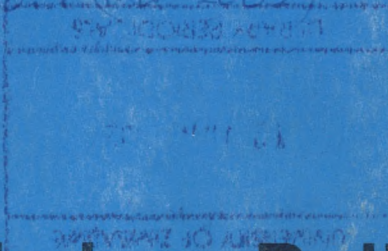


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Educational integration of children with disabilities in schools in the Midlands Region of Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Primary school heads' and teachers' experiences and perceptions of the education of children with disabilities were examined to determine their attitudes towards disability and integration. One hundred and twenty-six primary school heads and teachers from the Midlands Region participated in this study. A questionnaire was used as the main data collection tool and descriptive statistics were mainly used to analyse the data. Zubin's (1939) nomographs for statistical significance of differences between percentages were used. Two hundred and sixty three of the participants (52%) displayed favourable attitudes towards disability and integration of children with disabilities into regular schools. Pertaining to individual disabilities, physical and visual disabilities were considered more acceptable for integration while intellectual and hearing disabilities were considered less acceptable for integration. Teachers and heads involved in structured integration displayed more positive attitudes towards disability and integration than those who have self-integrated children. Further, male teachers' and heads' attitudes towards disability and integration were not significantly different from those of female teachers and heads. Finally, it was recommended that future studies should use more vigorous research designs to ascertain correlative and causal relationships between and or among variables.

Introduction

There is a considerable number of research findings on teacher attitudes towards the integration of children with disabilities into regular schools. Reviews of the numerous studies on teachers' attitudes toward integration paint a negative picture. Attitudes reported were generally unfavourable to integration (Alexander & Strain, 1978; Gickling & Theopald, 1975; Jordan & Proctor, 1969). Many teachers and other professionals were found to perceive children with disabilities in the negative light (Alexander & Strain, 1978; Baker & Gottlieb, 1980; Casey, 1978; Harvey, 1985). Nevertheless, several sources have suggested that regular teachers may be more ready to support integration if certain requirements are met, such as the provision of additional training and preparation aimed at developing knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to work effectively with children with disabilities (Alexander & Strain, 1978; Larrivee, 1981; Payne & Murray, 1974). In addition to additional training, another variable thought to be positively related to the acceptance of integration is previous experience with children with disabilities.

In general, research supports these assumptions. Harvey and Green (1984) found that teachers who have had experience with children with disabilities were slightly more favourably disposed toward integration than those without such experience and were more at ease with these students. Berge and Berge (1988) who reported that a certain regular class teacher complained that she was given a 'raw deal' after a severely intellectually disabled wheelchair bound student was integrated into her regular class supports these results. With time, the teacher "perceived that the child was receiving a better education than she would in a segregated setting" (Berge & Berge, 1988; p. 107). Almost without exception, having attended a course on special education has been found to be associated with positive attitudes towards integration (Harvey & Green, 1984; Mandell & Strain, 1978; Stephens & Braun, 1980). French and Henderson (1984) showed that attitudes can be modified through training and Leyser and Abrams (1983) reported significant attitude change in nineteen regular class teachers following an introductory special education course and practicum.

However, Haring, Stern, and Cruickshank (1958) (cited in Hegarty Pockington, and Lucas 1982) found that while an in-service workshop resulted in significant improvement in teachers' knowledge and understanding of children with disabilities, it did not automatically lead to increased acceptance of integration. Only teachers from schools, which contained children with disabilities, showed significant increase in their acceptance of integration. Thus, it was concluded that information about children with disabilities might be more likely to promote attitude change in teachers having concurrent involvement with children with disabilities than in teachers without such involvement. Pertaining to attitudes of heads, Center, Ward, Parmenter and Nash (1985) revealed that while their attitudes are generally positive, certain individual characteristics of heads affect their attitudes towards integration. The variables assessed by Center, et al. (1985) are number of years of service as head, possession of an appropriate educational qualification and some administrative or teaching experience with a special class. Those who had spent less than seven years as school administrators appear to be significantly more positive towards integration than longer serving heads. This was particularly evident in attitudes towards children with mild-moderate intellectual disabilities or those with more severe physical and sensory disabilities. According to Center, et al., (1985) heads with appropriate special education qualifications also appear to be significantly more positive in their attitudes to these disabilities. Furthermore, years of service together with special education qualifications seem to modify attitudes towards those disabilities viewed most negatively, such as multi-handicapped conditions (Center, et al, 1985; pp. 155-156).

