

Parental Involvement: An Untapped Potential For Transforming Special Needs Education In Zimbabwe.

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Abstract

This study attempted to identify untapped potential within the cultural heritage of African communities that could be utilized in enhancing the running of inclusive programmes in Zimbabwe. The study was informed by the Negotiating Model by Dale (1996) where parents and professionals engage in negotiating and joint decision making, developing a shared perspective on their strengths, concerns and needs. A case study design was adopted and interview and observation guides were used as data gathering tools. A sample of fifteen parents, three regular and three specialist teachers participated in the study. Interviews were conducted to establish the type of involvement that suited all groups of participants. The study brought to light variability of extent and levels of involvement on all the teachers' and parents' groups. The non-specialist teachers were not keen to collaborate with parents while specialist teachers were for the practice. One group of parents was willing to be involved in classroom tasks but raised the great need for guidance on how they could master requirements needed thereof. The other parental group was hesitant. This latter group mentioned lack of knowledge and expertise in the general area of education as the deterrent factor to participation. Both parental groups indicated that they could participate in locally initiated programmes for supporting learners with disabilities. Constraints of lack of time and resources were a challenge as all parents expressed that they were busy with extra jobs for sustaining their own survival.

Key words: Cultural, parental, teacher, involvement, inclusive education, disability, constraints.

Introduction

The wholesome adoption of innovations emanating from foreign practices without prior reflection on adaptability to own local situation is not advisable. It is tantamount to failure if not matched to beneficiaries' ecological systems and their socio cultural conditions. Inclusive education for students with disabilities is one such reform that can mistakenly be applied without establishing pre-requisites for attaining successful implementation. This educational practice of educating students with disabilities alongside their non-disabled counterparts emanated from Western countries. One of the factors that Western practices provide which is contributory to the success of their programmes is parental involvement (P I). These aforementioned parental programmes are also matched to western culture. Xiao and Liu (1996) states that there has been shown to be effective family intervention to facilitate parental participation in western societies but as yet is not practiced elsewhere like in China. This observation also applies to Zimbabwe. Young (1998) lays blame on failure to incorporate programmes that are genuinely inclusive of other

cultures as being probably the other reason rendering parental involvement less effective in non-western countries. A link to this background is essential as progress of any nature to the children is affected by the context of the historical events and cultures within which they are reared (Springate & Slegelin, 1999:35).

This study is an attempt to identify untapped potential within the cultural heritage of African communities that could be utilized in enhancing the running of inclusive education programmes.

Background

Parental involvement can be referred to using a variety of terms such as parental participation, parental support or parent-teacher collaboration. All these expressions refer to the co-operate support emanating from both the home and school in enhancing the child's functionality. Garry (2011) notes that, the effectiveness of both home-based and school-based parental involvement in facilitating academic achievement has been reported by several reviews and meta-analyses of the literature (Fan and Chen, 2001; Henderson and Mapp, 2002; Jeynes,

2005, 2007; Pomerantz, Moorman, and Litwack 2007).

In Zimbabwe, the most popular form of parental involvement is participation in the work for the school and attendance of meetings. This practice can be traced back to the early 1990s when Government made parental involvement mandatory through the Act of parliament of (1987). Statutory instruments 87 of 1992 for Non-Governmental Schools and 70 of 1993 for Government Schools were put in force. According to Zvobgo (1996) these instruments

empowered the parents to form boards and partner with Government in transforming and equipping the schools. The Education Act (2006) referred to the parental groups as School Development Committees (SDCs). The Education Act (1987) specifies the responsibility of these boards as being for raising funds for infrastructural development through levies, donations and any other fund raising activities. In addition, Sui-Chu (2003) notes that, educators could also inform or consult the (SDCs) in relation to instructional activities. Related to the latter role of (SDCs) Chakuchichi, Gandari and Chataika (2012) give an account of communities participating in inclusive schools through moulding bricks, carrying pit sand, and river sand, water for construction of ramps, pavements, toilets and enlargement of doorways. In this particular project, parents were seen to get involved through attending meetings and child performance consultations. The Ministry of Education Draft Corporate plan (1996-2001) acknowledges the role of community efforts in constructing new schools and supporting the education of their children. According to Springate & Slegelin (1999) such involvement as stated above is considered as peripheral. It does not cater for the critical aspects that directly relate to children's learning. Involvement which is directly related to children's learning is reviewed later in this paper.

