



Strategies for Monitoring the Successful Delivery of Inclusive Education in the Classroom

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Abstract

This study explored strategies to monitor the successful delivery of inclusive education in mainstream classrooms. It particularly emphasized the importance of identifying and addressing the gaps that often exist between education policy and actual practice. Tackled from the principles of social constructivism and the Theory of Planned Behavior, the research explored how teachers are able to identify and support students with special needs, recognizing the diverse challenges they face. Employing qualitative methods, the study incorporated a thematic analysis of teacher responses to gaining deeper insights into their experiences and perceptions. Among the key strategies identified are systematic observation, which allows teachers to closely monitor student engagement and diverse assessment techniques that cater to various learning styles. Again, personalized interactions that build trusting relationships and necessary environmental modifications that create an inclusive atmosphere. The findings underscored the critical role of continuous monitoring tools, progress tracking systems, and effective feedback mechanisms to promote a more inclusive educational environment. Furthermore, the study stressed the importance of implementing structured accountability frameworks and providing ongoing professional development.

Keywords: Inclusive education, teacher strategies, special needs, classroom monitoring, policy implementation

Introduction

One of the prominent issues which informed the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) discussions held in Rio de Janeiro 2012 under the auspices of the United Nations was Quality Education (SDG 4). The SDG 4 opines that Quality education “should be all-in as well as being impartial to ensure lasting openings for all and sundry by 2030” (UNDP,2012). In consonance

with the Sustainable objective, the entire world is devoted to providing quality education by eroding any kind of impediment that will militate against universalism for all learners.

South Africa's Department of Education is on a quest to achieving the aforementioned (quality education for all) and has formulated and carried out a lot of divergent policies in the educational sector (DBE, 2016). A case in point is the National Curriculum and Assessment Policy. The aim of the policy document is to provide every learner regardless of their socio-economic class, tribe, family, sex, strength or capacity or intelligence with the knowledge, skills and values necessary for self-fulfillment and meaningful participation in the society as citizens of the country (DBE, 2012). It emphasizes inclusivity as the central part of each school's planning and teaching by teachers and other stakeholders having a sound understanding with regards to identification and how to address the barriers that affect learning and to make provision for diversity.

The National Curriculum and Assessment Policy have been criticized for its fast-paced, lock-stepped and content-heavy demands (Andrews, Walton, & Osman 2021) preventing teachers and other stakeholders to play their roles effectively in providing quality and inclusive education for all. Furthermore, the policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) which aims to provide a framework of procedures to identify, assess and provide programmes for all learners who require additional support to enhance their participation and inclusion in school supports other Department of Education policies to create inclusivity. Challenges still exist though as the provision of these policies and its implementation are insufficient. This is due to lack of monitoring and accountability systems by the various stakeholders. This study therefore is to (1) explore how teachers are able to identify learners with Special needs in their classroom and (2) draw out strategies to monitor Inclusive Education in the classroom. This study is significant because it will aid in identifying the inconsistency in the Inclusive Education classroom and recommend monitoring tools for accountability purposes in Inclusive Education practice.

Theoretical Framework

In this study, social constructivism theory and the theory of Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) were adopted. Social constructivism is a learning theory that Lev Vygotsky introduced in 1968. The theory of social constructivism captures the significance of collaborative learning settings that cater to a variety of learners, including individuals with disabilities. This perspective aligns with the views of Rannikmäe, Holbrook, and Soobard (2020), who assert that institutions should honor each other's distinctiveness and create an environment where people can develop their understanding of reality from their individual viewpoints. A key aspect of Vygotsky's social constructivism is the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which underscores the teacher's role as a facilitator in the learning process. The ZPD indicates that through the support of a teacher (facilitator), learners can achieve comprehension and mastery of skills that they would struggle to grasp independently. The teacher assists learners in building self-trust, confidence in their skills, and proving their capability to accomplish assigned tasks.

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) model clarifies the readiness to participate in inclusive teaching. It is essential for comprehending the elements that affect teachers' intentions and actions regarding inclusive education. As per the TPB, individual behavior is motivated by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control over actions. These theoretical frameworks provide a thorough insight into the interactions that contribute to the effective implementation of inclusive education. These theories point to the importance of teacher attitudes, social interactions, and the wider cultural environment in shaping practices related to inclusive education.

