanding of the concept.

### **3.2 Inclusion of learners with mental disabilities**

Current practices in the education of learners with mental disabilities emphasize their inclusion in ordinary schools and exposure to the regular education curriculum. Inclusion can be viewed as the placement of a child with mental disabilities in a general education classroom with supplemental supports and adaptation that allow the child to benefit from that placement

Inclusion involves participation of learners with mental disabilities in all the activities of the classroom or school done by non-disabled peers.

The inclusion of students with mental disabilities in ordinary school settings is supported by the findings of studies that show that student achievement in regular schools depended on the combined effects of teaching methods used for all students and those used to meet the unique learning needs of individual students (Darling- Hammond 1996; McDonnell 1998; Du Toit and Forlin, 2009). The need to individualise teaching to take into account the learning needs of students with mental disabilities is a matter of best teaching practice rather than a result of having a learner with a disability in a class (McDonnell, 1998).

Teaching strategies that accommodate learners with mental disabilities that have been proposed by Ainscow (2003) include regular methods with no adaptations, material adaptations, multi-level curriculum and substitute curriculum. A wide variety of teaching methods and strategies can be employed in the teaching so as to cater for learners' individual needs. Task analysis can be very useful in teaching learners with mental disabilities in inclusive settings Slavin, 1996; Mpofu, 2000; Forlin, 2006).

## **4. BENEFITS OF INCLUSION**

Hayden and Thompson (2000) suggest that the presumed benefits of inclusive education for students with mental disabilities include that they will achieve at a higher level due to the higher demand and expectation of regular education programs. Students with mental disabilities benefit from exposure to students without disabilities who would model acceptable behavior and adaptive skills to students with mental disabilities. The social acceptance of students with mental disabilities increases through social contacts with a greater number of classmates and school mates without disabilities.

On the other hand, children are catered for in a continuum of skills and abilities. Hayden and Thompson (2000) advance that an inclusive approach facilitates and encourages staff team work, caters for individual learner's rights, works towards eradication of stigmas and provide opportunities for special needs children to function in the real world and to demonstrate their strengths. Inclusion develops relationships and creativity that would not be possible in segregated situations. Winter (2006) posits that students from inclusive schools speak warmly of increased opportunities and learning through diversity, challenging traditional views that special needs children in mainstream classes lower the overall standards. Forlin (2008) advances that familiarity and associated tolerance reduces fear and rejection of those with mental disabilities hence inclusive schools better prepare mainstream children for living in an inclusive society. The society provides a wide range of learning opportunities develops emotional intelligence and fosters empathy, respect generosity, self-confidence compassion caring and responsibility- all necessary ingredients for the adult of the twenty first century (Ainscow, 1999; Hayden and Thompson, 2000; Forlin, 2008). Ainscow (1999) points out that encouraging mainstream student to face challenges and not run away from them, leads to learning outcomes for such students which cannot be generated from a book.

Vlachou (1997) found out that all teachers who commented positively about inclusion saw major benefits for children's social education. Inclusion was perceived as mechanism for promoting socialisation between disabled and non-disabled students (Forlin, 2008).

## **5. CHALLENGES OF INCLUSION**

Despite, the good things about the inclusive education Bradley (1998) cited by Hayden and Thompson (2000) posit that it needs to be pointed out that there are many difficulties in implementing inclusion. It is time consuming and requires a high level of human resources. Inclusive education has to be carefully monitored and well planned in order to cater for the needs and not just the rights of special needs children. In this situation, it may not be economically viable. Ainscow (2003) advances that most importantly; the introduction of an inclusive education requires input and support from those who are committed to its ideology and values. Badza and Tafangombe (2010) cited challenges to inclusion as funding, policy issues, large class numbers and negative attitudes towards learners with mental disabilities. Lack of qualified personnel and lack of supervision, monitoring and evaluation of the system cause problems in the inclusion of learners with mental disabilities.

Teachers with special education qualification are still insufficient to make an impact in the country. This affects the proper implementation of inclusive education. Teachers trained for the regular school find it difficult to teach the child with mental disabilities to use the toilet as a lesson (Chimedza & Peters, 2001). He or she would consider reading or writing as the lesson rather than teaching self- help skills. Thus regular school teachers may not consider or value the teaching of self-help skills to learners with mental disabilities which in turn should lead them to acceptance, independence and functionality in their lives.

