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## ABSTRACT

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# Exploring Challenges and Gaps of Preparing Inclusive Early Childhood Development Teachers in Zimbabwean Teacher Training Colleges

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## ABSTRACT

*To create equitable programmes and services for all children, inclusive early childhood education has increasingly become a major focus of national governments, education systems and schools. Generally, inclusive education has the potential to alter the way society perceives the early education of children. It becomes prudent therefore to explore perceived challenges and gaps experienced by teachers colleges in preparing inclusive early childhood development (ECD) teachers. The study sought to ascertain whether the lecturers in the ECD department are adequately equipped with knowledge, skills and expertise to deal with inclusive education issues. The assumption is that the experiences and expertise will be shared among trained ECD teachers. A qualitative approach employing interviews and document analysis as methods of collecting data was used. Data was collected from one teachers' college in the Metropolitan province of Harare where two college administrators, 2 lecturers and 5 student teachers were purposively sampled to participate in the study. The research findings revealed that lack of knowledge and skills to deal with inclusive education coupled with unfriendly infrastructure were the major challenges faced by teachers' colleges. It is therefore recommended that there should be a specific policy to address the implementation of inclusive education in teacher training colleges. More importantly, the infrastructure in teachers' colleges should reflect inclusivity. Further studies can be undertaken to ascertain the availability of funding and resources in inclusive education in teacher training colleges.*

**Keywords:** inclusive education, teacher training colleges, early childhood, development, inclusivity, early childhood student teachers.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Various special education laws and regulations have called for vast changes in educating students with disabilities in public schools in the United States (Anderson, 2020) and other countries globally. Integrating students with disabilities with their non-disabled peers has been an integral part of the education system in Zimbabwe following the Education Act of 1987. Policymakers, researchers, and educators agree that high-quality inclusive early education begins in teacher training institutions (Pellati et al., 2016). Best practices have historically moved from very segregated education settings to much more inclusive educational settings in which to educate students with special needs. Thus, for the successful implementation of inclusive education, current practices at teachers' colleges should reflect what is practised in schools, providing student teachers with access to high-quality inclusive educational experiences is of the upmost importance in mitigating educational gaps that might exist. This study explored the problems encountered during the implementation of inclusive education in teacher training colleges in Zimbabwe. Focus was on the challenges that the college is encountering in trying to prepare an inclusive early childhood teacher. In so doing, this research explored prospects for success in such an endeavour. It is not in dispute that there are concerted efforts towards inclusive education by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education

and the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education Science and Technology Development in Zimbabwe. The government, through various policies and circulars, is advocating for inclusive education in all schools in Zimbabwe.

## II. THE CONCEPT OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Inclusive education is when all learners, regardless of any challenges they may have, are placed in age appropriate general education classes that are in their own neighbourhood schools to receive high-quality instruction, intervention and support that enable them to meet success in the core curriculum (Ballard, 2012; Makaya, 2022). As a relatively new phenomenon worldwide, inclusive education is driven by the philosophy that all children, regardless of their mild or severe individual differences, should attend the same school, in the same class with their peers (Musengi et al., 2010; Chireshe, 2011; Majoko, 2016; Maladev, 2023). In addition, inclusive education is seen as a system catering for the needs of a diverse range of learners and supporting diversity, thereby effectively eliminating all forms of discrimination (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), 2004).

Inclusive education owes its foundations to the American Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s (Thomas *et al.* 1998), when the provision of segregated services like health and education based on race and colour started to be seriously questioned and rejected by the segregated races and liberals. Those who were segregated began to advocate that physical impairment does not necessarily mean disability (Chireshe, 2013; Thomas *et al.*, 1998).