Literature Review

Inclusive Education in the classroom is not only about access to education by all learners but "belonging, nurturing and educating all learners regardless of their differences (Engelbrecht *et. al* 2015). Inclusive Education is not about accommodating learners ensuring that each learner's learning needs are catered for and any possible barriers removed so that all the learners can benefit from the outcomes of the lesson in the classroom (Yeboah, *et al.*, (2023). Teachers who are the fundamental implementers of any educational policy and first point of call-in achieving inclusivity have the core mandate to identify the learning needs of their learners and address them.

Teachers have had to adapt not only to align with the shift towards a more just and equitable education system due to past injustices, but they also must navigate new policies, curriculums, and a variety of classrooms that include learners with diverse disabilities that require accommodation (Hooijer *et al.*, 2021). However, they are usually faced with a herculean task of creating and implementing inclusivity in the classroom due to factors like fast paced curriculum, large classroom sizes etc. These factors prohibit teachers in identifying learning barriers and address them by using different strategies. Due to this, teachers adopt the "all fit all" approach in order to be able to finish the teaching plan and curriculum on time. The "all fit all" approach tends to sideline learners who are unable to catch up with the style of teaching and tend to deprive disadvantaged learners of their right to quality education.

Faced with this challenge, teachers end up resorting to giving out the same standardized lesson and activities, as prescribed in the curriculum which is grade appropriate and not learner appropriate as it should be with regards to those with learning disabilities. (Nkonyane & Hove 2014). Furthermore, Nkonyane & Hove (2014) believes that many teachers do possess neither the knowledge bases nor the skills to embrace the policies of inclusive education, hence they feel sacrificed when they are required to have children with learning disabilities in their classroom because they have to prepare for programmes and activities of learning for students with learning disabilities in their class when he/she still has to attend to the needs of those who are average and above average.

The implementation of policies has created diverse means for teachers and other stakeholders to use different strategies to achieve the goals of these policies. However, the implementation of the policies in the classroom is easier in theory than in practice. Loreman (2017) believes that implementation of inclusive education teaching and learning should be considered critically, as such teachers are to come up with learning and teaching activities that are inclusive and sensitive to learners' diversity.

Methodology

Research Context

The study was conducted in Cathcart High School in the Amathole West District in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. The school is located in a rural area with a population of about 800 learners with 40 qualified teachers. It has an average class size of 32.

Sample

Intentional sampling, also known as purposive sampling, was employed as a method for selecting samples. This sampling technique involves the strategic selection of specific elements from the population to serve as a representative sample. The sample size of the study was 8 teachers. 2 from the foundation phase (grade R – 3), 2 from the intermediate phase (grade 4 -6), 2 from the senior phase (grade 7-9) and 2 from the further education training phase (grade 10 -12). The participants in the study were chosen due to their easy accessibility and their existing knowledge of Inclusive Education, making them suitable representatives of the target population. Participants were identified with their initials for the sake of anonymity. (Mr. G, Ms. M, Mrs. W, Mrs. K, Miss. A, Ms. N, Mrs. Q, Ms. R).

Data Collection

Questionnaires were physically distributed to the participants of the study. After three days, the completed questionnaires were retrieved followed by a semi – structured interview to get a deeper insight of the questionnaires that have been answered.

Data Analysis

Thematic framework was used to examine the data in this study. Thematic analysis is a systematic approach for identifying themes present in the collected data. This strategy was implemented to pinpoint the themes evident within the gathered information. A common pattern from participant responses were recognized and categorized into four distinct themes.

Data Presentation and Interpretation

The thematic analysis of the data uncovered four key themes that shed light on how teachers recognize learners with special needs in their classrooms. Each theme emerged through thorough examination of the responses from participants in the questionnaire. The identified themes were: Observation of Learner Behaviors, Academic Performance and Assessment, Direct Interaction with Learners, and Physical and Environmental Indicators.

Observation of Learner Behaviors

This theme surfaced as a prevalent approach utilized by educators to recognize students with special needs, as noted by Mr. G, "The student leaned her neck to copy notes from another student rather than from the board... which raised my suspicion and led me to interview her."; Mrs. K stated, "Observing daily while moving around the classroom is beneficial."; Ms. A mentioned, "I recognized the students by focusing on every detail within the classroom."; Ms. N remarked, "Observations helped me" the level of student's engagement and participation in

class was key." Teachers consistently watch learners' behaviors and actions in the classroom to detect indicators of special needs.

