

Exploring Pedagogical Orientations: A Critical Analysis of Teacher Perceptions towards Inclusive Education in ECD Environments in Zvishavane District

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ABSTRACT

The study investigates the pedagogical orientations of Early Childhood Development (ECD) teachers towards inclusive education within Zvishavane District, Zimbabwe. Inclusive education promotes the integration of learners with diverse learning needs and is strongly supported by both national and international educational frameworks. Despite this emphasis, practical implementation remains a challenge at grassroots level, particularly in rural settings. To explore this issue, the study adopted a qualitative approach rooted in an ex post facto design, which allowed the researcher to examine existing practices and perspectives on inclusive teaching strategies. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and document analysis. The target population comprised ten ECD teachers and five school heads selected from rural schools in Zvishavane District. The study focused on gathering their perceptions regarding preparedness, available support systems, and classroom strategies used to foster inclusivity in ECD environments. The findings reveal significant gaps in teacher training and resource availability, highlighting the urgent need for targeted professional development. The study recommends the strengthening of teacher support mechanisms and curriculum adaptations to promote inclusive education in early learning institutions.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Teacher Perceptions, Pedagogical Strategies, Early Childhood Development (ECD), Cultural Stigma

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Inclusive education is a key global educational principle, as it supports the right of all children, regardless of their physical, intellectual, or emotional challenges, to learn together with their peers in mainstream classrooms. Zimbabwe, like many countries under the United Nations (UN) banner, has committed to offer inclusive education as a core component of its educational policies. This endeavour is grounded to the provisions in international frameworks such as the Education for All (2000) and the Salamanca Statement (1994), which advocate for the integration of children with special educational needs (SEN) into regular educational settings.

Zimbabwe committed to inclusive education as evidenced by the adoption of key international policies such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and the Salamanca Statement. These global frameworks emphasise on the need to ensure that all children have the right to education, regardless of their physical, intellectual, or emotional needs, to access quality education (UNESCO, 1994; United Nations, 2006). In line with these commitments, Zimbabwe introduced national initiatives such as the Revised National Policy for Early Childhood Education (2015), which aims to promote inclusivity at the foundational stages of learning. However, despite these policy advancements, the translation of inclusive education into practice remains illusive, particularly in rural districts such as Zvishavane. Madhuku (2016)