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SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION AND TEACHER EDUCATION IN ZIMBABWE; RETHINKING AND RETOOLING REGULAR TEACHER PREPARATION

BY

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ABSTRACT:

A survey is made of the Theory of Education and Professional Studies syllabuses of regular teacher education programmes in Zimbabwe to establish the extent to which they meet the needs of students with special educational needs integrated in the regular school system. Based on the findings, recommendations are made to rethink and retool the Theory of Education and Professional Studies courses in all the teachers colleges in Zimbabwe so that regular teachers are able to provide meaningful assistance to students with special educational needs integrated in their classes.

Introduction

The World Health Organization estimates that of the 120 million people with disabilities in developing countries needing rehabilitation services only 2 percent are receiving them (Helander, 1989). Zimbabwe's National Disability Survey (1981) reports that 52.4 percent of all people with disabilities in Zimbabwe have never been to school, 16.5 percent have attended school for up to two years, 28.2 percent have completed primary school education but proceeded no further. Only a minute one percent have progressed to or beyond secondary education (Department of Social Services, 1982). This is the situation in a country with a literacy rate of 89% (male) and 78% (female), probably one of the best in Africa.

Since Independence the number of students with disabilities who receive school education has increased due to the provisions of the education act of 1987

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(revised in 1996). Section 4 (paragraph 2) of the Education Act states that, No child in Zimbabwe shall be refused admission to any school on the grounds of race, tribe, colour, religion, creed, place of origin, or the social status of his or her parents.

This act does not specifically mention children with disabilities. However, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports Special Needs Education Policy Statement of 1989 gives the following strategies in its attempts to increase provision of education for students with disabilities, early detection, intervention and prevention of disabilities integration of children with disabilities into ordinary schools, whenever possible, development of local relevant training facilities at college and university levels, development of centres to localize integration establishment of government personnel to service, monitor and coordinate programmes, and assistance of nongovernmental organizations (Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports Special Education Policy Statement, 1989).

The 1972 Zimbabwe Psychological Services Act (Revised in 1988) advocated for the development of individualized programmes for persons with disabilities and for their placement in the least restrictive environment.

Since 1987 the provision for special needs education has expanded more in integrated settings than in special institutions (see enrollment statistics in Table 1 below). This is a shift from previous practice where provision was mainly given in special institutions. However, this shift in provision of special needs education has not been matched with appropriate regular teacher training so that the regular classroom teachers are able to teach children with special educational needs integrated in their classes. This paper makes a survey of the Theory of Education and Professional Studies syllabuses in Zimbabwe's regular teachers colleges to try and determine how they have responded to this new development in the provision of special needs education in the country.

Enrolment patterns

Statistics of the enrolment patterns for children with special educational needs in Zimbabwe show more increase in integration programmes than in special schools

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and institutions (see table 1 below). It appears the trend is to provide integrated education for children with special educational needs wherever possible. This is in line with the normalization principle (Wolfensberger 1972, Flynn & Nitsch, 1980) and the concept of inclusive education (Vlachou, 1997). Various terms have been used to describe the concept of children with special educational needs learning together with ordinary students: integration (Hegarty and Pocklington, 1990), inclusion (Vlachou, 1997) and mainstreaming (Kaufman, Gottlieb, Agard & Kukic, 1975). Table 1 below shows school enrolment statistics for children with special educational needs in Zimbabwe from 1987 to 1995.

Table I: Special Needs Education Enrolments in Zimbabwe (1987 - 1995):

Disability	1 987	1 989	1 990	1 991	1 992	1 993	1 994	1 995
1. Visual								
(a) Special schools	487	423	441	456	468	470	479	523
(b) Integration	266	335	376	432	447	473	469	951
2. Hearing								
(a) Special schools	866	882	769	913	835	841	828	931
(b) Integration	0	90	172	177	278	303	325	474
(c) mixed school	166	335	376	432	447	-	-	-
3. Physical								
(a) Special schools	-	-	-	496	498	490	490	344
(b) Integration	-	-	-	-	-	260	256	872
4. Mental								
(a) Special schools	961	1 165	1 130	1 052	1 022	1 064	1 067	1 214
(b) Special classes	1 352	2 094	2 094	2 840	3 163	2 309	4 929	4 771
(c) Integration	0	0	50	154	187	329	429	720

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(Compiled from statistics in Annual Reports of the Secretary for Education and Culture for 1987, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994 & 1995).