## **6. TEACHERS' VIEWS ON THE INCLUSION OF LEARNERS WITH MENTAL DISABILITIES**

A study by Santoli, Sachs, Romey, and McClurg (2008) found that despite the fact that almost all teachers interviewed were willing to make necessary accommodations for students with disabilities, the majority of those teachers felt that students with disabilities should not be educated in general classrooms no matter what the simplicity or severity of the disability, especially students with behavioural disorders and/or mental retardation. However, the majority of the teachers had a positive attitude toward inclusion which could only be successful with enough training and administrative support.

On the other hand, Vlachou (1997) found out that regular school teachers feel that they have nothing much to offer students with mental disabilities in inclusion setting as compared to specialist teachers. In agreement, Avramidis and Norwich (2002) established that some teachers have the conviction that special schools have more to offer and that they can relieve students from the stress of continuous performance pressure of failure and under achievement in regular schools. As such these teachers have negative unsupportive attitudes towards inclusion.

Ainscow (2003) points out that the majority of teachers feel they have got a difficult enough job without having to think about learners with mental disabilities who are viewed as an extra burden. These teachers are not comfortable with the large numbers, poor working conditions and remuneration; hence their resistance against the inclusion of learners with mental disabilities in ordinary classes. The same arguments are provided by Avramidis and Norwich (2002) teachers cannot promote inclusion while they experience conflicting constraints and expectations, insecurity and a general lack of encouragement.

## **7. STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE INCLUSION**

Studies have advocated for clear policies that specifically cater for the Special Needs Education. In Zimbabwe, for example, there is no specific policy on Special Education (Nziramanga, 1999; Chiswanda in Chimedza and Peters, 2001). There is also need for improvement in funding of Special Needs Education to make inclusive education a success (Badza and Tafangombe, 2010). This would enable motivate teachers, uplift the standards in regular schools, minimise attrition of professionals and make inclusive education a success.

Training of teachers in preparation for inclusion is recognized as a crucial factor in addressing attitudes and in promoting a greater commitment to inclusion, hence there is need for training teachers to handle learners with special needs in inclusive settings (Forlin, 2008; Mavhundure in Chimedza and Peters, 2001; Badza and Tafangombe, 2010). Avramidis and Norwich (2002) assert that some teachers resist inclusion less when teachers have obtained special education

training/qualifications. However, Winter (2006) noted that some newly qualified teachers in many jurisdictions still suggest that they are unprepared for working in inclusive schools, and many enter the profession with little understanding of inclusion.

There is also need for providing innovative programs that encourage and support pre-service teachers working with students with disabilities and providing opportunities for them to engage with self-advocates within the community are approaches that have been adopted successfully (Ainscow 2003; Engelbrecht, Green, Naicker and Engelbrecht, 1999). Teachers must also be skilled in a variety of teaching approaches to accommodate all children in inclusive settings (Kisanji 1997).

Badza and Tafangombe (2010) found out that- government has put efforts towards training of teachers. Ainscow (2003) advocates for forms of training such as school-based development workshops and seminars that may assist teachers to gain additional knowledge and skills, clarity about individual strengths, vulnerability and needs.

Collaborative approaches to teaching are also critical in equipping teachers for inclusion. Badza and Tafangombe (2010) suggest that there is definitely a need for each school to take up responsibility for the professional development of its own staff rather than relying on pre-service training. Some studies have advocated for collaborative relationships among teachers and stakeholders for the success of inclusion as this would encourage empowerment of individuals and teams for the success of inclusion (Sharma et al, 2008; Roffrey, 2001; Welch, 2000). Other researchers agree that collaboration is needed to support students with disabilities in general education settings (Wehmeyer et al., 2003). Team work and collaboration between teachers, administrators, parents and other stakeholders is crucial for the success of inclusive education (Smith and Hilton, 1997).

Forlin (2006) advocates for a highly individualized education plan/program for learners with mental disabilities. There is need for teachers to draw up the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for each learner to cater for individual learner's needs. The goal of education in inclusion is to enhance the child's successful functioning in society. The social component of the curriculum emphasizes this aspect.

