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Management practice applied in the provision of special education: a case of selected schools in central province, Zambia

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Abstract

This paper is an extract of one of the research questions from an on-going PhD study in Management Practices in the provision of quality Special Education in selected Districts of the Central Province of Zambia. The study sought to establish whether there was quality in the provision of special education due to the management practices applied in the selected schools in central province of Zambia. Management Practices that exist include; exclusion, segregation and integration. The study found that what was being practiced in the selected schools of Central Province was integration. The idea of integration in special education comes in three stages; the first stage is mainstreaming followed by inclusion and the final stage is full inclusion (US Department of Education, 2004). Furthermore it was found that there was poor quality of special education provided in the selected schools due to a lot of factors, some of which were; negative attitudes by teachers and education managers, inadequate teaching and learning resources, low staffing levels and the misunderstanding of the concept of Special Education. On basis of the study findings, it was recommended that the Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early Education should adopt the systems and contingency approaches that work side by side with Inclusive Education.

Keywords: special education, management practices, mainstreaming, inclusive education, integration

Introduction

Background to the study

Management practices applied in the provision of special education have become a topical issue attracting research. Management Practices that exist include; exclusion, segregation and integration. Each of these practices has its weaknesses and strengths when applied in the provision of education. What remained unclear was the type of management practice applied in the provision of special education and its influence on the quality of education provided. This became the basis for this study.

One of the main purposes of the school system is to provide quality education to all learners. As rightly stated by the Ministry of Education (2006), quality education is evidenced by learners being able to demonstrate analytic skills, ability to form and transform concepts, enabling them to use knowledge as well to acquire it, stimulating them to identify and solve problems, equipping them to express their beliefs intelligibly, empowering them to develop and live by a personally held set of values. Ministry of Education (2007) also states that quality education can be perceived as the extent to which educational outcomes are relevant to societal expectations such as productivity and improved ways of doing things at individual and societal level. As a way of achieving quality education including special education Zambia's education system has undergone several education reforms.

As regards the development of Special Education in Zambia, it started with the effort of the missionaries and philanthropic organizations. The aim of the missionaries was to teach literacy and numeracy skills for evangelism purposes (Snelson, 1980). People with visual impairments, hearing impairments and intellectual impairments were the target group at the time and were taught in segregated settings in special schools. Thus the management practice applied at the time was segregation. The provision of special education before 1971 lacked adequate funding from government. In addition, there were no specialized teachers to meet the ever growing demand of learners with special educational needs in various schools country wide.

Special education has not developed as the government would wish. Little effort was made by the government to build new special schools after it took over in 1971 but continued using the already existing infrastructure. This made it difficult for children with special education needs

to access special education in limited special schools. Therefore children attended school in integrated settings near their homes without specialized teachers and equipment. Thus the management practice at the time was integration. This resulted in parents and guardians opting to keep their children in their homes because the school system was no longer responsive to the children's needs. This is equally the situation today where schools have inadequate trained human resources and material resources. The infrastructure was not special education needs friendly but the system wanted to teach all learners in the same settings. Above all the management practices adopted such as integration did not respond positively to learner needs. This scenario left many children with special educational needs out of school or they were in school but ignored. This adversely affected the learning achievements at lower, middle and upper primary levels of education. Furthermore integration at the early childhood education level was unnoticeable. This was as a result of lack of assessment facilities within reach.

Between 1997 and 2015 policy makers tried to come up with an inclusive policy in order to provide quality special education. Countries all over the World, Zambia inclusive, sought to provide for children with special educational needs so that in turn they would contribute to the alleviation of poverty and illiteracy. Unfortunately inclusion was misunderstood to mean mainstreaming and there were no matching resources to meet the policy goals. It is from this background that examining the management practice applied in providing quality special education is worthwhile.

Statement of the problem

Over the years several management practices such as exclusion, segregation and integration exist. What is not known is the management practice applied in the provision of special education in selected schools in Central Province of Zambia.

Purpose of the study

The study sought to examine the management practices applied in the provision of Special Education in selected schools in Central province of Zambia.

Objective

The objective of the study was to examine the management practices applied in the provision of Special Education in selected schools in Central province of Zambia.

Research question

The study sought to answer the question; what management practices were applied in the provision of Special Education in selected schools in Central province of Zambia?