Zimbabwean Cultural Support System.

The cultural support system in Zimbabwe has been noted to be available in the social context. Kisanji (1999) observed that grandparents, aunts, uncles, brothers, sisters, nieces and nephews in the extended family in Africa contribute towards the upbringing of children. They also provided informal

education. Baloyi (2003) notes that, informal education has been present since prehistoric times. According to Koross, Ngwane and Sang, (2009) family members groomed the child through teaching, praise, discipline and socialized them into gender roles. This was done within the institution of the home under the tuition of parents, hence the claim that parents are the first educators of the child (Springate and Slegelin, 1999:34).

Agreeably, influences of globalization have resulted in some shifts in the family structure and family value systems but have not eradicated this culture. Though weak, the existence of this culture was reflected a great deal in the support rendered to persons with HIV and AIDS since the dawn of the last two decades. Relatives took care of their ill folks in the home based care programme in practice to date. Unfortunately the Zimbabwe Human Development Report (ZHDR) Social Sector Research Report of 2002 expressed that the care givers experienced numerous challenges due to resource shortages and the nature of caring task for the ill. Relatives had to handle severe diarrhea and vomiting in the absence of enough linen and water, hence scaring them of getting contaminated. This rendered the programme a failure. If this had not been the case, the extended family had arisen to give support. In another case, according to the UNDP, Zimbabwe Human Development Report (2003) in Chinmanmani District, Women formed groups within their wards and villages in which they cared for the orphans. They came up with locally initiated programmes to occupy the children. This ready support in the case of children with disabilities can be utilized in enhancing services for them. The weakened remnants of this culture can be revived in strengthening the implementation of Inclusive Education in Zimbabwe. The achievement of this development can be possible if Zimbabwean parents are supported in this endeavor.

Traditionally, Zimbabweans were known to rally behind one another when confronted with a challenge. These were challenges such as famine, pressure of work, disease and poverty. Wintersteen, Mupedziswa and Wintersteen (1995) note that, families in Zimbabwe continue to bear responsibility for providing assistance to relatives with mental illness. This follows that other forms of

disability need to be confronted from a similar perspective. Communities could be counselled to resolve such a challenge from a similar stance. Such initiatives could be established through the initial provision of opportunities for parents to meet at non-educational functions such as at functions of parent excursions and discuss ways and means of supporting other disadvantaged members of society.

The success of these initiatives is hinged on schools' effort in understanding the cultural and linguistic characteristics of their school community. This will assist in coming up with programmes suited to circumstances of that school. There is need to provide cultural awareness training for school staff and parents and support staff to build their own competency in understanding local Zimbabwean culture and community.

Forms of parental participation

The role of parents in supporting their children in education has kept on improving from passive recipients of services to equal collaborators. Studies by Bazyk, 1989; Simeonsson & Bailey, 1990; concluded that over the years, the place of parents has evolved from parents as co-therapists to parents as equal partners with professionals in intervention programs for children with physical disabilities. Parents need to be included as integral participants for all disability groups. A strong alliance between teachers and parents must exist as both parties are critical to the child's success. What perhaps educators need to know in this context is that, although they possess appropriate skills that can assist parents, in large measure, keen education managers should acknowledge that parents possess unique relationships with their children that educators can capitalize on (Glanz, 2006:22).

Parents get involved in school activities in a variety of ways. Mansour and Martin (2009) found that it is not only active engagement in the school that accrues benefits for the child but also parental involvement at home. There is need to strike a balance on both types of parental involvement in Zimbabwe.

Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) suggest ways of parental involvement that are both home based and

school based. These relate to provision of a secure and stable environment. Poverty and irresponsibility on the part of parents deny the fulfillment of this task. Sacker, Schoon and Bartley (2002) noted that as material deprivation worsened, parental involvement decreased markedly. Intellectual stimulation leading to parent-child discussion is another form of parental involvement. Regardless of social class, home discussion is a significant factor in intellectual stimulation. The more parents and children conversed with each other in the home, the more the pupils achieved in school (Desforges and Abouchaar (2003). On this same issue, School Learning Support Programme, 2010, p. 9. has found that the inclusion of students in discussions between parents and teachers may encourage further commitment to learning especially when it is related to individualized learning plans. Parents of children with visual impairment need to take advantage of this finding as these children's communicative skills are fairly good. In the same manner deaf parents of deaf children may exploit the option of using sign language to its fullest extent with their deaf children. Similar communicative strategies may be attempted with different disability groups to maximize children's learning. A review conducted by the General Teaching Council for England (2006) emphasized that parent-child conversations in the home are more valuable, in terms of enhancing pupil achievement, than parents' involvement in school activities.

On another aspect, parents can assist their child to have a positive attitude towards staff and the work of the school, and by helping them to develop organizational strategies to support learning, parents can positively impact on their child's learning (Mansour and Martin, 2009, p.10).

Parental involvement can also come in the form of home-work supervision. In class paired reading and support in materials preparation. In addition, contact with schools to share information such as in school consultative or administrative meetings is also a crucial form of involvement. Contributing reports from home on child's performance especially for children with disabilities is part of valuable home-based involvement. Bastiani (1989) has suggested that teachers' goals for parent-teacher meetings includes: discussing children's progress and any

difficulties they are having; finding out from parents how children are coping with school; identifying ways in which parents can help their children at home; and, identifying potential conflicts with parents. On the other end, parents' goals for parent-teacher meetings include, discussing children's progress and any difficulties they are having; comparing their children's progress with that of others in the class; learning more about the school and methods of teaching used; and, questioning teachers about any concerns. This goes further to participation in school events and in the work of the school including school governance. It might also include involvement in fund raising activities such as exhibitions, science fairs and volunteering to be resource persons.

Models of parental involvement

Appleton and Minchon (1991) proposed the empowerment model, where the family is recognised as a social system that influences understandings of disability. The school must be seen creating a platform for collaboration with the family to enhance the child's functionality. Although empowerment is the main premise of this model, the expectation is that professionals will identify the unique strengths and needs of the family, and incorporate them into assessment and intervention procedures. Dale (1996) advocated for the negotiation model, where parents and professionals engage in negotiation and joint decision-making, developing a shared perspective on their strengths, concerns, and needs.

Lueder (2000) discusses the gap between rhetoric and reality and talks of the need to shift our thinking to schools working with and supporting families. He bases his model of parent-school interactions on the theory that there is a central problem in parental support of education because large numbers of parents, whom he names "missing parents", are not involved in education at home. He proposes a "self-renewing partnership model" of PI based on the idea of what he terms "energy-in", which is an extension of the traditional roles of families in supporting schools, and "energy-out", which involves schools supporting families.

All these models have a place to play in the involvement of parents of children with disability in the inclusive school environment.

Benefits of parental involvement in the education of children with disabilities. A number of researchers have testified to the importance of parental involvement to both non-disabled and disabled children (Cox, 2005; Eccles and Harold, 1993; Epstein, 2001; Campbell, 1987; Levitt, 1995; Shepherd, 1995). This collaboration on a common cause strengthens relationships between the teachers and the parents. Hartas (2008) observed that parental involvement works indirectly on school outcomes by helping the child build a pro-social, pro-learning self-concept and high educational aspirations. In turn the climate of the school transforms for the better. Aspects such as school performance, attendance, attitudes and overall outlook for all the participants at the school improve.

This is more so for children with disabilities at the early intervention stage. They face challenges on transferring skills learnt in one context to another. Parents are the most ideal personnel to support their children in fulfilling this task. This support is also needed in the attainment of most milestones such as motor development. McCormick & Noonan (1984) urge that practice with the help of an adult in natural environments is better than in scientific settings. Parental intervention is also more consistent than a once off session in a week with a professional.

Strategies for enhancing parental involvement

There is need for the school and parents to enter into a partnership where a systematic way of cooperation is established. Bastiani (1993) gives an example of the "Home-School Liaison Scheme" which was set up by Humberside Local Educational Authority (LEA) in the UK in 1988. In this scheme schools in deprived areas in and around Hull area were provided with additional funding so they could employ Home-School Liaison professionals. Teachers in this programme worked half time as classroom teachers and half time on developing parental involvement. They received additional training to this effect. Their role was for developing partnerships between parents and schools which included setting up parent rooms, providing parent education and relieving class teachers so they could make home visits.

