Swazi Teachers' Challenges inIncluding Learners withDyslexia inMainstream Classrooms

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Abstract: *The inclusion of all learners within the regular classroom has brought about a plethora of challenges for teachers. The purpose of this study was to explore the challenges faced by mainstream primary school teachers when including learners with dyslexia. The problem was that teachers seemed to struggle to understand learners who failed to reach language proficiency. The study used qualitative research methods; where a phenomenological design was used to conceptualize the essence of the teachers' challenges. Participants were 12 (n = 12) purposively sampled English language teachers of dyslexic learners who met a pre-determined criteria. Data on the teachers' challenges were collected by individual interviews. Conventional content analysis was used to analyze the data. The data were thematically presented. The findings suggest that teachers experience a lot of challenges emanating from the lack of inclusive education training, knowledge and monetary support from the Swazi Government.*

Keywords: *dyslexia, inclusive education, learners, mainstream, teachers*

I. INTRODUCTION

Dyslexia is one of the most prevalent learning disabilities in the world (Statistics of children with special needs, 2013). With dyslexia being one of the most common disabilities, it is assumed that ordinary teachers are confronted with dyslexic learners on a regular basis. Studies have however shown that teachers face a lot of challenges including learners with dyslexia in mainstream classrooms (Gwerman-Jones & Burden, 2010; Moats &Foorman, 2003; Wadlington&Wadlington, 2005). In particular, these aforementioned studies have pointed out the need for teachers to be more knowledgeable on this learning disability.

There is a growing awareness among sectors of the teaching profession on the problems associated with specific learning difficulties. With the move towards inclusion in recent years, so has been the need for teachers to equip themselves with the necessary skills to help learners of varying educational needs in their classrooms. Crombie (2002) argues that while definitions may change over time from such words as integration to inclusion, there remains little doubt that learners with disabilities remain a challenge to their teachers. Mills (2013) seems to suggest that many teachers lack the necessary knowledge and skills to successfully teach diverse student populations in inclusive settings.

Washburn, Joshi and Bricks-Cantrell (2011) attribute inadequate preparation at the pre-service level as one of the factors that contribute to the general lack of understanding of basic language concepts amongst teachers. Kerr (2001) expresses the argument that the very term 'dyslexia' appears to instantly induce even the experienced teachers to a state of learned helplessness. Reid (2011) advances the view however, that such a term is useful for providing the basis for a framework within which teachers can operate and devise individual programs. With dyslexia being a reading disability, language is an important aspect to be considered next.

Reading and writing are some of the most crucial skills that learners are required to master if their education is to progress smoothly (Makondo, 2009). Nevertheless, teachers have been reported to have challenges helping learners achieve reading and writing proficiency (Cunningham, Perry, Stavonich&Stavonich, 2004). Teacher knowledge research of basic language constructs shows that teachers lack the understanding of various terms used in reading, phonemic knowledge, phoneme and morpheme- yet these are needed for effective instruction in reading (Shaywitz, 2003; Spear-Swerling&Brucker, 2002; Washburn, Joshi & Bricks-Cantrell, 2011).

With dyslexia being a disability that is localized in the phonological module of the brain, it is not enough for teachers to only be literate but they need an explicit understanding of the constructs related to English Language (Snow &Wongfillmore, 2000). Moats and Foorman (2003) seem to indicate that even though teachers are educated; they lack the essential knowledge of basic constructs and structure that is needed to help both beginning and struggling readers. Research evidence also suggests that teacher preparation programs are not providing pre-service teachers with efficient information about basic language constructs and other

components related to reading instruction (Carvalhais& Da Silva, 2010; Moats &Foorman, 2008; Washburn, Joshi & Brinks-Cantrell, 2010).

The study was aimed at investigating Swazi teachers' challenges when including learners with dyslexia in mainstream classrooms. The following research question guided the study; what challenges do mainstream teachers face when including learners with dyslexia in mainstream classrooms?