Significance of the study

At the time when it is not clear what management practices were applied in schools and whether such a practice provides quality Special Education, a study that can fill up this knowledge gap is significant.

Literature Review

Kern and Richards (2004) studied public schools in the United States of America and concluded that public schools were a common ground for tolerance and mutual respect. In such a setting, children are part of a plural community that more readily leads itself to fostering their autonomy, whether or not they have disabilities.

The Government of India, (2002) National Sample Survey Organization, purported that India has been implementing integrated education for the learners with disabilities since 1974 as a central sponsored scheme. Integrated management practice in the provision of education for the learners with disabilities has become an important component of education projects such as District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) and Sarvaskha Sikha Abhyan (SSA) meaning Movement for Education For All. The objectives were to integrate children with physical and intellectual disabilities in the general community as equal partners, to prepare them for normal growth and to enable them to face life with courage and confidence.

In South Africa all learners regardless of their disabilities are entitled to free public education. In 1975 an Education for All Handicapped Children Act was passed to provide free education and appropriate services to learners with disabilities and furthermore in Article 2 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, (United Nations, 1989), it was also indicated that no child should be discriminated against and every child has the right to receive an education (Mukhopadtyay, 2010).

In Zambia the Ministry of Education (1996) states that, every individual has an equal right to educational opportunity. Furthermore, the policy on education reveals that only a small percentage of children with physical and intellectual disabilities were catered for in schools. This is due to lack of sufficient educational provision for the profoundly impaired. Another reason was that systems for identifying and contacting children with Special Needs were not well developed. Furthermore family attitudes were not always favourable. Mandyata (2002) observed similar issues in Kasama district of Zambia where children with special educational needs were left out in the education system due to inadequate human and material resources.

The Education Act, Republic of Zambia (2011) postulates that, learners with special needs shall be integrated in the main stream of education. Where need is established learners with special needs may be transferred from the inclusive setting to special education institutions and vice versa. The government Manifesto - Patriotic Front Manifesto (2011-2016) states that the government will "promote inclusive education by integrating children with mild to moderate learning disabilities in the mainstream schools and offer special education to those who cannot be integrated", (P.9).

From the literature it is clear that integration as a management practice was applied in many regions of the world. Initially children with Special Needs were excluded and placed in discriminatory settings. With the Convention on the Rights of the child, it was realized that children should be socially integrated through education. This Convention affects Children with Special Needs too. The Zambian government also developed policies in line with integration. Since 1977 the policies spelt out integration as a management practice in the education of children with Special Needs. The 1966 Education Act did not give a legal backing to integration but a lot of developments took place in special education provision. From the segregated settings children were integrated. It started with mainstreaming and later inclusion was piloted. Special education units were closed and children were referred into the mainstream. Due to inadequate matching resources, low staffing levels, negative attitudes and the misunderstanding of the concept enrolments started fluctuating for children with special needs as can be evidenced in the table below;

Table 1: Enrolment Numbers of Learners with Disabilities

YEAR		2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Primary school	Male	84 141	89 291	88 420	110273	102 071	90 494	55 004	55 528
	Female	76 903	80 793	80 446	91 842	96 323	84 867	51 855	51 743
	Total	161 044	170 084	168 866	202 115	198 394	175 361	106 859	107 271
Secondary school	Male	3 228	2 687	1 826	1 826	1 880	2 351	146	396
	Female	3 309	2 558	1 906	1 906	2 417	2 561	215	482
	Total	6 537	5 245	3 732	3 732	4 297	4 912	361	878

Source: Zambia Education Statistical Bulletin, (2013)

Many children were sent back to Special schools (segregation), Special Education Units and others dropped out of school as Ndhlovu (2008) observed. He reported that in most schools learners with Special Needs were excluded from accessing education. Such exclusion retards the progress in meeting the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. Ndhlovu (2008) further reports that achieving universal primary education may not be realized especially that 98% (588 million) of the 600 million children with disabilities worldwide were excluded from school. Moberg and Kasonde (2001) ascertained that 40% of children with Special Needs in Western and North Western Provinces of Zambia could not continue with school due to lack of transport to school, food, uniforms. Due to lack of a well-defined integration system children with special needs were placed in the mainstream of education without assessment and the teaching did not respond to their needs. This defeated the idea of integration to the extent that children were instead labelled as having special educational needs.