Purpose of the study

The other variable considered in studies of integration is the sex and gender of the subjects. Sex of respondent has rarely proved to be significant factor in determining attitudes towards integration. Higgs (1975) reported more positive attitudes among female teachers whereas Maunganidze (1991), Berryman, Neal and Robinson (1980), Foley (1978), and Hughes (1978) found no such relationship. Other than studies on integration by Maunganidze (1991) and Barnatt and Kabzems (1992), no other major studies on integration were carried out in Zimbabwe. Yet, Zimbabwe through the 1987 Education Act the country acknowledged that integration is one of the ways the country will make schools work for all children. The statistics compiled by the department of Schools Psychological Services and Special Needs Education (1999) demonstrate Zimbabwe's commitment to the integration of children with disabilities into regular schools. For example, 693 children with hearing disabilities received their education in resource units at regular schools while 696 children with hearing disabilities were enrolled at special schools. Out of 667 children with visual disabilities attending school, 365 received their education in resource units at regular schools. Of the 1550, children with intellectual disabilities varying from mild to profound, 617 were enrolled at regular schools receiving their education in resource units. Regular schools also hosted special classes for children with learning difficulties. In 1999, regular schools had 6993 children of this category.

Since no study was carried out before the practice of integrating children with disabilities into regular schools, integration could have been used as a means of improving teachers' attitudes towards children with disabilities. This examined heads' and teachers' attitudes since these people play a very important part influencing the success of integrating children with disabilities into regular schools. Integration in this study means allowing children with learning disabilities to learn together with those without disabilities. Structured integration refers to a well planned coming together of children with disabilities and those without disabilities while self-integration refers to a practice where children with disabilities join the regular schools/classrooms on their own. The study mainly sought to:

- a) to identify attitudes of primary school teachers and heads towards children with disabilities;
- b) to assess heads' and teachers' attitudes towards integration;
- c) to compare attitudes of those who have been involved in structured integration with attitudes of those who only experienced self-integration; and

- d) to compare attitudes towards integration of children with disabilities of female teachers and heads with those of male teachers and heads of primary schools.

Methodology

A two by two-factorial research design was used for this study. The factors involved were sex (male and female) and practitioner (head and teacher). Participants were seventy male and fifty-six female heads and teachers of primary schools with resource units, special classes, and of schools or classes with self-integrated children with disabilities. The teachers were randomly selected from a teacher population of 900 in the Midlands Region. The teachers and heads who participated belonged to thirteen schools in Gweru urban, eight schools in Kwekwe, five schools in Zvishavane, six schools in Mberengwa, five schools in Gokwe, one school in Mvuma, four schools in Silobela, three schools in Lower Gweru, three schools in Shurugwi and one school in Zhombe. Of the males, 28 were teachers and 42 heads, while 45 females were teachers 11 females were heads.

During the study, inspection records on visits by education officers, termly reports on special education programmes by teachers and heads, and evaluation reports on special education teachers' in-service training courses from the previous year were analysed. A questionnaire was also administered to the participants. In the questionnaire, demographic data and information on the type of integration comprised part A. Part B carried an item pool of 38 attitude statements generated from the literature, records, reports and interviews with special education teachers and heads. Part C consisted of a request for respondents to identify problems faced and suggest possible solutions in integration. A pilot study using 35 specialist teachers from all special education institutions in Zimbabwe revealed that 29 items of the questionnaire reliably tap the attitudes of teachers toward children with disabilities.

Results

To analyse the data, significance of different proportions were determined using Zubin's (1939) nomographs for testing of statistical significance of differences between percentages (Oppenheim, 1966). Table 1 shows the proportion of heads and teachers favouring or not favouring integration. Just over 89% of the primary school heads and teachers were willing to allow children with physical disabilities to learn with their peers in the regular schools, while about 66% were willing to integrate children with visual disabilities. For both children with intellectual and

hearing disabilities, about 26% of the participants were willing to integrate them. Overall, about 52% of the participants were willing to integrate children with various types of disabilities into regular schools while, 22% did not favour the integration of these children.

Table 1. Heads' and teachers' attitudes toward integration of children with different types of disabilities (N = 126)

Type of Disability	Response Frequency %		
	<i>Favourable</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Negative</i>
a) Physical Disability	89.68	6.35	3.97
b) Intellectual Disability	26.19	39.68	34.13
c) Visual Disability	66.67	18.25	37.70
d) Hearing Disability	26.19	37.30	36.51
Total	52.18	25.40	22.42

Table 2 compares proportions of male and female participants favouring or not favouring integration. Male participants had more favourable attitudes towards disability and integration than their female counterparts. Twenty nine male participants (41%) compared to 20 females (36%) responded favourably towards disability and integration. However, the difference was not statistically significant even at the 10 percent level. This was also true with the percentage differences for those who reported neutral and negative attitudes towards disability and integration.

Table 3 compares participants' willingness to accept structured- and self-integration. In both categories more than 90% of the participants were willing to have children with physical and visual disabilities integrated in their schools/classrooms. On the other hand, more than 40% of the participants in both groups were unwilling to have children with hearing disability in their schools/classrooms. More than 60% of the participants involved in self-integration were unwilling to have children with intellectual disabilities in their schools/classrooms. Overall, 77% of the responses from participants involved in structured integration were positive compared to 69% of the responses from those involved in self-integration.

Table 2. Female and male participants' attitudes towards disability and integration.