Inclusive education was then introduced at the Salamanca World Conference in 1994 in Spain. During the conference, the Salamanca Statement was adopted, and called for equal opportunities and access for diverse learners, including diversities in race, skin colour, gender, sexual orientation, trauma, learning styles, and disability (UNESCO, 2004). As a result, teachers were required to understand diversity as an element

that accommodates all kinds of differences, not just disability (Maladew, 2023). Additionally, teachers were expected to learn to work in creative ways to facilitate the diverse challenges encountered by young children and their families (Maladew, 2023; Diaz-Vega et al., 2023; Makaya, 2022). In an inclusive classroom, the role of teachers is to consistently and creatively modify their teaching strategies to include all learners' learning needs (Veerabudren et al., 2021). Explaining further the role of teachers, Mpofo and Shumba (2012) suggest that there is a great concern regarding teacher understanding of diversity particularly in early childhood education and this becomes a great challenge in the promotion of inclusion. Several researchers concur that inclusion demands teachers ought to discard the traditional teaching methods where they were the sole providers of knowledge and the learners were passive recipients (Veerabudren et al., 2021; Makaya, 2022; Mabasa-Munganyi, 2023). It becomes imperative therefore to ascertain whether graduates from teachers' colleges were effectively prepared to assume the role of guide in inclusive settings or centres. The research sought to determine the teachers' understanding of diversity in relation to inclusive education in early childhood classrooms.

## III. INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN ZIMBABWE

By introducing EFA(education for all) goals the government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) aimed at ensuring that no child should be left out of school regardless of gender, sex, race, ethnicity, social, physical, or cultural status goals (Majoko, 2016). The initiative saw the establishment of homes and centres like Jairos Jiri centres throughout the country, Kapota Home in Masvingo and St George's in Bulawayo to accommodate people with disabilities (Mafa, 2012). The inclusive education in Zimbabwe was ushered by the World Declarations on Education for All (Jomtien Conference, 1990), as well as the Salamanca Statement of 1994.

Zimbabwe is a signatory to the Salamanca Statement and framework for action on special needs education and several other inclusive education related international charters and

conversions (Musengi et al., 2010; Mabasa-Manganyi, 2023). Being a signatory to the Salamanca Convention of 1994, the government of Zimbabwe is fully obliged to ratify and implement inclusive education (Majoko, 2016; Makaya, 2022).

Although Zimbabwe does not have an inclusive education specific policy, it has inclusive education related policies like the Education Act of 1996 which advocates for education for all. The Nziramasanga Report 1999, which looked into the education affairs of Zimbabwe, stipulates that the quality of education for children with disabilities should reflect the same standards and ambitions as general education (Mafa, 2012). In addition, the Zimbabwe Disabled Persons Act of 1996 advocates for non-discrimination in the provision of education and non-discrimination of people with disabilities in Zimbabwe, respectively (Chireshe, 2013). In 2001, the Directors' Circular No.1 of 2004, announced that pupils with disabilities were supposed to be included in sporting activities in their own category whenever those without disabilities participated. In 2010, the then Ministry of Education, Sports, Arts, and Culture, in partnership with the Leonard Cheshire Trust, launched a campaign named "Inclusive Education for All" which targeted 1000 children with disabilities in government schools (Musengi et al., 2010). In line with the effort of the government to embrace inclusive education, Zimbabwe's 2013 constitution upholds the rights of all people, including vulnerable groups and those living with disabilities (Makaya, 2022).

According to Makaya (2022), Zimbabwe's position of implementing inclusive education policies was impeded because of teachers' attitudes (Chireshe; 2013), teachers inadequate relevant knowledge and skills to address the challenges of diverse learners in various classrooms (Mabasa-Manganyi, 2023), overcrowded classrooms (Mafa, 2012) as well as lack of transparency and clear explanations of policies and how they should be implemented (Chireshe, 2013). Over the decade, inclusive education studies in Zimbabwe have all made numerous recommendations aimed at improving inclusive education (Mafa, 2012; Musengi et al.,

2010; Chireshe, 2011; Chireshe, 2013). The recommendations included: running awareness campaigns, coordinating stakeholders, training of teachers and availing resources. The present study explored the current practices in teacher training colleges in their preparation of inclusive early childhood teachers. It is further argued that the state of inclusive education in Zimbabwe requires an approach that embraces all learners, including disadvantaged learners and those with additional learning needs because the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment require an inclusive approach (Mabasa-Manganyi, 2023; Makaya, 2022; Makaya, 2022). For example, early childhood settings are constituted by learners who are diverse in terms of their cultural, religious, social, economic, political and academic needs. Therefore, it is the responsibility of teachers that all these diverse areas and needs are contextualised and catered for (Chireshe, 2013; Makaya, 2022).