Similarly Zindi (1997) studied special education in Zambia and reported that it was provided through the following management practices; exclusion, segregation and integration. Since the 1920s the separate system for special education has been enlarged and refined (Pijl et al, 1997). The separate system used to be seen as an expression of the care for pupils with special educational needs. However, this view of special education has gradually been changing. According to Pijl et al (1997) knowledge, expertise and facilities were still of importance to the education of pupils with special needs, but the segregation of these pupils was now perceived as unacceptable. The prevailing view is that they should be educated together with their peers in regular education setting. The consequence is that regular and special education as separate systems disappear and are replaced by a single system that includes a wider range of pupils. In principle, in such a practice all pupils attend the same school. This is what has failed to yield positive results because the people practicing it do not understand the concepts involved. Children were just dumped in the integrated class without much support. The curriculum was examination driven and for learners with special education needs, little could be achieved if they were rushed through. In most cases examination results were poor.

In summary, despite many studies on the provision of special education, there still remains knowledge gap as to what management practice was applied in Special Education schools and whether such practices assure provision of quality education.

Methodology

The methodology that was adopted by this study borrows heavily from the epistemology paradigm. Thus, the study was qualitative in its methodology.

Research Design

A descriptive survey design was chosen as the method of research, considering that this was largely a qualitative study. Just as (Chifwepa, 2006) reports, a descriptive survey helped to evaluate, analyse, interpret and describe the facts, situations and opinions of participants towards the management practices applied in the study sites and whether there was quality education provided.

Sample size

The sample included three Education Officers, three Standards Officers, one curriculum specialist, two examinations specialist, three District Education Board Secretaries, twenty eight teachers and fourteen Head teachers. Random sampling procedure was used to select the education officers and education standard officers. Purposive sampling procedure was used to select the curriculum specialist, examinations officer, District Education Board Secretaries, teachers and head teachers. These participants were the only ones with experience and knowledge about management practices applied in the schools. The teachers were the only ones teaching in the special education units making them suitable to provide the desired data for the study.

Research Instruments

Semi- structured questionnaires, interview schedules and Focus Group discussion schedules were used as research instruments. Questionnaires were used on teachers as they could carry same questions for all the teachers in the study. Interview guides were used to collect data from the education officers, examinations specialist, District Board Secretaries and head teachers in order to have in-depth understanding of the topic. Focussed group discussion was conducted with eight teachers to understand their opinions on whether the quality in the education they provided in the schools.

Data Analysis

The data collected were qualitatively analysed using thematic analysis.

Findings

This study sought to examine the management practices applied in the provision of special education in schools. The standards officers indicated that management practiced was integration. In addition, there were more weaknesses than strengths in the provision of special education in the Central Province and in the three sampled Districts in particular.

From the examinations specialist it was found that the Examinations Council of Zambia had taken into consideration learners with special needs by adapting examinations to meet their needs. Several matters of accessibility have been reflected in the administration and management of examinations in Zambia.

From the curriculum point of view the aims of Special Education provision were well articulated as reflected in the

policy document of 1996. Learners with Special Needs were integrated in the education system. The only reservation was the problem of implementation. It was not efficiently and effectively done.

The District Education Board Secretaries in the sampled districts pointed out that the children with special needs were taught in special education units and in what we call inclusive settings. It was unfortunate that in all inclusive settings there were no special education teachers. One of them said,

“it was sad that very little was known about Special Education and to us Special Education is Special Education but these issues of inclusion are not well understood as a result we refer children with special educational needs to the ordinary classes for integration. Integration is easy to understand but it should be accompanied with Special Education teachers”.

Another District Education Board Secretary said, Special Education in the three districts was provided in the following;

- (i) Special Education Units in Schools
- (ii) Special Schools

Despite being introduced to the inclusive education programme the Districts still understood the practice as meaning mainstreaming or integration. Each district had special education units and only one of the units had a Special Community School. Concerning quality, the District Education Board Secretaries pointed out that quality of education was compromised as some teachers did not know sign language and braille as a result had difficulties to teach the learners with hearing and visual impairments.

An analysis of the management practice of mainstreaming was that it worked with mild/moderate impairments. Children with severe impairments needed to be placed in special education units located within schools. However, the children in the special units and those in main stream schools were not assessed. The table below provides details about the prevailing situation in the mainstream classes.