Type of Disability	Response Frequency %		
	<i>Favourable</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Negative</i>
Females (N = 56)	35.71%	55.36%	8.93%
Males (N = 70)	41.43%	52.86%	5.71%
Overall	38.89%	53.97%	7.14%

Table 3. Involvement in structured integration and attitudes towards disability and integration.

Type of Disability	Response Frequency %					
	Structured Integration (N = 864)			Self Integration (N = 648)		
	<i>Willing</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>Unwilling</i>	<i>Willing</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>Unwilling</i>
a) Physical Disability	98.61	1.39	0.00	93.59	4.63	2.78
b) Intellectual Disability	54.17	24.31	21.53	26.85	9.26	63.89
c) Visual Disability	96.76	1.39	1.85	92.59	2.47	94.00
d) Hearing Disability	47.92	11.11	40.97	50.93	0.93	48.15
Total	76.85	8.64	14.51	68.72	4.12	27.16

Discussion

The foregoing analysis of teacher attitudes towards disability and integration of children with disabilities revealed that teachers and heads generally display positive attitudes towards children with disabilities and are supportive of integration of these children into regular schools/classes. These results are incompatible with several reports which indicate that most teachers and heads oppose integration of children with disabilities into regular classrooms. For example, in Zimbabwe, Barnatt and Kabzems (1992) found secondary school teachers to be very critical of the integration of children with intellectual disabilities into the regular classrooms. Unlike

the earlier study by Barnatt and Kabzems, the present study examined the attitudes of teachers at schools, who had experienced structured and self- integration of children with disabilities. Their positive attitudes towards disability and integration may be due to these teachers' acquired understanding of the abilities and needs of children with disabilities. McLeskey and Waldron (1996) report that teacher opposition of integration of children with disabilities can approach 100% when integration is poorly implemented.

When the results were analysed according to particular disabilities, the impression gained was that heads and teachers always accepted the integration of children with physical and visual disabilities while they either slightly supported or opposed the integration of children with intellectual disabilities. These findings may be explained when the teaching demands each disability places on the teacher are considered. For example, for children with intellectual disabilities to integrate into a regular classroom they must be able to read and understand all the teaching and learning materials at appropriate levels. Because these children have not yet acquired appropriate reading and understanding competencies, the teachers find teaching them burdensome.

Consistent with earlier studies on integration (e.g., Maunganidze, 1991; Berryman, Neal, & Robinson, 1980; Foley, 1978; Hughes, 1978), male heads' and teachers' attitudes towards disability and integration were not significantly different from those of female teachers and heads. However, male teachers and heads displayed marginally more positive attitudes than female teachers and heads. In addition, for the converse responses, female participants were slightly more negative than male ones. However, the difference was not statistically significant. This finding suggests that sex may not be an important factor in determining attitudes towards disability and integration. Thus, when considering teachers for children with disabilities, other factors such as qualification and experience should possibly be accorded higher priority than sex of the aspiring teacher.

A comparison of heads and teachers with a special class or resource unit on site (that is structured-integration) and those with at least one child with disability integrated (self-integration) indicated that the former were significantly more positive to the integration of children with disabilities than the total group of teachers and heads. The latter were marginally more negative. This finding suggested that it may **not** be exposure to disabilities per se which facilitates development of positive attitudes, but other factors associated with teachers' involvement in planning and preparation for the integration of children with disabilities. The difference in the

attitudes of heads and teachers who were involved in structured integration and those who were exposed to unplanned integration could be explained in terms of special education qualification or at least attendance of special education in-service workshops. All heads and teachers involved in structured integration had attended at least one in-service training course in special education while several teachers held special education certificates or diplomas.

It was interesting to note that most heads and teachers involved in self-integration rated children with intellectual disability as unsuitable candidates for integration. These children usually benefit from well-structured educational programmes which teachers may find difficult to design and implement without expert advice. Heads' and teachers' attitudes confirmed their legitimate realisation that when these children are integrated into regular classrooms a variety of changes need to be implemented if the children are to benefit. These changes mean additional work demands on the teachers and heads. They also need to acquire new teaching and classroom management skills. For example, if children with intellectual disability are included in the regular classroom, both the head and teachers need some training in designing and implementing individualised educational plans.

Conclusion

Although the nature of the present study may not give the final explanation to causes and relationships of variables involved in the attitudes towards disability and integration of children with disabilities into regular schools/classrooms, the results could be used as a base for more vigorous research. That is, in future experimental and correlational designs should be used. With these research designs, a longitudinal study is likely to identify factors that govern the formulation and evolution of attitudes. In this study, only opportunities for interaction were assessed, yet, sheer physical proximity does not automatically lead to meaningful encounters. Future studies should examine the possibility of introducing direct intervention by teachers and parents to promote interaction between those with special needs and their peers. Such future studies should consider the pupil's attitudes towards their disabilities and normal children's attitudes toward their disabled peers.

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