However, some studies carried out elsewhere report frustration of respondents over the lack of time to collaborate with special education teachers regarding appropriate interventions and modifications that could grant further exposure to the general education curriculum. Some respondents felt they had little to no input on the instructional activities and content meant for students with disabilities (Downing & Peckham-Hardin, 2007; Matzen et al., 2010).

## **8. METHODOLOGY**

The present study adopted that the survey design. This assisted to assess influence of various factors which can be manipulated by public action. The study was a social research which sought to determine teachers' perceptions towards the inclusion of learners with mental disabilities. As such the survey was the most appropriate for searching and looking into perceptions held by a group of people (Creswell, 2000). The survey was factual and its collection presented relatively few problems because questionnaires and interviews upon a phenomenon were used.

## **9. POPULATION AND SAMPLE**

The population for the present study consisted of 85 prospective respondents drawn from five schools. Out of the total population, fifty respondents were chosen into the sample. These were made up of teachers from five school heads. The sample of teachers was drawn through the stratified simple random technique based on gender of the respondents.

## **10. PRESENTATION OF RESULTS**

In order to answer the main research questions, the study had four sub-problems which stood as research questions. Data are presented in tables, pie charts and graphs.

### **10.1 Sub problem 1: What is the level of teachers' understanding of inclusive education?**

Respondents were asked what they understood by inclusion in as far as it related to learners with mental disabilities. From the findings, it was seen that the majority 45(90%), had sound knowledge of what the concept entailed. Most indicated that inclusion meant the learning together of learners with disabilities and those without in regular schools. What is clear is that while the respondents were aware of the concept but there appears to be lack of clarity on the issues involved. From the majority of the responses, issues to do with support and modification within general education to meet appropriate learner outcomes; belongingness, equal membership, acceptance, and being valued; collaborative integrated services by education teams, as suggested by Ryndak, Jackson, and Billingsley (2000) were lacking in the definitions. These are also the same issues of support and adaption that allow the child to benefit from that placement as indicated by Coats, Bishop and Grenot- Scheyer (1998). Generally, in layman`s language, the respondents had a sound idea of the concept, though falling short of what authorities say.

To further establish their understanding of inclusive education, the respondents were asked if they agreed that inclusive education is the ideal placement. Figure 1 below, shows the responses.

Figure 1 above reveals 38(75%) of the respondents agreed with the idea that inclusive education is the ideal placement for learners with mental disabilities. Seven (15%) disagreed with the notion while the remaining 5(10%) was neutral about the inclusion of learners with mental disabilities.

Respondents were asked whether learner support was offered to students with mental disabilities.