In 1987 there were 266 visually handicapped students in integrated classes. The number rose to 447 in 1992 and 951 in 1995. Also, there were 487 visually handicapped children in special schools in 1987. In 1992 the number dropped to 468 and in 1995 it rose again to 523. At the same time there were no deaf students in integrated classes in 1987. However, by 1992 there were 278 deaf students integrated in regular classes and the number rose to 474 in 1995. Also, there were 866 deaf students in special schools in 1987. The enrolment dropped to 835 in 1992 and then increased to 931 in 1995. The position was equally the same for students with mental disabilities where none of them were integrated in ordinary schools in 1987 but by 1992 there were 187 and the number rose to 720 in 1995. The percentage increases of students with disabilities who received school education from 1994 to 1995 are as follows;

(a) Visual handicap - special schools -----	9.18 %
integrated classes-----	102.77 %
(b) Hearing handicap- special schools -----	12.51%
integrated classes-----	45.84%
(c) Mental handicap - special schools -----	13.77%
integrated classes-----	67.83%

These statistics show a general trend of a higher percentage increase in integration classes than in special schools and institutions. This has implications for the regular school teachers in ordinary schools. Students with disabilities are increasingly being integrated in regular classes. Regular teachers are expected to teach these children when integrated in the classes they teach. Yet, their training orientation as teachers has very little to do with the education of such children. It appears for most regular teachers their knowledge of disability issues is very limited and their competence in handling and teaching children with special educational needs is suspect. There is, therefore, need to change the training orientation in regular

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teachers' programmes so that the training includes foundations and teaching methods of special needs education in their courses. This will make the teachers graduating from regular teacher education programmes competent to teach students with special educational needs integrated in ordinary schools. The current model of integration operates with support from the specialist teacher. This change will improve the level of understanding by the regular education teacher as he or she gets such support.

The University of Zimbabwe Teacher Education Review Committee of 1986 recommended the inclusion of Special Needs Education (Special Education) in the syllabuses of all teachers colleges. As a result some teachers colleges now have a special needs education section in their Theory of Education syllabuses. The current study examines the status of special needs education in the Theory of Education and Professional Studies syllabuses of regular teachers colleges in Zimbabwe. Theory of Education is a foundation course. It develops the teachers' professional thinking, attitudes, behaviours, and conceptions of issues related to teaching. Also, it lays the foundation for the teacher to be able to understand his or her students. On the other hand, teaching skills are developed in Professional Studies. It is in Professional Studies where teaching methods are taught. It is, therefore, necessary to include knowledge of special needs education in Theory of Education and Professional Studies courses if this change is to have any impact in the teaching/learning situation in the regular classroom.

The Study:

Sample:

Zimbabwe has a total of 16 teachers colleges. These are made up of six secondary education teachers' colleges and 10 primary education teachers colleges. Of these only one teachers college has a Special Needs Education Department. The sample for this study is as follows:

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Table II: Colleges in the Study:

Type of college	No. of Trs Colgs in the country	No of colleges in the sample.	Percentage of sample
Primary	10	7	70%
Secondary	6	5	83%
Total	16	12	75%

All the 16 teachers colleges were given the chance to participate in this study. The researcher requested the college Link Persons at the University of Zimbabwe to submit their college's Theory of Education and Professional Studies syllabuses to him. He also checked with the Department of Teacher Education offices at the University of Zimbabwe for some of the syllabuses. All colleges whose syllabuses were submitted are part of this study. Of the 12 participating colleges, seven are primary and five are secondary teachers colleges.

Data collection

Data was collected from the Theory of Education and Professional Studies syllabuses of the conventional preservice teacher training programmes in the country. These syllabuses have been approved or are being processed by the University of Zimbabwe through the Department of Teacher Education. The colleges are associate colleges of the University of Zimbabwe which certificates the graduands. The areas of concern in both syllabuses were the objectives and the content sections. These varied from college to college and demonstrated the thrust and areas of emphasis by the college during training.

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Data Analysis

Data analysis involved document analysis. The syllabuses were analyzed individually to check the extent to which they addressed the needs of children with special educational needs integrated in regular schools. Only the objectives and the content sections of the syllabuses were analyzed. The objectives were only counted as present in a syllabus if they were explicit on special needs education. Objectives that were stated to imply special needs education were excluded. The content was only counted as existing in the syllabus if it explicitly mentioned any of the major handicapping conditions such as visual handicap, hearing impairment, learning disabilities, behaviour disorders and the creative, gifted and talented.