Another option is of the Home/school links workers (HSLW) in the United Kingdom which was initiated in (2006). This programme aimed to help parents whose own experience of schooling may have made them negative and unconfident when dealing with their children's schools. The responsibilities of this initiative were to establish contact and build relationships with families. It also worked to improve attendance and guiding the parents in supporting the children's learning. HSLW (2006) says this type of project led to better understanding on the part of teachers of family situations and improvement in parents' understanding of school issues.

Another option is of planning a school-parent collaboration programme. This option ensures all the necessary components and key personnel are included. The guiding principle is that successful programmes are, 'planned and not merely a collection of random or disorganize activities' (Raffaele and Knoff, 1999, p.461). Cultural traits need to be observed also. The sequenced action suggested by Deforges et al (2003) is used to guide the plan, initially, the community's human and material resources. Strengths, links and coping strategies for this action need to be identified. These would form the bases for operation. Ideas from all stakeholders related to the collaboration need to be taken into account. The internal school organizational adjustments that need to be considered to allow for the incorporation of parents need to be considered such as the following:

- identify community's human and material resources and local demographic trends;
- analyse stakeholders' perceptions;
- map out the organizational adjustments to employ; and
- mobilise the participants and get started.

Barriers to parental involvement

It has been noted by Sanders (2008) that the majority of parents have the desire to participate in their children's learning but fail because of obstacles. There are a variety of these obstacles and could be related to factors such as socio-cultural, attitudinal, educational, financial and those of psychological origin. HSLW (2006) said that

barriers resulted from the effects of extreme poverty, substance abuse, domestic violence, depression, lack of confidence in, or knowledge about, how to support their child's learning, impact of inappropriate values and beliefs and the impact of the difficult child.

We now discuss barriers to parental involvement basing it on Epstein's (2001) framework of overlapping spheres of influence on Family, school and the community. The applicability of the spheres to the African situation will also be analysed. Parental beliefs have been noted by Hornby and Lafaele (2011) to bear a strong influence on the role they play in supporting the child learn. Parents who still hold on to the traditional belief of only getting the child to school and assigning all educational responsibilities to professionals whom they believe to be all knowledgeable will not put effort in assisting the child. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) reported that this attitude is more prevalent in some communities and national cultures than others, but that there is considerable variation within these. When parents think that parental involvement is not valued by teachers or schools they are less likely to get involved. Therefore, parents' perceptions of invitations from schools are considered crucial in developing effective parental involvement. Epstein (2001) has found that parents are most effectively involved when teachers actively encourage parental involvement. Teachers with positive facilitating attitudes toward involving parents encourage more parents to become involved and increase the effectiveness of involvement (Eccles and Harold, 1993). Parents' level of education will influence their views on whether they have sufficient skills and knowledge to engage in different aspects of involvement (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, and Sandler. 2007). Some educated parents are very participative. These parents confidently treat teachers as equals and are comfortable using the language of education while others come to the partnership with little confidence and self assurance (School Learning Support Programme, 2010, p . 9). In most cases, parents who did not complete high school may be diffident about helping their children with homework once they get to secondary school. Also, parents without

university degrees may feel in some ways inferior to teachers whom they know are better qualified than them and therefore be reluctant to work closely with teachers. Family circumstances can be major barriers to parental involvement. In this instance, Sanders (2008) noted that psychological barriers may also operate for parents and inhibit participation and involvement. For example, solo parents and those with young families or large families may find it more difficult to get involved in parental involvement because of their caretaking responsibilities. Parents' work situations can also be a factor. Sanders (2008) observed that Lack of money and time are two major inhibitors. When parents are unemployed, they fail to provide resources needed. This is more so in the case of children with disabilities who need a lot of material and assistive devices to use in circumventing the effects of the impairment. It follows that material deprivation has a strong, negative effect on parental involvement. In the case of working parents, the kind of jobs they do and shifts they work have an impact on parental involvement. When both parents work, there will be less time available for both home-based and school-based involvement.