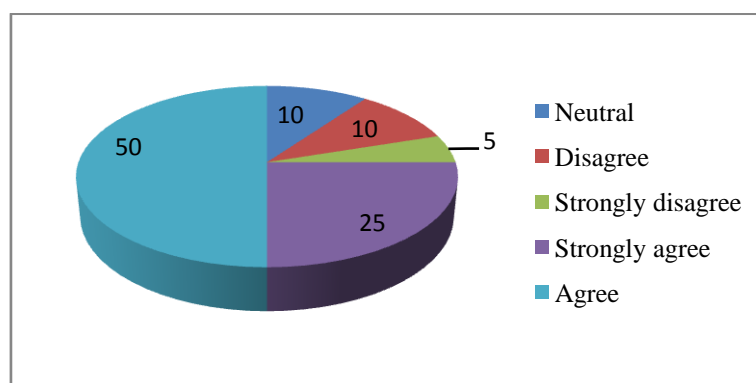


Figure 1. Inclusive Education is the Ideal Placement

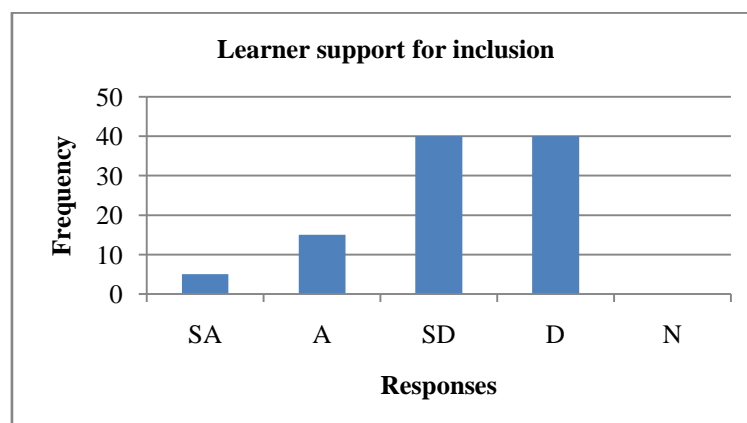


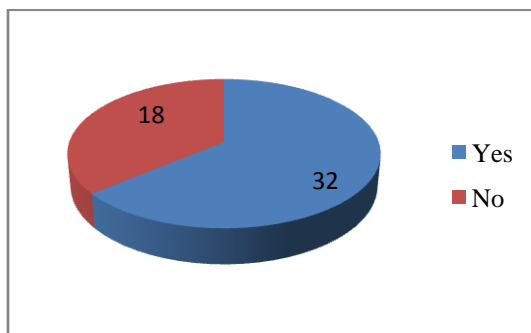
Figure 2. Learner support for inclusion

Figure 2 above shows that 40(80%) of the teachers indicated that they disagreed with the idea that students with mental disabilities have learner support they need for learning in inclusive settings. This could be attributed to unavailability of resources and becomes a limitation to inclusion as established by Badza and Tafangombe (2010). In view of this, Roy (2009) suggests that the availability of resources contributes to the attitudes. Ten (20%) respondents indicated that learners have support they need for learning. Probed further on what they thought was learner support for such learners, the respondents indicated, among others, special methods and modifications of the curriculum. In this view, the respondents demonstrated their understanding of the concept of inclusion.

**10.2 Sub problem 2: What are teachers' perceptions about the benefits of inclusion of learners with mental disabilities?**

Respondents were asked whether they thought inclusion of learners with mental disabilities was beneficial. Responses are shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3 shows that 32(64%) respondents supported the idea that learners with mental disabilities benefit from inclusion. The other 18(36%) disagreed with the idea that such children benefit from inclusion. In support of the majority of the respondents, several research studies have revealed that most teachers in inclusive classrooms recognise the positive social benefits for both special and general education students can be attained through inclusion (Downing & Peckham-Hardin, 2007; Fisher & Meyer, 2002; Matzen et al., 2010). This is in light of the more benefits accruing to inclusion as presented in the data in Table 1 below.



**Figure 3.** *Learners with Mental Disabilities benefit from Inclusion*

**Table 1.** *Benefits of inclusion of learners with mental disabilities as perceived by teachers*

Benefit	Number	Percentage
Modelling of acceptable behaviour	30	60
Achievement at a higher level	2	4
Improvement in school work	6	12
Socialisation and social acceptance	32	64
Eradication of stigma	25	50
Normal functioning in real world	25	50
Development of creativity and relationships	11	22
Development of emotional intelligence	20	40
Fostering personal daily life and self care skills	28	56

Table 1 shows that 30(60%) respondents indicated that inclusion paved way for modelling of acceptable behaviour while only 2(4%) stated that learners had high achievement at a higher level. Contrary to the views of the of many, Hayden and Thompson (2000) state that learners in inclusive classes will achieve at a higher level due to the higher demand and expectation of regular education programmes. Six (12%) indicated that there was improvement in school work while 32(64%) stated that there was improved socialisation and social acceptance of the included learners. According to Vlachou (1997) and Forlin, (2008) teachers commented positively about inclusion as it benefited in children's social education. According to them, inclusion promoted socialisation between disabled and non-disabled students.

Twenty-five (50%) respondents stated that inclusion made way for the eradication of stigma and some 25(50%) indicated that functioned normally in the real world as a result of inclusion. The findings are in support of those by Hayden and Thompson (2000) both in terms inclusivity having to eradicate stigma and providing opportunities for special needs children to function in the real world. Development of creativity and relationships and development of emotional intelligence accounted for 11(22%) and 20(40%) respectively. Twenty-eight (56%) perceived inclusion as fostering personal daily life and self care skills and this is in line with previous findings (Ainscow, 1999, Hayden and Thompson, 2000, Forlin, 2008). The findings also support those by Hardman et al (1999) who established that children with mental retardation were equipped with daily living or self-care skills for them to function independently in their lives. To a great

