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SUPPORT PROVIDED TO LECTURERS TOWARDS THE IMPLEMENTATION OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN ZIMBABWEAN TEACHERS' COLLEGES

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Abstract. This research explores the support provided to lecturers for implementing inclusive education in teacher colleges within Zimbabwe. Using an interpretive framework, a qualitative methodology, and a case study approach, 24 participants were selected, comprising three principals and 21 lecturers. The study builds on Sherman and Wood's classical liberal theory of equal opportunity, focusing on three colleges transitioning to inclusive education. Data collection methods included interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis, with thematic analysis employed for data interpretation. The findings reveal inadequate support for lecturers, compounded by non-inclusive facilities and a struggling national economy that fails to provide essential teaching resources. The Ministry of Education was identified as offering insufficient assistance in implementing inclusive curricula, leaving lecturers to face significant challenges such as a lack of teaching materials. The study recommends the provision of assistive devices and customized learning resources to enhance inclusive education in teachers' colleges. Furthermore, it highlights the need for additional research to identify effective strategies for implementing inclusive education. These findings emphasize the urgent requirement for systemic improvements to support lecturers and foster equitable educational opportunities.

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has emerged as a global priority, yet many higher education institutions face challenges in fully implementing it. Lecturers are pivotal in this process but often lack the necessary support and resources. Zimbabwe lacks explicit legislation or policy on inclusive education, although research indicates that existing policies align with its principles. This study examines the support provided to lecturers in Zimbabwean teacher training colleges for implementing inclusive education. Since the 1980s, Zimbabwe has integrated children with disabilities into regular education settings Samkange (2013). Inclusive education's contribution to socioeconomic development has made it a global focus (Shaukat, 2023). However, limited attention is given to educator training in this area (Kurth et al., 2020). Other vulnerabilities, such as those faced by students from low-income families, remote rural areas, or those affected by HIV/AIDS, are often overlooked (Tuan Sek & Hui Min, 2024). Zimbabwe's inclusion-related policies include the Zimbabwe Education Act

(1996), which introduced free and compulsory education, and the Disabled Persons Act (1996), addressing rights in various sectors, including education (Mutepfa et al., 2007). Additional guidelines, such as the Secretary's Circulars and the Director's Circulars, aim to support inclusion (Chipenda & Cochrane, 2024). Despite these efforts, in-service training for inclusive teaching remains inadequate (Grimes et al., 2023), with little focus on college lecturers.

This study explored the support available to lecturers and student teachers for implementing inclusive education in teacher-training colleges. Recent findings highlight challenges such as a lack of policies, resources, inclusive teaching strategies, and counselling expertise, alongside negative attitudes among lecturers (Chitiyo et al., 2024). Effective implementation of inclusive education requires robust legislation, policy development, and funding (Hardy & Woodcock, 2023). According to the Social and Economic Rationale of Inclusive Education (2022), tailored strategies must address specific college and classroom contexts. Adequate financial resources are also essential for inclusive education programs. Challenges similar to those in Zimbabwe are observed in other contexts, such as China, where teachers report insufficient support in collaboration, materials, administration, and infrastructure (Byatt et al., 2024).

Saloviita (2020) highlights inclusive education as defined by the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), where all children, including those with severe disabilities, access regular classrooms with adequate support. However, studies reveal that implementation can be stressful due to the absence of formal support structures (Nel et al., 2016 & Citrawan et al., 2024). Zimbabwean colleges face similar barriers, including lecturers' attitudes, professional competence, and a lack of special education certification systems (Magumise, 2020). Various studies identify policy gaps, resource shortages, and curriculum issues that hinder inclusive education (Diachenko et al., 2024; Erni & Dewi, 2024). These challenges underscore the need for optimistic lecturers who support inclusion (Addy et al., 2023). Developing high-quality inclusive instruction requires relevant professional development opportunities (Curtis, 2024). Research suggests misconceptions about inclusive education persist, with many focusing solely on disabilities while ignoring other marginalized groups (Shutaleva et al., 2023; UNESCO, 2009; Ji et al., 2024; Öztemur, 2024).