Schools and teachers are styled on a culture that matches that of middle class parents who have material resources and a sound academic background. Reay (1998) suggests that it is these parents who possess cultural capital which matches that generally valued by schools who participate more in school activities. Working class parents are aware of their deficit in this respect and this deters them from participation. Reay (1998) concludes that, for working-class families, home-school relationships are about separateness, whereas for middle-class families they are about interconnectedness, and this difference shapes their respective attitudes to parental involvement. Sanders (2008) sums up the relationship between the school and the home by pointing out that successful parent-teacher relationships are based on mutual respect, cultural sensitivity, a focus on strengths rather than deficits and attention to the needs of families as perceived by families rather than schools.

In general, minorities are less involved, less represented and less informed, and are less likely to have access to resources, as well as more likely to have problems associated with language, transport, communication and child care. They have substantially different relationships with teachers, who most often share white middle-class cultural capital (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 1997).

Research Questions

- What roles do Zimbabwean parents play in the education of their children with disabilities?
- What are the barriers to parental involvement in the education of children with disabilities in Zimbabwe?
- What Zimbabwean cultural based involvement could be used to enhance the learning of children with disabilities?

Method

This study adopted the qualitative research paradigm in which a case study design was used. The design enables the researcher to study the social world under investigation by involvement, participation and focusing on what individual actors say and do (Best and Khan, 1993). Considered from another perspective, a case study is an in depth investigation of instances of a phenomenon in its natural context and from the perspective of the participants involved in the phenomenon (Yin, 1989). The design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to interact with the participants in their natural settings on the phenomenon in its original form. This was related to parental involvement in the education of their children with disabilities as these were studied in their natural settings.

Participants and setting

The study comprised 21 participants drawn from the Harare educational region. This figure comprised 15 parents of children with disabilities 3 specialist teachers and 3 regular classroom teachers. Parents were coded according to the category of impairment of their children. Teachers were coded according to their area of specialization. The areas of disability

were the visually, hearing and mental categories. There were 7 children with mental challenges, 5 with hearing impairment and 3 with visual impairment. The codes used for teachers were as follows: Specialist in hearing impairment (Sp-H/Imp) specialist in mental challenges (Sp-M/Chall), specialist visual impairment (Sp-V/Imp). The codes used for regular classroom teachers were as follows: (Reg-Tr.a) (Reg Tr.b) and (RegTr.c). The codes used for the parental participants are as follows:

Hearing impairment (N = 5) Code (H/ Imp – 01);
Visual impairment (N = 3) code (V/Imp – 02);
Mental Impairment (N = 7) code (M/Imp -03).

An additional letter was added to each code to distinguish the participants that belonged to the same category such as for those with hearing impairment; it was coded as (H/Imp -01a) for the first participant and the second one as (H/Imp-01b). These codes went up to (e) since this category of those with hearing impairment had 5 participants. This same coding system was adopted for the other disability groups. Among the children, there were 8 female participants and 7 males. There were also two females and one male of the specialist teachers and 2 males and 1 female of the regular classroom teachers.

Instruments

Two instruments were used. These were the interview and the observation guides. A structured interview guide for the parents of children with disabilities and one for the teachers was drawn up and used. Some observational guidelines on the aspects to look for in the participants as they were being interviewed that would be information rich on parental involvement were listed down.

Procedures

The researcher set out to identify special schools and mainstream schools that had children of varied categories of disability. Having a number of children with different types of disabilities at the same venue facilitated the conducting of the study. The study was carried out at one special school and two mainstream schools in Harare region.

Permission to carry out the study was sought and granted by the head office of the Ministry of

Education, Sport, Arts and Culture. The individual study sites were visited to seek for further permission to carry out the study at those stations, familiarize with the study area, identify interviewees and make appointments for the actual interview dates.

Sampling criteria

Teachers who were selected to participate in the study were instrumental in selecting the parent participants. Purposive sampling was used to choose these parental participants. According to Borg and Gall (1996) purpose sampling is a procedure which enables the researcher to select informants that are likely to be information rich with respect to the purpose of the study. This procedure would suit this study as the informants would give a deeper understanding on how teachers and parents implemented parental involvement for children with disabilities. Teachers gave contact details of the prospective parent participants. Appointments with these parents were made and interviews conducted. Codes formulated and cited above were used in the data analysis process. Themes used in the data collection process were used as the basis for data analysis.