II.   METHOD

2.1   Research design

A phenomenological approach was utilized to investigate the teachers' challenges. Such a design fit in the study because it contributes to a deeper understanding of lived experiences by exposing taken-for granted assumptions (Sokolowksi, 2000). The approach allowed a chance to probe into the unique perspectives of Swazi teachers' experiences and challenges in mainstreaming dyslexic learners. An insightful understanding of these challenges in the manner in which teachers perceived them was sought.

2.2   Participants and setting

Participants were twelve (n=12) mainstream primary school English Language teachers of learners with dyslexia in the Manzini region of Swaziland. They were comprised of 11 females and 1 male. Stratified random sampling was used to select the schools where teachers were sought. They were from urban (n=4), semi-urban (n=4) and rural (n=4) schools in the region. Criterion purposive sampling was used to choose participants. Participants were included if they met the criteria of being English language teachers who had at least two years' experience teaching in an integrated class, they were currently teaching learners with dyslexia in primary school or they had experience teaching learners with dyslexia in a mainstream classroom. Teachers who showed interest to partake in the research were screened to determine eligibility prior to partaking in the study.

Table1.Demographic data of participants

Category	Frequency
Age group (years)	
22 - 25	2
30 - 40	6
41 - 49	1
50 - 58	3
Sex	
Male	1
Female	11
Teaching Experience (Years)	
32 - 38	3
9 - 14	2
2 - 6	7
Teacher Qualifications	
O' level Certificate	1
Primary Teachers' Certificate	3
Primary Teachers' Diploma	6
Bachelor of Arts in Humanities	1
Bachelor of Education + Honours	1
Inclusive education training	
Trained	1
Partially trained	5
Not trained	6
Total number of teachers	12

2.3   Procedure and data collection

This study used individual interviews as a data collection instrument. This type of interview served as a good instrument because it is rich in terms of depth and nuances. An unstructured interview guide was used. All twelve teachers partook in the interviews, which lasted for about 30-45 minutes. Interviews were held in the schools where teachers taught. A tape recorder was used to capture all the responses, notes were also taken. All interviews were personally facilitated by the investigator. To ensure that the research was credible, there was use of an iterative questioning strategy and peer examination of the data.

In line with ethical considerations, clearance to conduct research in schools was sought from the Ministry of Education. Additional permission was requested from the head teachers to conduct the research in the schools premises. Consent was also requested from the teachers to participate in the study. The purpose of the study was explained before asking teachers to voluntarily participate. Participants were given a consent form to sign, in which they agreed to be interviewed and have their verbatim statements quoted. There was assurance for confidentiality and anonymity which was enhanced by the use of pseudonyms. The schools in question, where the research was undertaken were also kept anonymous. Teachers were also notified from the onset that they were at liberty to drop off at any given point from the study and they were not going to be questioned about their withdrawal. Additionally, the withdrawal had no repercussions on their professional career.

III. DATA ANALYSIS

Data in the study was analysed through the use of conventional content analysis. Data were categorized into themes. Analysis followed six basic steps by Creswell (2003) Organising and preparing the data for analysis, reading through all the data, beginning a detailed analysis with a coding process, using the coding process to generate a description of the setting or people as well as categories or themes for analysis, advancing how the description and themes would be represented in the qualitative narrative and making an interpretation or meaning of data.

IV. RESULTS

4.1 Theme 1 Insufficient time

The challenge that all participants seemed to share was that of insufficient time. Participants pointed out that the hour allocated per day for teaching English was not enough to help dyslexic learners as well. They expressed a need to have more time allocated to the subject because the current time made them rush through the lesson and thus not give much attention to dyslexic learners who are most likely to lag behind. A female teacher with 3 years teaching experience said;

If I am to meet my objectives in the hour, I have to choose between helping struggling readers or the whole class and most times I choose keeping the pace of the whole class and thus leave behind dyslexic learners.
While teachers understood that dyslexics had to work at their own pace; they expressed challenges that, they couldn't help but worry that giving more attention to dyslexics would result in them not successfully completing the syllabus. Teachers are then forced to extend remedial time for dyslexics to after school or Saturdays, which also does not come without its challenges. For example, a teacher lamented;
It's like a mother that is forced to sacrifice one of her children. While I understand that my dyslexic learners need time, it becomes painful because situations are beyond my control. I can't give them what they need, the time of the school calendar cannot allow me to give them the due attention. (Female, 33 years old).