Results

(a) Theory of Education:

Table III: Theory of Education Syllabuses With a Section on Special Needs Education:

Type of Teachers college	Objectives No of colleges	Total No. of colleges in the sample	Content: No. of colleges	Total no. of colleges in the sample
Primary	2	7	4	7
Secondary	1	5	3	5
TOTAL	3	12	7	12

All the available 12 syllabuses were analyzed to check whether or not they had any objectives and/or content deliberately set to address issues of special educational needs. The idea was to assess how much teachers colleges of

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regular class teachers are preparing the graduating regular class teacher to teach the child with disabilities integrated in the regular school system. In stating the objectives three out of 12 colleges (25%) explicitly stated objectives to do with special needs education. Out of the three colleges two were primary colleges while one was a secondary teachers college.

In listing the content relevant to preparing regular teachers to meet the special educational needs of children with disabilities integrated in regular classes seven colleges (58%) had content that addressed special needs education. Of these four are from primary school teachers' colleges and three are from secondary school teachers' colleges. Two other colleges from the primary section had special needs education topics as sub topics within given headings. The content was minor and is not included in the results stated above.

Professional Studies

A similar analysis was made of the Professional Studies syllabuses to assess the extent to which the regular teachers' colleges are including methods of teaching children with special educational needs integrated in regular classes in their training programmes. The findings revealed that none of the colleges in the sample set any objectives nor had any content to do with specific methods for special needs education.

Discussion

Theory of Education Syllabuses

Twenty five percent of the teachers training programmes in the study set objectives specifically to address the needs of children with special educational needs integrated in regular classes. Seventy five percent were silent. They did not have specific objectives that addressed issues of special needs education. Fifty eight percent of the same teachers training programmes had content in their syllabuses that addressed the needs of students with special educational needs. What is noted here is that whereas

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less teachers' colleges specifically targeted the area of special needs education as crucial (objectives), more colleges realized the need for teachers in training to have an awareness of special needs education (content). This awareness is important if the integration of students with special educational needs into regular classrooms is going to work. Past research has shown that the success of integration depends of the attitudes of regular school teachers towards integration and towards students with disabilities (Macmillan, Jones & Meyers, 1976; Price & Ringlaben, 1981). Such attitudes are influenced by knowledge and experience of working with students with special educational needs (Schmelkin, 1981). Also, regular school teachers need to see children with special educational needs integrated in their ordinary classes as part of their responsibility right from training.

Professional Studies Syllabuses

Professional Studies develops the teachers' professional skills (e.g., teaching methods, classroom management, lesson preparation). It is in this course of study where the teacher is made and yet, it appears Professional Studies remains a grey area in terms of meeting the special educational needs of children with disabilities integrated in regular classes in Zimbabwe. No regular teacher education programme in this study offers anything on the methods of teaching children with special educational needs integrated in regular classes. Other studies elsewhere indicated that the majority of teachers feel that where integration is not working well it is due to lack of adequate teacher training. In one such study 86.1 percent of the teachers in the sample reported that they had not had any course work on integration in their teacher preparation courses (Price & Ringlaben, 1981). It appears there is a wrong assumption that every teacher naturally knows how to deal with exceptionality. What has been demonstrated is that teacher skills (Professional Studies) and attitudes (Theory of Education) are the key to the adjustment in regular classes of the students with special educational needs (MacMillan, 1974; Macmillan, Jones & Meyers; 1976).

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There is need for honest rethinking and purposeful action to realign teacher preparation so that teacher thinking and learning result in consistent, viable and measurable results for all children (Bynoe, 1998) including children with special educational needs. Teacher education whether pre service or inservice is the pivot for amending teacher thinking and maximizing learning for all students. It appears many educators are not particularly sanguine about the changing populations in the regular classrooms. If the results of this study are anything to go by, the inclusion of children with special needs education in regular classrooms calls for a reevaluation of teacher preparation in Zimbabwe particularly in the areas of Theory of Education and Professional Studies.

Theory of Education

The traditional content covered in Theory of Education syllabuses in a regular teacher education programme in Zimbabwe for both primary and secondary teachers' colleges includes the following areas: sociology of education, philosophy of education, psychology of education, comparative education and curriculum studies. An analysis of the topical content in each of these areas does not show that special needs education is embedded in them. For example, when the syllabuses address sociology of education, the sociological issues of special needs education are not included. What the study noticed is that some syllabuses have a section on special needs education. Whereas this is a positive development, not all syllabuses in the study had this section. This paper advocates that all theory of education syllabuses for both primary and secondary teachers' colleges should have a section on special needs education or have special needs education topics clearly included, not implied, in each section of the content area.