UNESCO's International Conference on Education prioritized inclusive education, emphasizing systemic support for teachers (Grimes et al., 2023). However, challenges in Africa, including negative attitudes, insufficient training, and poor coordination, hinder progress (Mwangi, 2024). This article contextualizes the state of inclusion in Zimbabwean teacher colleges and explores how higher education supports inclusive education within the classical liberal theory of equal opportunities framework. Inclusive education spans political, social, economic, cultural, and educational dimensions (Berman-Bieler et al., 2023; Olusanya et al., 2023). It aims to integrate individuals with disabilities into mainstream education while eliminating exclusionary practices. UNICEF defines it as ensuring real learning opportunities for all, including marginalized groups (Olusanya et al., 2023). This study evaluates Zimbabwe's support structures using the classical liberal theory to recommend sustainable systems for inclusive education implementation.

Classical Liberal Theory of Equal Opportunities. Sherman and Wood's classical liberal theory (1992), cited in Mbua (n.d.), frames education as a fundamental right for all individuals. This theory emphasizes students' inherent dignity, autonomy, and potential contributions to

society. It advocates for dismantling barriers within educational systems caused by socioeconomic, cultural, geographical, or institutional factors (Xie et al., 2023). Within this framework, inclusive education prioritizes integrating students with disabilities into mainstream classrooms alongside their peers (Mwangi, 2024).

The classical liberal theory underscores the principle that "disability is not inability" and emphasizes the need for collaborative efforts among stakeholders to address key challenges. These include curriculum reform, resource development, and creating an enabling environment for inclusive education (Resch & Schrittesser, 2023). Globally, the transition to inclusive education remains fraught with challenges as segregated educational systems persist (Shutaleva et al., 2023). In Zimbabwe, this transition is further hindered by inadequate support structures, insufficient training, and a lack of resources for lecturers and trainee teachers. These deficits limit the effective implementation of inclusive practices (Widana et al., 2023). This study explores the support mechanisms, challenges, and the disconnect between theoretical frameworks and their practical application in Zimbabwean teachers' colleges. By contextualizing these findings within the classical liberal theory of equal opportunities, the study aims to provide insights into fostering a more inclusive and equitable educational system.

METHOD
This study explored the support provided to lecturers and student teachers during implementing inclusive education in teachers' colleges in Zimbabwe. A qualitative approach allowed the researcher to understand events and individuals in their natural state (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2017). This approach aligns with interpretivist principles, emphasizing comprehensively understanding contexts (Cao Thanh & Thi Le Thanh, 2015). The study employed purposive sampling, selecting 24 participants, including three principals and 21 lecturers from three colleges implementing inclusive education. Lecturers were organized into three focus groups (A, B, and C) based on their roles. Data collection involved interviews with principals, documentary analysis, and focus group discussions with lecturers.

Data Analysis
Data analysis commenced with a thorough examination of the collected information. This involved arranging focus groups, conducting face-to-face interviews, and document analysis. Two researchers meticulously arranged and categorized the transcribed data, utilizing respondents' verbatim comments with minor modifications for clarity. Measures such as interview reflection, triangulation, and member checks were employed to ensure data reliability. Researchers engaged deeply with the data, repeatedly reading transcripts to gain a nuanced understanding (Alam & Asmawi, 2024a, 2024b; Cao Thanh & Thi Le Thanh, 2015). Initial themes and patterns were identified through coding, then grouped into categories to reveal broader themes. The study utilized qualitative content analysis, chosen for its ability to reveal patterns and themes within the data. This approach facilitated a comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences, making it an ideal methodology for exploring complex challenges (Alam & Asmawi, 2024b; Cao Thanh & Thi Le Thanh, 2015).

Ethical Considerations
The Ethics Review Committee approved this study. All participants provided written informed consent before data collection. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured, and data was stored securely with restricted access. Pseudonyms replaced names and identifying information, and data was anonymized and aggregated to prevent individual identification.

Six themes related to support for lecturers and student teachers during inclusive education implementation were identified: (a) promoting equal opportunity among students; (b) collaborations among lecturers; (c) strategies used to support inclusive education implementation; (d) lecturer training; (e) material, economic, social, political, and moral support; and (f) college environment and accessibility.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the study's findings, organized thematically to reflect critical areas identified through data analysis. Each theme highlights significant aspects of inclusive education within teachers' colleges, offering insights into challenges and opportunities.

Equal Opportunity for Students

The study emphasizes the importance of equal opportunity in education, guided by Sherman and Wood's classical liberal theory 1992, cited in Mwangi, (2024). This aligns with the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Shaukat, 2023), advocating inclusive education as a fundamental human right. Participants stressed non-discrimination, emphasizing equal treatment for all students. Supporting literature corroborates these perspectives, affirming that inclusive education promotes equal participation and institutional reform (Mwangi, 2024; Öztemur, 2024).