Table 2: Situation in special education units and mainstream classes

Special Education Units	Main Stream Classes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specialized teaching • Small classes • Poor infrastructure • Long pupil-teacher contact time • Inadequate teaching/learning resources • Inadequate funding • Poor attendance by learners • friendly curriculum • Continuous Assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No specialized teaching • Crowded classes • Good infrastructure • Short pupil-teacher contact time • Inadequate teaching/Learning resources • Inadequate funding • Good attendance by learners • Over loaded curriculum • Examination oriented teaching

It was found out that the District Education Board Secretaries depended on the Education Standards Officers to interpret the policy on Special Education. These Education Standards Officers – Special Education were not in all districts. In Kabwe and Mumbwa for example they were not there. The government’s establishment was that one Standards Officer operated in two Districts. To this effect, one District Education Board Secretary said,

“The absence of the Education Standards Officer – Special Education puts the District on a disadvantage in the interpretation of the special education policy. Many Units were closed and many children with special needs were out of school”

Concerning administration and management of special education, it pointed out it was still a new phenomenon in the education system. To this effect, one of the District Education Board Secretary said,

“Special Education organization and management was difficult due to lack of information and a general lack of commitment by those in the administration of the special education programme.”

Fourteen Head teachers were targeted in the sample. These were from the schools which had Special Education Units. They said including learners with disabilities in the mainstream compromised quality of education provided to them. It was because there were no qualified teachers of special education in many schools. In addition, not much attention was given to learners with special educational needs. One of the head teachers reported that there was a challenge in mainstreaming learners with disabilities. Even the teachers ask head teachers why learners with special educational needs were integrated. He added, we take time to explain that it was government policy. As a result of these challenges, there was little done to meet the needs of learners with special needs.

One of the teachers’ focussed groups commented, “Inclusion has not assisted learners with special needs adequately because there is no staff to teach them adequately. For example, the learners with hearing impairments in the mainstream were left unattended to. Concerning learners with visual impairment, the infrastructure in the schools practicing inclusion was not user friendly. In addition, the curriculum was not modified. As a result, it is even difficult to say there is quality education provided to these learners.”

DISCUSSION

In Lesotho, Mariga and Phachaka (1993) revealed that children with special educational needs in the ordinary school had no extra help and they ultimately fell back and dropped out of school, a situation still common in Zambia and Central Province in particular. Special Education Units were closed and learners with special educational needs were placed in the mainstream of education. It was unfortunate that this placement was called inclusion. Allan (2008) states that Mary Warnock one of the architects of inclusion had changed her mind. The move towards inclusion was seen, to be a mistake which made many schools ungovernable. The education system in Zambia needed to reform if it was to practice inclusion. In principle what is practices in schools is inclusion but practically what was practiced was integration. Hergarty and Alur, (2011) argued that it all had to do with school reform. The reason special schools (segregation) had still been in existence is the fact that ordinary schools were not able to provide quality education to learners with special educational needs. Furthermore in 2011 out of the thirteen thousand (13,000) learners at the University of Zambia only two (2) were visually impaired (Education post, Saturday July, 19, 2011). Access to University education by learners with visual impairments was difficult due to inadequate facilities. Throughout the education system in Zambia, during examinations learners with special needs were given extra time but this extra time was not given during course work. They competed with the rest of the class to beat time in order to finish the syllabi before examinations. This arrangement was not in line with special education ethos.

Conclusion

The study revealed that special education in the Central Province was being offered through Special Schools, Special

Education Units and Mainstream classes. Mainstreaming was the lowest stage of integration. Inclusive Education Programme (INPRO) was misunderstood to mean Mainstreaming. The policy on education demands that schools practice inclusion but the system had not changed towards that. Therefore, there was total confusion in the management practices applied to provide special education. This was so because the introduction of inclusive education did not go with the needed facilities and resources. Due to inadequate qualified teachers and appropriate learning materials, quality special education was not realized. It was only in Special Schools and Special Education Units that quality education was partially attained.

Recommendation

1. The Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early Education should adopt the systems and contingency approaches that work side by side with inclusive schooling.
2. All the Directorates and line Ministries should collaborate for the betterment of learners with disabilities.

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