Practitioner-Informed Professional Development to Advance Special and Inclusive Education in Ghana, Malawi, Namibia, and Zimbabwe

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The Issues

• Push towards inclusive education

• Shortage of special education teachers (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016; Vittek, 2015)

• High number of children in need of special education
Possible Solutions

- Increase special education teacher preparation programs (Chitiyo et al., 2015)

- Special and inclusive education classes for general education pre-service teachers (Kamchedzera, 2008)

- Professional development in special and inclusive education for in-service teachers (Royster, Raglin, & Losike-Sedimo, 2014)
Purpose of the Study

- Identifying schoolteachers’ professional development needs for special and inclusive education in Ghana, Malawi, Namibia, and Zimbabwe.
Research Questions

1. Do schoolteachers in Ghana, Malawi, Namibia, and Zimbabwe believe that students with special needs should be educated in inclusive classrooms?

2. How important do schoolteachers in these four countries consider professional development to be in the area of special and inclusive education?

3. What areas of professional development or resources do schoolteachers in these four countries need to effectively serve students in inclusive educational settings?

4. Are there differences in beliefs among schoolteachers in Ghana, Malawi, Namibia, and Zimbabwe regarding the idea of educating children with special needs in inclusive educational settings?

5. Are there differences in the degree to which schoolteachers in Ghana, Malawi, Namibia, and Zimbabwe value the importance of professional development in the area of special and inclusive education?

6. Are there differences in what schoolteachers in Ghana, Malawi, Namibia, and Zimbabwe identify as prioritized professional development needs regarding knowledge and services about special and inclusive education in their respective countries?
Method

• **Sampling and Participants:**

  • A combination of purposive and convenient sampling

  • **Ghana:** 250 surveys were distributed and 232 were returned
  • **Namibia:** 203 surveys were distributed and 125 were returned
  • **Malawi:** 500 surveys were distributed and 300 were returned
  • **Zimbabwe:** 340 surveys were distributed and 204 were returned

  • **Total received:** 861
Method (Continued)

• **Instruments:**

  ▪ A semi-structured questionnaire with open and closed-end questions

  ▪ Questionnaire was content validated by special education experts and piloted in the region

  ▪ Questionnaire- 12 demographic questions, 26 Likert type questions and 3 open ended questions
Results

• Demographics:

• Teachers who were teaching students with disabilities: 46% (n=368)

• Certified special education teachers: 15% (n=150)

• Teachers in regular education class with no supports: 44% (n=383)

• Regular education class with some support, e.g., teaching assistant: 8% (n=45)

• Inclusive setting with some support, e.g., special educator: 10% (n=190)

• Special education class: 6% (n=83)
Results

Students with special needs should be educated in inclusive classrooms. (Likert scale ranging from zero (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree))
Results

How important is professional development on teaching students with disabilities? (on a scale ranging from zero (Least Important) to five (Most Important))

Professional Development

Number of School Teachers

0 20 40 60 80 100 120 140

5 Most Important 4 3 2 1 0 Least Important

Malawi  Namibia  Zimbabwe  Ghana
## Results

Professional Development (PD) Topics by Country

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Notes: N, M, SD represent the number of participants, mean, and standard deviation, respectively.
Results

Needs for Successful Inclusion

• **Self-Reported Needs and Additional Thoughts:**
  • Similar themes emerged amongst the three countries and these included:
    ▪ Instructional supports
    ▪ Infrastructure
    ▪ Personnel support and training
    ▪ Reducing student-teacher ratio
    ▪ Remuneration for teachers needs to be reviewed upwards
Implications

• Teachers across the countries supported inclusive education. However more work still needs to be done to promote inclusive education.

• The teachers supported the need for professional development. This is encouraging as teachers’ own interest, felt need, and desire for professional development can influence participation in professional development.

• The teachers rated all the identified topics a important. Policy makers need to take this feedback into consideration in designing professional development for teachers.

• Policymakers need to address the identified needs in order to move inclusive education further ahead.
References