Findings

Results are discussed under three main themes drawn from research questions of this study of parental involvement in the education of their children with disabilities.

Parental responses

The Role of Zimbabwean parents in the education of their children with disabilities

Parental responses on the type of support they were supposed to contribute towards the improvement of their children's educational prospects yielded vague responses. The majority of parents (13) did not mention academic support but gave answers that pointed to material and financial support. Badza, Chakuchichi and Chimedza (2008) point that parental involvement in actual programmes do much better than those in which parental involvement is limited to fund raising activities without input in the child's learning and social

activities. They should be involved in the core business of the school and not peripheral and narrow ones such as chaperoning trips, cake sales and fund raising activities or being used as window dressers in PTOs/PTAs (Baloyi, 2003:16; Glanz, 2006:19).

Responses from all parents on what the school requirements were resulted in contributions such as home-work supervision, attendance of meetings and consultation days and provision of material and financial needs of the child. Parents said they never initiated parental involvement for fear of disturbing the teachers. One parent (V/Imp-02b), said, "My child is a slow learner and I sent her to this special school so that the teacher could assist me and teach using special methods which I do not know myself. How can I be called upon to also teach". Responses on how children with disabilities could be supported yielded a number of responses. One parent, (V/Imp-02a) narrated that children with disabilities needed love. She said love helped to dispel negative attitudes and discrimination. Parent (H/Imp-01c) elaborated that, "There was need to put a platform, say on the local television or national radio for children with disabilities so that they could say out how they felt, How can we speak on their behalf?, it is high time that we asked these children to talk for themselves." Another parent, (H/imp-01e) laid the blame on the schools. She said schools had not taught them how to be involved in supporting their children learn in the education system. She claimed this was supposed to be part of the curriculum to teach parents on involvement in the education of their children. Schools were also supposed to groom children to be future supportive parents of their children. Another parent said the school was also no longer teaching practical skills such as wood work and Home Economics in the manner it used to be taught historically. She said, "These are the subjects that our children who are not academically oriented need. We would be willing to support the school in such areas as these prepare them for self-sustenance in life but now our children are taught more of theoretical subjects only." Most parents (12) felt they needed more guidance on how to be more involved in the education of their children. This is supported by Fitzgerald (2004) who points out that parents really need education in that direction

because often parents are ignorant of their role and do not understand that the way they rear their children greatly influences development and learning. Some parents (3) said they were illiterate and so could not support their children academically. Lareau (2000) and Lewis & Naidoo (2004) observed that illiterate parents complained that they were being thrown in the deep end without any training.

Barriers to parental involvement in the education of children with disabilities in Zimbabwe

One barrier which parents had now overcome was of language. During the colonial era, the use of English in educational establishments did not allow some parents to express themselves fully. Even if English is still the official language, parents can now express themselves in their mother tongue and this removes the communicative threat that used to exist. This is supported by Ngwenya (2010) who says effective education managers should not hesitate to use a language native to the locals. Another parent, (V/Imp-02a) spoke of lack of education. She said, "How can I support my child educationally when I am not educated". Another parent, (M/Imp-03a) spoke of the issue of negative attitudes. She said, "We say supporting the child is the culture for the white people. There are also some of us parents who still say it is the teachers' role, they are paid for it and must do their work." Parent (H/Imp-04) spoke of African women being reserved, leading to them not wanting to come out in the open to assist their child with disabilities in public for fear that other people will laugh at them. "It is our back ground and lack of openness." Parent (M/Imp-03b) spoke of bitterness that some parents still hold because of having a child with disabilities and so do not want to socialize. They would rather dump the child in the hands of teachers and hide in their home. "These are the parents who would hide the child, what these parents do not realise is that, if you do not socialize, you become bitter." Parent (M/Imp-03b) response on how people viewed parents with children with disabilities was that, "I am aware that other parents of children without disabilities will be fixing their eyes on me, but I ignore them and work with my child and continue with my work by demonstrating I am copying." All

parents lamented the barriers of time and finances. They said they had the desire to support their children but were not available as they were busy looking for resources to survive on. Nechyba, McEwan and Older-Aguilar (1999) summarised that there is a 'culture of poverty' in which working class families place less value on education than middle class parents and hence are less disposed to participate. He cites proposals to this effect concerning these parents being less well equipped to negotiate and deliver on the demands of schooling. Another parent (M/Imp - 03e) said, "I want to support my child's learning but would rather use the little I have in educating the able bodied child so that he may look after the child with disabilities in the future." Another parent (M/Imp - 03c) said, "I will ensure that I send my child to the best of schools so that my child may receive the best of education, this way, my daughter will improve and be able to look after herself."