### 10.3 Sub problem 3: To what extent are learners with mental disabilities included in regular schools?

Figure 4 shows that 38(75%) of the respondents disagreed with the notion that learners with mental disabilities are readily accepted by their peers in inclusive settings. Ten (20%) respondents agreed that these learners are accepted while a minority of 2(5%) respondents was neutral about the acceptance of these students. While these findings show unacceptance by peers, some studies found out that teachers were willing to make necessary accommodations for such students. However, the same studies found out that the majority of teachers felt that students with disabilities should not be educated in general classrooms (Santoli, Sachs, Romey, and McClurg, 2008; Vlachou, 1997). This is behind the background that regular school teachers feel that they have nothing much to offer students with mental disabilities. According to Avramidis and Norwich (2002), teachers cannot accept inclusion with the conflicting constraints and expectations they face.

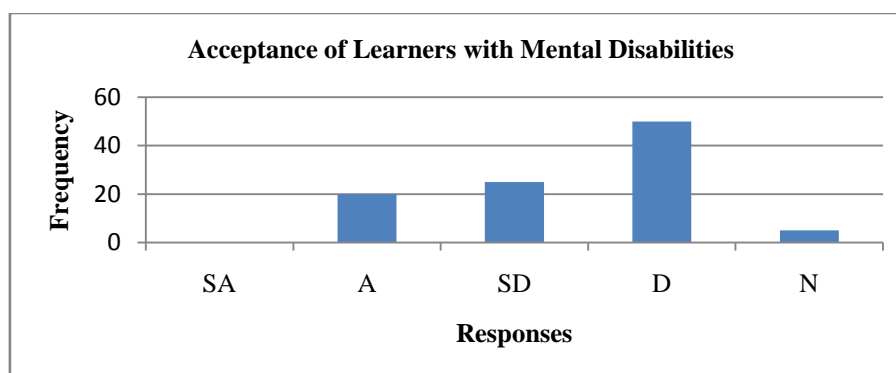


Figure 4. Acceptance of Learners with Mental Disabilities

### 10.4 Sub problem 4: Which challenges affect the inclusion of learners with mental disabilities?

Table 2. Challenges affect the inclusion of learners with mental disabilities

Challenge	Number	Percentage
Time consuming	40	80
Lack of expertise	50	100
Inadequate resources	42	84
Negative attitudes	35	70
Poor funding	47	94
Lack of policy direction	40	80
Lack of supervision	30	60
Large class sizes	41	80

Data in Table 2 show that 40(80%) respondents indicated time consuming as a challenge and an overwhelming majority of 50(100%) respondents stated that lack of expertise was a challenge. This is in concurrence with previous findings where teachers trained for the regular school find it difficult to teach the child with mental disabilities (Chimedza & Peters, 2001). In some studies, it has been established that there are many difficulties in implementing inclusion. Besides, it is time consuming and requires a high level of human resources (Hayden and Thompson, 2000). Inadequate resources were singled out by 42(84%) respondents as a challenge while 35(70%) indicated negative attitudes as a challenge. Poor funding and lack of policy direction were singled out by 47(94%) and 40(80%) respondents respectively. Thirty (60%) respondents cited lack of supervision and 41(82%) indicated large class sizes as challenges. In line with these findings, several studies have shown that there are challenges to do with those established in the current study which include, funding, policy issues, large class numbers, insecurity and lack of encouragement (Ainscow, 2003; Avramidis and Norwich, 2002; Badza and Tafangombe, 2010). Furthermore, as argued in these studies, teachers cannot promote inclusion while they experience conflicting constraints and expectations.



### 10.5 Sub problem 5: What needs to be done to improve teachers' understanding of inclusive education?

Table 3 shows that only a paltry 8(16%) respondents advocated for Individualised Education Plan while a sizeable 30(60%) asked for clear policies on special education. These findings support those by Forlin (2006) and Chimedza and Peters (2001) who advocated for individual differences to be catered for when teaching learners with mental disabilities.