Strategies for Implementing Inclusive Education

The findings indicate a need for structured institutional strategies to support inclusive education. Participants suggested measures such as orientation sessions and mentorship programs (Halawa et al., 2024; Rahmi et al., 2024a). Effective strategies include curriculum reform, practicum focus, and human resource enhancement (Rahmi et al., 2024b). Institutional capacity building through workshops, training sessions, and structured programs is necessary. Participants agreed that the government must introduce policies, strategies, processes, and actions that can ensure the success of the students and a series of transformations (Deng & Poon-McBrayer, 2012), both at the institutional level and in the classroom practices, to move towards a more inclusive institution. Strategies may include special orientation sessions, and tutorials (e.g., assigning a student in a higher year or an instructor as a counsellor or having reference persons or groups related to the disability among the faculty) (Messiou, 2017).

The lecturers and principals' responses on the strategies used in the implementation of inclusive education were as follows: '*There are no specific strategies used or stipulated; we use the knowledge we attained from colleges during training. Hopefully, there is a need for inclusive education training (FC).* In support of the above, P2 said: '*This programme was just imposed by higher education, but our teachers have no knowledge of how to implement inclusive education.*' FC2 added: '*There are no strategies laid on the ground for them to follow or use.*' The participants believed that the lecturers and the students did not know enough about implementing inclusive education. The lecturer, FB6, said, '*College lecturer, principal, and the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education (MOHTED) are supposed to have reviews of the inclusive education programs every year to evaluate the program and to improve on their weaknesses.*' FC5 maintained that '*the recommendations may also be useful during workshops and training programs.*' The literature reviewed was in line with the respondents' views that there should be strategies to include special orientation sessions, assigning a student in a higher year or an instructor as a counsellor, or having reference persons or groups related to the disability among the faculty (Genova, 2015; Moriña, 2017; Xie et al., 2023; Xue et al., 2023). The article argues that there is limited research on the support given to teachers'

college lecturers and student teachers (Knowles, 2013; Deng & Poon-McBrayer, 2012; Mafa, 2012). In addition, the literature suggests strategies that include curriculum reform, emphasising practicum more than theories, and human resource development, empowering institutional heads to implement inclusion and provide resources (Chhetrie et al., 2023.). Thus, this article explores strategies and support given to lecturers and students during the implementation of inclusive education.

Lecturer Capacity Building
A recurring theme is the insufficient support for lecturers in implementing inclusive education. Participants emphasized professional development, suggesting workshops on inclusive education curricula (Udych in Pedagogy et al., 2024). Addressing barriers such as inadequate policies and resource constraints is essential for empowering lecturers (Mokaleng & Möwes, 2020). Most participants revealed that the support given to college lecturers was inadequate. The participants' responses in this study revealed that the lecturers needed support from higher and tertiary education and government through training, workshops, and reviews of the programmes (Samkange, 2013).

FCA3 suggested that 'colleges must hold some workshops, for example, to discuss the issue of the new curriculum on research about inclusive education.' FC4 stipulated that at college, no adequate workshops are being held to implement inclusive strategies used.' A lecturer, FB1, observed that 'lecturers should be well equipped with adequate skills.' Also, a principal concurred, ' I strongly feel that it is essential that lecturers must be given guiding principles and have positive attitudes towards inclusive education.' Another lecturer, FA7, responded that: *'The colleges must encourage lecturers to go for staff development workshops to be updated with new knowledge and skills on dealing with learners with disabilities and the educational changes since we are in a dynamic world.'* P3 said, *'There are many educational changes, such as introducing the new curriculum.'* Another lecturer, FB2, complained, *'As lecturers, we are not trained on teaching inclusive classes.'*

Studies have established that faculty members should be sensitised, informed and trained to carry out inclusive pedagogy and universal designs for learning (Pliner & Johnson, 2004; Spratt & Florian, 2015). The study's findings concur with Mokaleng and Möwes (2020), who indicate that implementing inclusive education has been hindered by inappropriate policy development, teacher attitudes, teacher training, inadequate support and resources, and curriculum issues. Thus, the literature and the research findings recommend that lecturers and students undergo training and awareness on implementing inclusive education in teachers' colleges.