4.2 Theme 2 Big class sizes

Free Primary Education has seen the increase in student numbers in schools. As a result, there tends to be overcrowding in classrooms and such is deemed challenging for teachers when there are also dyslexic learners. In all the schools but one, the classes were overcrowded with learners ranging between the numbers of 50-68 per class. Teachers expressed challenges that it was impossible to give learners individual attention given such big numbers.
One teacher said;
The way they are packed is unbelievable. It's hard, you see I have been trained in inclusive education but even with my experience I just can't. (Female, 9 years teaching experience)
Another teacher commented;
With such big numbers it's almost impossible to give individual attention to struggling readers. There is not even much space to manoeuvre around the class. They are too many such that it takes time for me to notice their individual challenges. (Female, 32 years old).

4.3 Theme 3 Lack of parental involvement

An overarching issue that ran throughout the interviews was the lack of parental involvement in the education of dyslexic learners. Teachers felt unsupported by parents yet having dyslexic learners implies that both teachers and parents have to support each other and play a dual role if the learners are to perform well. With dyslexia learners will have challenges in their learning; teachers expected that parents or caregivers would be hands on in the education of their children. This ran contrary to their expectations as teachers highlighted a lot of parental ignorance in the education of dyslexic learners. Participants expressed concerns that they are forced to 'adopt' the dyslexic children

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This was evident in the following statement;
Sisilanakeuyatetfulautetfwesebataliabayingeni (parents don't care; you are on your own as a teacher).
This is whyI'mevenforcedtostaybehindandhelpgivetheselearnersremedialwork.
Bayintamaneyakhonjeunguthishelalabantfwanalaba (dyslexic learners are your sole responsibility as a teacher). (Female, 57 years old)

4.4 Theme 4 Lack of support
Teachers also expressed challenges that the government had merely legislated inclusive education in the country but little had been done to help them understand in practice how to include all learners. They also had concern with the poor reading material that the government supplied. This material was seen to be shallow and not much help to dyslexic learners. Additionally, not only was this material shallow but some schools complained about inadequate reading material such that learners were forced to share in class and alternate taking books home if given homework.

For instance it was said;
Our government does not provide enough reading material and as a teacher you have to make learners share. Teaching becomes impossible, learning becomes very difficult. (Female, 9 years teaching experience).

Another teacher commented;
Using NCC books is a challenge because they are not rich and helpful to struggling readers. I'm forced to supplement with such reading books as Ladybird Series. (Female, 51 years old).
Teachers were also asked to comment on how their school administrators fared in supporting their teaching. Most teachers pointed out that the general attitude from their school principals was not that of help, but one that leaves the teacher to sort himself out. The administrators believed teachers' college training was sufficient in helping them against any situation to be encountered in the teaching profession. As a result, teachers are blamed for being incompetent if learners fail yet there is not much help that they get from the school in terms of having them better understand dyslexia. For instance, one teacher commented;

The administration doesn't help us in any way. They feel children are never failures; it's instead the teacher who fails. So I end up not asking for help because I will be blamed instead. (Female, 5 years teaching experience).

4.5 Theme 5 Lack of training
Of the 12 participants, there was only one teacher who had graduate training in Inclusive Education. Five of the teachers were exposed to a course or two on inclusive education in their tertiary education. Even though they had such an exposure, they felt such training was insufficient to effectively handle the myriad of learners with varying disabilities. They admitted to struggle to successfully include dyslexic learners in their mainstream classrooms. When the teachers who had taken a course or two on inclusive education were asked about how efficient they felt the courses had been in preparing them to handle dyslexic learners; they shared unanimous sentiments that their training was not enough. One teacher remarked:
Learning disabilities were only hinted about in my training, they never went into detail. I'm actually as good as someone who never did anything on inclusive education. (Male, 6 years teaching experience).
Another teacher held similar sentiments when she said:
Dyslexia was highlighted in my training. Despite this training, I do not feel adequately prepared to teach dyslexics because my training looked at inclusive education as an umbrella course and not much time or vigour was invested in dyslexia as a single entity. (Female, 5 years teaching experience).