**Table 3.** Strategies needed to improve teachers' understanding of inclusive education

Strategy	Number	Percentage
Individualised Education Plan	8	16
Clear policies on special education	30	60
Improvement of funding	46	92
Training of teachers for inclusion	50	100
In-service of teachers in post	50	100
Staff development of teachers	50	100
Collaboration among teachers	30	60
Training of administrators	40	80
Adaptation of teaching strategies	38	76

In the same vein, Winter (2006) also advocated a policy promoting inclusive schooling which must be supported by teachers who have appropriate positive attitude to sustain this paradigm shift. This is the policy that has been lacking in Zimbabwean education system since the system relies on other pieces of legislation (Nziramasanga, 1999; Zindi, 1997; Chiswanda in Chimedza and Peters, 2001). A majority of 46(92%) required an improvement in funding for the inclusion programmes in concurrence with existing findings (Badza and Tafangombe, 2010). All 50(100%) respondents advocated for training of teachers for inclusion, in-service of teachers in post and staff development of teachers. Teacher training has been seen to be crucial in a number of studies which should include forms of training such as school-based development workshops, in-service courses and seminars that may assist teachers to gain additional knowledge (Kisanji, 1997; Badza and Tafangombe, 2010; Ainscow, 2003; Forlin, 2003; Engelbrecht, Green, Naicker and Engelbrecht, 1999). Collaboration among teachers was advocated for by 30(60%) and in agreement with previous studies team work and collaboration between teachers, administrators, parents and other stakeholders has been seen to crucial for the success of inclusive education (Smith and Hilton 1997; Sharma et al, 2008; Roffrey 2001). In line with collaboration, Forlin (2006) established that the success of inclusive education lies in the fact that society in general and the educational community in particular, have an attitude of acceptance, respect and valuation of individual differences. Forty (80%) respondents wanted administrators to be trained. This is in line with the findings of previous studies which advanced that training should not only confine to regular school teachers but to extend to other school administrators and other professionals (Welch, 2000). Adaptation of teaching strategies was advanced for by 38(76%). Previous studies have also revealed a wide variety of teaching methods and strategies can be employed in the teaching so as to cater for learners' individual needs (Slavin, 1996; Mpofu, 2000 & Forlin, 2006).

## 11. CONCLUSIONS

In light of the analysis and discussion of the research findings presented above the following conclusion can be deduced.

- While teachers can define the concept of inclusion, they have scanty knowledge of the issues obtaining in special needs education more so in inclusion of learners with mental disabilities.
- In spite of the scanty knowledge, most teachers agree with the idea that inclusive education is the ideal placement for learners with mental disabilities.
- Respondents feel that students with mental disabilities do not have learner support they need for learning in inclusive settings due to unavailability of resources.
- Learners with mental disabilities benefit in a number of ways from inclusion.
- Teachers feel that learners with mental disabilities benefit educationally and socially from inclusion.

- Respondents perceive that learners with mental disabilities are not readily accepted by their peers in inclusive settings while teachers are very forthcoming.
- In spite of the fact that teachers readily accept learners with mental disabilities, they feel they have nothing much to offer these students in light of the conflicting constraints and expectations they face.
- There is no inclusive education policy to fully cater for the educational needs of learners with mental disabilities in inclusive settings.
- There are many challenges that influence teachers' perceptions towards the inclusion of learners with mental disabilities in the regular classrooms which include lack of expertise, inadequate resources, lack of policy direction and lack of supervision.
- Teachers perceive pre-service training at college, in-service training as well as staff development at school level as important for them to successfully implement inclusive education.

## 12. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were made basing on the research findings and conclusions.

- The Schools Psychological Services should organize in-service courses or workshops for regular teachers on Special education.
- Teacher training programmes should help inculcate positive attitudes among teachers and provide knowledge and skills to handle students with mental disabilities in regular classrooms.
- In-service training through seminars, workshops or courses should help teachers acquire knowledge and skills to be competent inclusive.
- Teachers with specialization in disability studies in regular schools through their administrators should hold staff development workshops to educate the staff on inclusive education and learners with mental disabilities for them to be successfully included.
- There should be an inclusive education policy to fully cater for the educational needs of learners with mental disabilities in inclusive settings.
- There is need for thorough supervision; monitoring and evaluation by School Psychological Services and the Special Education in schools where learners with mental retardation are included.
- Schools, at cluster level, should take an active role in promoting the inclusion of learners with mental disabilities in regular schools.
- Schools and the Ministry of Education should mobilize resources from donor agencies to cater for the successful implementation of inclusive education.

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