Professional Studies

The situation in primary education teachers' colleges in Zimbabwe at the moment is that the teaching and professional skills of a teacher are taught in the Professional Studies course. This course is divided into three syllabuses. Syllabus A which deals with professional issues of a general nature in terms

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of teaching and classroom management (e.g., lesson planning, scheming, classroom control). Syllabus B which deals with teaching methods for specific subject areas (e.g., mathematics, music, shona, environmental science, social studies). Syllabus C which is a project (Curriculum Depth Study) that combines ideas from Syllabuses A B and a curriculum area. Unfortunately, special needs education is not included in any of the three syllabuses. The recommendation of this paper is to include special needs education in all the three syllabuses of Professional Studies as follows:

(a) Syllabus A

The current approach in syllabus A makes the wrong assumption that all students in regular school education are ordinary learners. It ignores the current trend prevalent in the regular school system where students with special educational needs are being integrated in regular schools. Some students with disabilities are now learning side by side with ordinary students. Issues such as those dealt with in syllabus A should be taught in terms of regular children, children with special learning needs and a combination of both (integration). That way, the teacher preparation retools ordinary teachers to meet the paradigm shift taking place in the education system in Zimbabwe.

(b) Syllabus B

Special needs education is not a subject that is taught in the school system such as history, geography or science. It will be problematic to try and give special needs education a status equal to that of a subject and to treat it as such. However, special needs education can be a core knowledge base that can be embedded in all subject areas. Instead of looking at teaching methods say for mathematics for regular students only, this study recommends that it becomes mandatory for the methods to be looked at both for regular and special needs education students.

8) Syllabus C

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Syllabus C is a project. Students are required to do a research based project on their teaching experiences. Most of this should be action research. It would be a good idea to encourage students to discuss within their study the implications of their findings to the teaching of both regular students and students with special educational needs.

Professional Studies in secondary education teachers' colleges is organized differently from that in primary teachers' colleges. The content areas that are usually covered are communication skills, educational media and technology, curriculum management and administration and curriculum depth study. These content areas are taught as they relate to the general teaching and learning across all subjects of the secondary school curriculum. The subject-specific teaching skills and procedures are taught in Applied Education within each main subject area. The results of this study show that special needs education is not included in the syllabuses of both Professional Studies and Applied Education. Such a situation continues to disadvantage students with special educational needs integrated in ordinary secondary schools. This paper recommends a rethinking of the way professional studies and applied education are offered. There is need to include special needs education in all the areas of Professional Studies and Applied Education in secondary education teachers' colleges. For instance, instead of having a course on communication skills meant only for ordinary students, there is need to develop such a course to include how the teacher communicates effectively with students with special needs integrated in the ordinary class he or she will teach. For example, this will help teachers deployed at Waddilove Secondary School to be able to communicate effectively with the blind students they teach in the ordinary classes there. The same can be said of the gifted and talented students in our secondary schools. They are not getting to the best of their potential because teachers have not been trained on how to teach them. In some cases students with special education needs end up being labelled as stubborn or they drop out of the school system because of frustrations. Special needs education should be embedded in the Applied Education of each main study area as well. Such a move will retool regular school teachers and will make the integration programme more effective.

Closing Thoughts

While we continue to grapple with some of the issues and viewpoints presented in this study, we must not lose sight of the beneficiaries - the children. If all children are to benefit, then, teacher preparation needs to be reconceptualized in ways that facilitate the meaningful education of teachers to meet the needs of all students, including those with special educational needs. Moreover, the importance of recruiting and retaining personnel trained in special needs education in regular teacher education programmes cannot be downplayed. Each teacher's college in Zimbabwe and indeed the Department of Teacher Education at the University of Zimbabwe must have someone trained and experienced in special needs education. Let us learn from mistakes we made in the past. It is an open secret that primary school teacher training (especially in Professional Studies) has suffered because we have used secondary school trained and experienced teachers as our primary school teacher trainers without any primary school knowledge base or experience. They get promoted on the basis of their training and teaching in secondary schools and overnight upon promotion they qualify to train primary school teachers, more so in methodology. This weakness, no doubt, negatively affects teacher quality. If special needs education and in particular integration/inclusion/mainstreaming is to be successful in ordinary schools then, appropriately qualified and experienced special needs education lecturers should be hired as part of the regular teacher training personnel in all the teachers' colleges in the country.

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