Another barrier that teachers pointed out was with regards to the structuring of in-service training in the region. Though they admitted that inspectors came to their schools on a yearly basis, they felt this coming was not of much help to them. None of these inspectors came to train them on neither inclusive education nor dyslexia. They instead came for things such as official books (preparation books, scheme books) where they were interested in assessing if these were up to date. This is what one teacher had to say:
We need them to be talking about these important things like disabilities instead all the time they tell us about the need to have updated scheme books. (Female, 5 years teaching experience).

4.6 Theme 6 Shallow knowledge of language constructs
Participants also pointed to a challenge that as primary teachers, they are expected to teach all subjects. Some of these subjects are not in their field of expertise. As a result, some of the teachers teach English language even though they have no prior training on the subject. This was such a case for four of the teachers in this sample who had no English language training.When asked about how challenging it was for them to teach a

subject they had no training on, teachers pointed out that it was quite difficult for them to understand the nuances of the language. A teacher had this to say;

I majored in Science and Mathematics so I don't know much about this language thing. Sometimes when I teach I do feel that I'm not doing the right thing. It's hard but I do ask for help from other teachers who specialised in languages at college. (Female, 25 years old).

When the eight participants who were trained English teachers were asked about their knowledge of such terms as metalinguistic; teachers responded with great difficulty. They expressed challenges in their knowledge of complexities of English orthography and language systems such that they experienced difficulty teaching learners how to recognise written words. Teachers expressed shortcomings in their training as they were given descriptive knowledge of language constructs. For instance, they were not expected to analyse words at the phoneme and morpheme level.

Asked to give a summary of their understanding of language constructs such as phonemes, graphemes and morphemes- teachers had great difficulty doing so. For instance, a female teacher with 5 years teaching experience had this to say;

The only word I recognise is phonemes, the rest I'd really have to go back to my books and read to understand.

V.   DISCUSSION

5.1   Insufficient time
Teachers expressed considerable difficulty addressing the needs of all learners. Time was one of the reasons why they struggled to consider all learners' needs. The overall analysis made was that teachers did not have a grounded understanding of what inclusion meant. Their ideas were more on integration than inclusion. Inclusion necessitates that a teacher meet all learner needs in an inclusive environment. "To be included is not to be excluded" Kearney and Kane (2006: 202). Having participants in the study suggesting a need to create extra time for dyslexic learners apart from their peers shows an exclusionary model of education. Learners need to have their needs met concurrently with their non-dyslexic peers in an inclusive setting.

5.2   Lack of parental involvement
The successful inclusion of learners with dyslexia lies in the support structure that learners have. Lindsay, Proulx, Scott and Thomson (2013), show that parental involvement plays a crucial role in the support of learners with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. Parents in previous studies were found to be very supportive in the education of their dyslexic children (Bowen & Lee, 2006; Norwich, Griffiths & Burden, 2007; Sheldon, 2007). Parents were also seen to be overprotective and most of the time over concerned in the learning process, emotional and behavioural adjustment of their dyslexic children. Results in this study, however, ran contrary to this trend in that teachers expressed challenges with the lack of parental involvement in the education of dyslexic learners. Parents were said to show an uncaring attitude like not helping learners with their homework nor coming to the schools to inquire how best to help their dyslexic children.