Zimbabwean cultural based involvement that could be used to enhance the learning of children with disabilities

Responses on culturally based strategies that could be used to support children with disabilities yielded varied opinions due to the melt down of the traditional social order. Parent (M/Imp-03f) explained that, "People have now resolved to join clubs in their communities that cater for all their social needs such as weddings, funerals, baby welcome gatherings, tea parties and others. Clubs, to a certain extent, have taken the place and role of the extended family. These clubs could be exploited to support disadvantaged members of society such as those with disabilities." Members within such a club could identify talents among themselves and allocate one another duties to perform among club members and family depending on needs of participating members. One who is a teacher could offer coaching skills to other members who would in turn use these on their family members. One who is a tailor could do likewise to others, one who is a trader could impart some marketing skills to others and this would proceed in this manner. On another level, members in the group could volunteer to support a disadvantaged child by not only financial means but by offering skills development and taking turns in meeting the needs of members with

disabilities in the society. This would help in alleviating fatigue on the parents of such children. Another parent (H/imp-01b) cautioned this approach and raised issues that had to be guarded against. She said, "People have attained a (PHD) tendency, this is translated as pull her down practice. They do not want to cooperate and do not have openness and this tendency has to be addressed directly and eradicated".

Educator responses

Role of parents

All the six teachers were unanimous in suggesting the role of parents. Respondent (Sp H/Imp) said that parents who had received guidance on early intervention from such hospitals as Harare Children's Rehabilitation Unit (CRU) were more effective in disseminating their roles than those who had not received such similar guidance even from other centres in the country. According to Glanz (2006) such parents should be engaged in continued educational opportunities so that they become educators at home and volunteers in the classroom. Most of the roles mentioned first were related to academic support such as helping with homework, following up on child's progress at school to prevent their lagging behind and providing a learning conducive environment that allowed the children to attempt extra work. Respondent (Sp-V/Imp) said, "Parents have to support their children academically, financially and in extra-curricular activities. They also have to provide all the necessities for the children's education such as assistive devices, uniforms, books and fees." All the regular classroom teachers said they faced challenges in advising parents on the appropriate devices to buy for their children to enhance their functionality in learning. Respondent (Reg Tr.a) said "We always rely on the expertise of the specialist teacher in a number of issues concerning the children with disabilities in my class." All teacher respondents said they emphasized to parents to work patiently with the children with disabilities at their own pace without making them compete with the other able bodied peers.

Responses on other forms of support, that teachers felt were necessary resulted in respondent (Sp-M/Chall) mentioning fund raising, coaching extra-

curricular activities such as netball, offering counseling services, making donations and participating in the work for the school such as building activities. Respondent (Reg Tr.c) indicated that whenever a child with disabilities was participating in an activity such as athletics, all parents were very supportive and indicated the support by ululating, calling out her name and showering praises.

Responses on how involved the parents were yielded mixed answers. Respondent (Sp-H/Imp) said, "The parents of children with disabilities participated in the same manner as those of non-disabled children. Their level of support varied with individual parents, ranging from very participative parents in academic and extra-curricular activities to those who were non-supportive in all areas of education." All participants indicated that there were a lot of things that parents were not involved in. These included giving actual academic support within the schools such as supporting the child in reading or carrying out Mathematical calculations. All teachers also mentioned to their satisfaction that parents were also not involved in teaching staff recruitment and rating their performance. This satisfaction by teachers is a sign of guarding their professionalism. Teachers defend their profession at all odds and consider parents who are informed and well engaged as meddling (Lareau, 2000:32).