Academic Performance and Assessment

Utilizing a variety of assessment methods enables educators to accurately evaluate the academic abilities of students in the classroom. Since assessment and academic achievement are essential for the effective identification of learners with special needs, this was noted by Mr. G, Mrs. K, and Mrs. Q. This observation emphasizes the ways in which teachers adapt their lesson plans to promote inclusivity and guarantees that students with special needs receive extra resources to aid their learning.

Direct Interaction with Learners

Ms. A mentioned that "Every learner is unique so I ensure that I get to understand each of them by knowing their cultural background, hobbies and learning style and what makes them unique. In that way it is easier to trust which stimulates more learning". Likewise, Mrs. Q indicated that she **uses more one-on-one instructional time where she is able to understand the needs of learners and provide the necessary support. Teachers employed these strategies to identify learning obstacles in their students and implement effective support measures.**

Physical and Environmental Indicators

Adjustments are implemented in the classroom setting to accommodate various needs: Learners with hearing impairments are positioned at the front to assist them in observing the teacher's lips for improved comprehension. The learning atmosphere is varied to guarantee that every learner experiences a sense of inclusion. Chances are provided for learners to connect with each other, promoting an inclusive and culturally sensitive environment.

Discussion

Teaching and Learning confirm that teachers need to know the characteristics of various disabilities, difficulties and conditions, their impact on learning, and appropriate educational responses (Engelbrecht & Walton, 2022). This discussion combines research findings with theoretical viewpoints and contemporary literature to explore strategies to monitor the successful delivery of Inclusive Education in the classroom.

Participants point at the significance of monitoring student engagement, participation, and unusual behaviors to pinpoint learning obstacles. For example, observing a student depending on classmates for taking notes, as mentioned by Mr. G, aligns with the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which emphasizes the importance of recognizing various learning styles and adapting instruction accordingly. Research indicates that the observation of unusual behaviors by teachers, such as challenges with note-taking, plays a vital role in the early detection of learning obstacles (Hattie, 2019). This strategy aligns with Vygotsky's social constructivism, where interactions between teachers and students, along with environmental support, are essential for meeting individual needs.

Additionally, implementing a variety of assessment strategies (such as formative assessments, peer evaluations, and portfolios) promotes fair evaluation of students' capabilities. For instance, Mrs. Q's modification of lesson plans aligns with the UDL principle of offering diverse means of action and expression, enabling students to showcase their understanding through different formats. The application of ongoing, informal assessments minimizes bias and provides useful insights into learning gaps, especially for students with disabilities. While balancing standardized testing with personalized approaches can be demanding for educators, it enhances fairness for neurodiversity learners.

Furthermore, personalized interactions as an approach underscored by both Ms. A and Mrs. Q play a crucial role in cultivating trust among students and educators while also uncovering deeper, often underlying challenges to learning and engagement. This practice is closely aligned with the tenets of culturally responsive teaching, stressing the necessity of acknowledging and valuing the diverse backgrounds and varied learning styles of students. Research has shown that individualized interactions not only enhance a student's sense of self-efficacy but also serve as a valuable tool in identifying cultural and learning-related barriers that may hinder academic success (Ladson-Billings, 2020). Additionally, such personalized engagement is instrumental in promoting the social-emotional development of students, particularly those from marginalized communities, ensuring they receive the support needed to thrive both academically and personally.

Intentional modifications to the physical and environmental aspects of the classroom are crucial for meeting the diverse needs of all learners. These adaptations enhance resource accessibility and promote an atmosphere of environmental inclusivity. A thoughtfully designed classroom creates flexible seating arrangements that can accommodate various physical and sensory requirements. For instance, strategically positioning students with hearing impairments at the front of the classroom facilitates their ability to see the teacher's face and any visual aids, making it easier for them to read lips and access instructional materials. This thoughtful arrangement allows these students to remain engaged with the lesson and participate actively in discussions.

Moreover, additional modifications, such as providing different types of seating options like adjustable chairs can cater for students with varying preferences and needs. This variety helps to foster comfort and concentration in learning. Creating quiet areas with soft lighting and noise-canceling headphones can also support students with sensory sensitivities, allowing them a space to retreat when feeling overwhelmed. The overall design and arrangement of the classroom play a significant role in shaping educational outcomes. Conducive learning environment directly contributes to students' ability to access information, engage with peers, and feel a sense of belonging. This focus on inclusivity not only enhances academic performance but also promotes engagement and equity among all learners, ensuring that every student has the opportunity to thrive.