Collaboration Among Lecturers and Students
The findings reveal limited collaboration between lecturers and external stakeholders. Participants highlighted the need for engagement with inclusive education experts and structured opportunities for collaboration (Negash & Gasa, 2022). The participants were asked whether they consulted or collaborated with professionals or other stakeholders. A principal reported that they had not started consulting or collaborating with professionals. However, the Ministry of Higher Education promised to send inclusive education experts and professionals. Furthermore, FC4 reported that 'there was no specialist to assist with learners with disability.' This is in line with the study's findings, which indicated no clear guidelines to assist disadvantaged children in terms of disability and accessibility (Samkange, 2013; Xie et al., 2023). Thus, the lecturer and the students did not collaborate with specialists or experts. Teachers in China have not received adequate support regarding collaboration

with colleagues, teaching and learning materials, administration, infrastructure, and finance. The respondents also raised the point that only the principals and heads of departments could collaborate with stakeholders and experts at certain intervals. This coincides with Negash and Gasa (2022) & Sumandya et al. (2023), who note the nonexistence of professional collaborations with others, possibly due to lecturers and students lacking training.

Support Systems
Participants identified a pressing need for comprehensive support systems encompassing financial, material, moral, and social dimensions. Barriers such as insufficient funding and inadequate infrastructure were reported (Diachenko et al., 2024; Mokaleng & Möwes, 2020; Shaukat, 2023). The findings of the study are in line with the literature, which argues that most teachers' colleges have inadequate resources, personnel preparation, and support at the local level (Mokaleng & Möwes, 2020; Genova, 2015; Majoko, 2023; Mafa, 2012). Considering Merrigan and Senior (2023) and Slee (2011), the participants recommended the provision of incentives, improving lecturers' living conditions, increasing salaries, and providing better living quarters to motivate them to do their work. In this way, the college will support the implementation of inclusive education.

Accessibility of the College Environment
Accessibility emerged as a critical challenge, particularly for students with disabilities. Participants noted the lack of wheelchair-friendly facilities and resources (Ji et al., 2024; Xue et al., 2023). Colleges need to improve their accessibility, and lecturers need to know how to deal with disabled students of different natures. Also, parents with disabled children should empower their children by sending them to college. The literature reviewed shows that many countries have made institutions more accessible and user-friendly to learners with disabilities and have become more committed to inclusion (Jacklin et al., 2007, cited in Moriña, 2017). The colleges were initially not meant for inclusive education. Thus, they need to be made user-friendly for learners with disabilities. However, when asked about this, the principals and lecturers pointed out that very little has been done to make the colleges user-friendly due to financial constraints and a lack of support from the Ministry.

Discussion of Research Findings
The study's findings revealed that the colleges' support given to the lecturers was limited (Genova, 2015; Moriña, 2017; Xie et al., 2023; Xue, 2023). Support that can be offered to inclusive education lecturers to promote effective implementation of inclusive education includes providing material resources in colleges; holding workshops regularly for lecturers and principals; giving updates to all stakeholders; supervising lecturers; reviewing inclusive education programmes; giving lecturers incentives for motivation, orientation, induction and capacity building; and improving the college environment and accessibility (Negash & Gasa, 2022). The literature reviewed emphasises that the colleges must provide moral, material, social, academic, career and psychosocial support (Mokaleng & Möwes, 2020; Genova, 2015; Majoko, 2019; Mafa, 2012). Xue (2023) suggests that the induction of lecturers and students in inclusive education, as a form of support, will allow students to access a network of support within and beyond the implementation process. The teacher education department should equip lecturers and students with inclusive education implementation strategies and systems.

CONCLUSION

This study concluded that teachers' colleges face significant challenges in implementing inclusive education due to insufficient facilities for physically challenged students and a lack of understanding among lecturers and student teachers. Key barriers include discrimination, financial constraints, inadequate resources, limited parental awareness, and insufficient knowledge among lecturers. Although some support, such as material, emotional, and moral assistance, is occasionally provided, it remains inadequate to implement inclusive education effectively. To address these challenges, the study recommends enhancing support systems by providing material resources, conducting workshops for all stakeholders, offering regular updates and supervision, reviewing inclusive education programs, and introducing incentives to motivate educators. Structured orientation and induction for student teachers and capacity-building initiatives for mentors are also essential. Furthermore, future research should explore the effectiveness of mentorship programs in inclusive education, assess the role of community engagement in supporting inclusivity, and investigate the impact of policy reforms on reducing barriers to inclusive education. A firm, comprehensive policy framework on inclusive education is critical to ensuring sustainable progress in fostering inclusivity within teachers' colleges.

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