5.3   Lack of support
Inclusive education is articulated to reinforce a policy direction that all learners should be schooled in an inclusive setting where equipmentsupport, among others, is provided to meet the needs of all learners (Kerney& Kane, 2006). Anderson, Klassen and Georgion (2007) assert that the necessary resources must be available for both teachers and students if quality education for special needs students is to be provided in the general classroom. A barrier that participants in this study raised was the failure for the government to practically help them include dyslexic learners. This failure was seen in the lack of financial support and training. Reiser(2006) says the lack of resources makes inclusion hard to translate from policy to practice. While it cannot be denied that resources play an integral part in the management of schools, Slee and Allan (2001) warn of reducing inclusion to battles of limited resources. They suggest that such tends to reinforce the concept of pathological defects. Similarly, when schools believe that successful inclusion relies on resources, they feel justified in using the lack of resources as an excuse to exclude some students (Ballard, 2007).

5.4   Insufficient training
In a report on teaching learners with dyslexia, Rose (2009) seems to suggest that helping a child overcome dyslexia and literacy requires considerable knowledge and expertise on the part of the teacher. Lamport (2012) holds that for inclusion to be successful, it is important for teachers to be provided with training. Similar views seem to be shared by Thwala (2015) that the lack of training makes it impossible for teachers to supervise teaching and learning in inclusive settings. Even though it can be concluded that training is the backbone to the success of all inclusionary practices, findings in the study show that teachers struggle to understand dyslexia and how dyslexic clearners can be effectively taught in mainstream classrooms.

Beyond their general teacher training qualifications; teachers need specific training to successfully include learners with disabilities in mainstream setups (Piotrowski& Reason, 2000; Wearmouth, 2001).Participants who had taken up an introductory course to inclusive education in their college training expressed lack of confidence in their abilities to successfully teach dyslexic learners. Such wavering confidence was seen to emanate from the lack of breadth of knowledge that the teachers were exposed to in their training. This seems to echo Brown (2004) view that introducing a single course in special needs is not a solution to influence the long held beliefs, attitudes and stereotypical perceptions to learners with special needs. Kirk et al (2006) suggest that training in learning disabilities leads to greater teacher confidence, which in turn leads to the greater success of the learner.

5.5 Limited knowledge of language constructs

Morrison (2009) found that students who spent more time receiving explicit instruction from more knowledgeable teachers had stronger word reading gains than those with less knowledgeable teachers. When participants in this study were asked about their ability to successfully help struggling readers, they showed a lack of confidence in their abilities. This seemed to be consistent with Moats (2014) findings that teachers have a limited understanding of how students learn to read and why they experience difficulty in reading. Moats also observed that even though many teachers are able to explicitly teach many aspects that are integral to reading and writing, they themselves had a poor grasp of such concepts. Such observations were corroborated in this current study in that even though teachers had learners who showed great success in English, they were confused when asked about their (teachers) knowledge of language constructs. They believed phonics, phonemic and phonological awareness to be synonymous. While these concepts are related, such thinking and belief from participants reflects their overall lack of knowledge of the language structure.

5.6 Inflexible curriculum

Teachers also expressed barriers to inclusion resulting from the structure of the curriculum. These barriers ranged from the pacing to the length of the curriculum. Teachers felt that with dyslexic learners needing time to understand language concepts, the fast paced curriculum puts them in a disadvantaged position. Having participants feel there is not much they can do in the current curriculum is to suggest that they are not devising strategies to help dyslexic learners. A different curriculum is not the solution to inclusion, as that is exclusion on its own. Instead, a curriculum must take a rounded approach to cater for all needs of the learner (Norwich, 2002). Loreman, Depper and Harvey (2005) seem to suggest that when inclusion is done right; everyone wins. If inclusive education is to be a reality in Swaziland, teachers must individually accept the major responsibility of meeting the needs of all children, irrespective of disability. Inclusion methods benefit all learners (Lamport, 2012).

VI. CONCLUSION

Results in the study have shown that teachers of dyslexic learners face a plethora of challenges. These challenges range from the lack of time, overcrowding in classrooms, lack of training and support amongst others. It was ascertained that most of the teachers' challenges emanate from the lack of understanding of inclusive education, hence the need for teachers to be trained on the concept.

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