Implications of the Study

The findings of this study have significant implications for teaching practices related to the identification and monitoring of successful Inclusive Education in the classroom. The effectiveness of inclusive education strategies can be assessed through a blend of qualitative

and quantitative methods. Based on participants' interviews and contemporary literature, the study advocates for a comprehensive approach to effectively monitoring Inclusive Education in the classroom, focusing on three key areas namely: observation tools, progress monitoring, and feedback mechanisms.

Observation Tools

The systematic observation of learner behaviors, engagement, and participation is vital in the classroom. Proper observation in the classroom plays the role of diagnostic observation in detecting learning barriers. It fosters early intervention, enabling teachers to make instructional adjustments. Tools like checklists and engagement rubrics will allow educators to track atypical behaviors of students (e.g., avoidance of eye contact, inconsistent participation) without stigmatization.

Progress Monitoring

Consistent monitoring of both academic and social-emotional development is crucial for determining the effectiveness and sustainability of inclusive practices in educational settings. Engelbrecht and Walton (2022) stressed the importance of implementing dynamic assessment models, which prioritize individual growth and progress over static benchmarks. This approach ensures that evaluations are tailored to reflect each student's unique journey, fostering a more supportive and responsive learning environment. Focusing on individual progress, dynamic assessments can provide timely feedback and insights that help tailor instructional strategies to better support each learner's needs, fostering a more inclusive and responsive educational atmosphere.

Feedback Mechanisms

Engaging directly with learners provides rich qualitative insights into the concept of inclusivity in education. Through one-on-one interviews, student reflections, and culturally responsive dialogues, educators can uncover various barriers that may arise from students' cultural identities and individual learning preferences. These meaningful interactions not only foster an atmosphere of trust and self-confidence, particularly among marginalized students, but also equip teachers with a deeper understanding of their students' cultural backgrounds and personal interests. Educators can then tailor their evaluations to more effectively consider the socio-emotional dimensions of learning.

Limitations of Study

This study presents valuable insights into the strategies for effectively monitoring the implementation of Inclusive Education within the classroom setting. However, it is important to recognize several limitations that may affect the interpretation of the findings. While the study offers a rich and detailed descriptive data through a qualitative approach, this methodology inherently limits the ability to generalize the results beyond the specific case examined. The limitations of case study methodology are further emphasized by Adu and Miles (2023), who discuss how such a focused approach might restrict the applicability of the findings. Since the study centers on a singular school, the results may only capture a fraction of

the diverse experiences encountered by teachers and learners in other South African educational environments.

Consequently, any conclusions drawn from this study should be applied cautiously to different settings due to the issues related to representativeness and the limitations in generalizability. Despite these constraints, the findings open avenues for future research. Conducting similar studies in varied contexts with a greater number of schools and a larger pool of participants could enhance the understanding of Inclusive Education and its implementation across different educational settings. Such research could provide a more comprehensive overview and foster better strategies for meeting the needs of all learners.

Conclusion

This study examined strategies for monitoring the effective implementation of inclusive education in classrooms, particularly focusing on how teachers identify students with special needs and evaluate the success of inclusive practices. Approached through social constructivism and the Theory of Planned Behavior, the research points at the interaction between collaborative learning environments and systemic support in addressing gaps between policy and practice. Teachers are the drivers of the process whose attitudes, interactions, and innovative methodologies serve as vital conduits for identifying and addressing the diverse learning needs of students with disabilities. The findings reveal that creating an inclusive educational environment necessitates a multifaceted approach, incorporating systematic observation, varied assessment techniques, personalized interactions with students, and intentional modifications to the physical classroom layout.

Through meticulous monitoring of student behaviors and levels of engagement, teachers can pinpoint early indicators of learning challenges and adapt their instructional strategies in a timely manner. This proactive approach not only aligns with the core tenets of Universal Design for Learning but also reinforces the idea that inclusion is not a one-time initiative but rather an ongoing process. It requires educators to engage in continuous reflection and adaptation to foster an environment where every student can thrive. Inclusive education thrives when teachers deeply know their students and create an environment where everyone feels welcome. By employing a variety of engaging teaching methods tailored towards diverse learning styles and regularly assessing student progress, educators can illuminate the true potential of inclusive education.

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