All these efforts are aimed at improving the standards of inclusive education in primary schools. It is imperative to note that educators trained in teachers' colleges end up in primary schools where they meet children with diverse needs. These teachers should receive adequate training on how to handle such children. This study sought to find out if teacher training colleges are equipping the teachers with inclusive education knowledge and skills. The teacher's college selected was the first college in Zimbabwe to train ECD teachers. At the time of the study, the college was training the largest number of ECD teachers as compared to other colleges.

#### IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for this study was based on Vygotsky's social constructionist view on disability and its practical implementation in contemporary inclusive education programmes such as ECD. By adopting a constructivist perspective, the study supported the idea that children from diverse backgrounds require innovative practices and proper guidance from teachers (Botha & Kourkoutas, 2016). In addition, Botha and Kourkoutas (2016) commented that children with behavioural difficulties might often



develop varying degrees of psychological symptoms, including social withdrawal, learning difficulties, lack of motivation, and disengagement from school. The social constructivists equate learning to constructing, creating and inventing such that learners develop their own knowledge and meaning (Al-Shammari et al., 2019). Basing on the above ideas, learners from diverse backgrounds ought to construct and create new knowledge. From the above sentiments, the major question emerges: Do ECD student teachers have the knowledge, ideas and skills to teach ECD learners in inclusive settings so that they can invent knowledge on their own?

Furthermore, Vygotsky (1978) believed that knowledge is shaped by or constructed from social interactions with one's environment. In support of the above, Winter and Raw (2010) state that inclusive education requires a constructivist approach to teaching and learning. Constructivists believe that an understanding of the brain informs teaching (Gindis, 2003); therefore, learning should include learner-centred, task-based, hands-on and minds-on activities (Al-Shammari, 2019). According to Rapp and Coral-Granados (2021), constructivism is the best paradigm for teaching all learners, particularly students from diverse backgrounds and needs. In this regard, teachers are essentially considered facilitators, providing essential information, and organising activities for learners to discover their own learning (Winter & Raw, 2010; Rodina, 2007). The key to constructivism is that learning should include learner-centred, task-based, hands-on and minds-on activities (Lynch, (2016), while also being meaningful and closely related to practical and real-life experiences (Rapp & Corral-Granados, 2021). In addition, constructivist-based classroom activities should provide internal and external scaffolding strategies for all learners, which is essential for students with special educational needs (Lynch (2016). Practical constructivism-based inclusive education practices are the applications of constructivism in inclusive education settings, and these involve instructional methods and strategies to assist learners to explore complex topics actively. Given the above theory, it is no doubt that teachers

require the relevant knowledge and skills to design appropriate methodology and prepare the appropriate learning environment and activities that cater for learners from diverse background and needs.

## V. RESEARCH ISSUE/PROBLEM

Early childhood classroom settings in Zimbabwe serve young children from diverse backgrounds. In these settings, teachers ought to implement inclusion as an educational philosophy based on their professional training in teachers' colleges (Makaya, 2022; Mabasa-Manganyi; 2023). Many educators believe full inclusive practices are the best and the only way for learners from diverse backgrounds to experience success and growth (Mpofu & Shumba, 2012; Chireshe, 2013; Majoko, 2016). Currently, there is little training in pre-service teacher preparatory programmes for regular education teachers to teach learners from diverse backgrounds in inclusive regular classroom settings (Makaya, 2022). It becomes imperative to explore the challenges and gaps in the preparation of inclusive ECD teachers in teachers' training colleges.

### *Research Objectives*

The study was guided by the following research objectives.

- Determine the current training practices in teachers' colleges in the preparation of inclusive ECD teachers.
- Identify the challenges encountered during the training of inclusive ECD teachers in training colleges.
- Establish possible solutions to the challenges being encountered during training of inclusive ECD teachers in training colleges.