Barriers to parental involvement

All teachers cited challenges such as attitudes. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) study on beliefs, attitudes and skills concluded that if parents believed that achievement is a matter of luck, innate ability, or "who you know" rather than "what you do" there would seem little sense in expending effort in promoting it. Conversely if parents realize the importance of involvement in the form of coaching, but lack skills, they may pay for extra lessons to make their child achieve more academically. One respondent, (Reg Tr.b) Said "I offer extra lessons to most able-bodied children in my class but none for those children with disabilities." This shows that parental support in this case is a matter of attitudes.

In some instances, there was unwillingness on both the teacher and parental parties to get involved.

Respondent (Reg Tr.a) said, "My task is to concentrate on class work and if the parents do not supervise homework, it was none of my business." This teacher seems to be setting a barrier between herself and parental participation. Behaviours of this nature have been observed by Nechyba, McEwan and Older-Aguilar (1999), who says, another aspect implicates schools that accept involvement on their own pre-set terms and those who do not observe them are not included. Parents in this case are not accommodated and assisted by the teacher.

Lack of money to support the involvement in school activities is another barrier and the type of job done by the parents. Half of the teachers who had pupils of cross boarder traders were lamenting the issue of lack of parental participation. Respondent (Reg Tr.b) said, "I have never seen the parents of two children in my class. I have called them on several occasions to come and discuss their children's work but am told that they are always away on business." All teachers cited the aspect of time as a critical element to participation. Effective participation was noted to be time consuming. Lastly, lack of knowledge on what constitutes involvement was common to both the teacher and parent groups. All teachers in this study confessed that they were not well versed on what constituted parental involvement. (Tr-M/Imp) said "I am not comfortable to have parents coming to support their child in the classroom, they would disturb me." There was also lack of educational attainments on the part of parents. Respondent (Reg Tr.c) said "Some parents are very quiet when it comes to suggestions on academic matters but very vocal on issues related work for the school." This is summarised by Kohl, Lengua and McMahan (2000:503) in concluding that a poor or limited personal education might leave the parent lacking in vision or confidence or competence in supporting their own child.

Organisation of the involvement

Respondent (Sp-v/Imp) said, "Both the educator and parental groups had to agree on the way in which the involvement could be planned." Suggestions were that meetings and workshops could be a possible way of organizing the involvement. This would empower the parents since

they were not professionally trained in the area of pedagogy. Ngwenya (2010) supports this idea and emphasizes that there is need to organise workshops which will equip them with the necessary skills needed so as to make them meaningful players in the involvement process and adequately reinforce learning at home.

Zimbabwean cultural based involvement

All the teachers stressed that what was most important was to love children with disabilities. Teachers suggested that it was high time that educators offered their services as charity to a certain extent to the community. Respondent (Sp-H/Imp) said, "Some doctors in Zimbabwe and those in America usually ran charitable campaigns for treating conditions such as blindness. Why are teachers not offering outreach programmes for giving parents skills in supporting their children with disabilities in learning? These are the partnerships that used to prevail prehistorically in our culture. We need to revive such practices." Education managers in their pursuit of these partnership relationships need to be sensitive to ethnic, cultural differences, social backgrounds and community expectations if they are to bring parents on board (Berger, 2007:98; Glanz, 2006:20; Patrikakou et al 2005:89). Glenn (2006) views this alliance as involving a genuine shift in thinking that recognizes the importance of family, community networks and cultural and kinship relationships.

Ways of improving parental participation

Respondents indicated that there was need for raising awareness on parental involvement. Some teachers are also not aware of what parental involvement is all about. On the other hand, parents do not value the importance of their involvement. They still believe that the education of their children is the sole responsibility of the teachers. Respondent (Sp-V/Imp) suggested running radio and television programmes. The cheaper, WhatsApp technological platform was suggested as another means to use for disseminating information.

Conclusion

The ready and cheapest modality of implementing inclusive education in Zimbabwe is through

utilizing the resources inherent in parents. This will provide an effective solution of manpower in view of the large numbers of students in mainstream classes, shortage of resources, and lack of trained personnel. Parents can be readily trained through workshops to equip them with the necessary skills for supporting children with disabilities. However more studies need to be conducted alongside this initiative to realize more appropriate ways of enhancing learning in an inclusive environment for children with disabilities.

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