### *Research Methodology*

The philosophical assumptions underlying this research came from the interpretive tradition (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). Interpretivism assume that access to reality happens through social constructions such as language shared meanings and instruments (Myers, 2008). The philosophy enabled the study to observe how ECD lecturers facilitated the teaching of inclusive

education from a social construction perspective employing peer interaction at the teachers' college. In adopting the interpretive philosophical claim that social phenomena must be understood in the social contexts in which they are constructed and reproduced (Creswell & Poth, 2018), the study sought to explore the preparedness of ECD lecturers, student teachers and college administrators pertaining to inclusive education issues and their understanding of the subject matter. The social constructionist paradigm asserts that reality is socially constructed and subjective (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2016), hence this study sought to explore ECD student teachers' beliefs, motivations and understanding of inclusive education.

A qualitative approach was adopted in order to get insights and in-depth information on inclusive education in teachers' training colleges. Furthermore, this approach was deemed germane to understand human lived experiences of ECD student teachers during their training at teachers' colleges. The approach enabled the study to gather real, rich and deep data from ECD lectures, students and college administrators through interviews, observations and analysing documents.

The case study design in this research was adopted to explore a contemporary phenomenon of inclusive education in teacher training colleges (Yin, 2015). Case studies represent individuals in their real contexts and circumstances which enable readers to understand ideas more vividly than simply presenting them with abstract theories (Tight, 2017). The case study design assisted in exploring real-life experiences of ECD student teachers during training.

A sample of 10 participants took part in this study. These were 3 college administrators, namely the college principal, the hostel female warden, hostel male warden; 2 lecturers from ECD department; and 5 student teachers. Of the 5 student teachers, 3 were in the third year and 2 were in the first year. The third year students had gone for teaching practice the previous year and the first year students were supposed to go for teaching practice the following year. The third year

students were sampled in order to share their experiences during the teaching practice period. The hostel wardens were responsible for allocating accommodation to students upon arrival at the college. They were involved in the study in order to solicit information from them on the preparedness of the college in accommodating male and female ECD student teachers.

#### *Data collection*

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were held with ECD students, college administrators and ECD lecturers. The rationale for using semi-structured interviews was that they involve face-to-face interaction between interviewer and interviewees, as well as excluding non-response rates (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). These types of interviews were the most germane to a research that sought to address questions that demanded in-depth and individual responses (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Through interviews, participants explained the current training practices in teachers' colleges in the preparation of ECD teachers.

Before the interview, the participants were briefed thoroughly and reassured of their rights and responsibilities in the research (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014). The interviews with ECD lecturers and college administrators were conducted from their offices. The student teachers were interviewed in the staff room after seeking permission from the responsible authorities. Each interview lasted thirty minutes. The interviews were conducted between January 2023 and July 2023.

The study analysed documents that ECD lecturers used in delivering lectures. These documents included syllabi, college policy and the schemes of work. The syllabi was important in that it served to set forth the topics, concepts and key ideas of what is to be taught during the course. The syllabus contains the suggested pedagogy and the assessment to be done to determine achievement of both aims and objectives of the course.

Thematic approach and content analysis were used as methods of analysing and interpreting

data. Data from in-depth interviews was thematically analysed because it provided a way of looking for patterns in the data and connecting them together into meaningful categories and themes that capture the topic of the research (Yin, 2017). The process of data analysis involved reading the collected several times, taking note common ideas and coding them throughout the text (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2016). It involved “identifying, coding, categorising, classifying, and labelling the primary patterns in the data” to “determine what is significant” (Ridder, 2016). Finally, the codes were grouped together into similar clusters to create a meaningful theme. The three major themes that emerged were also predetermined as they corresponded with the subsidiary questions.

Content analysis assisted in exploring large amounts of textual information from the schemes of work and syllabus to determine trends and patterns of words used as well as their frequency, relationships, and structures (Marks & Yardley, 2004). Textual data from policies, syllabi, and schemes was systematically coded and analysed. Through content analysis, relevant codes were selected that would finally fit in the themes and discard codes that did not have anything to do with the research questions. The final research report reflected primary evidence generated from the identified documents interwoven with the interpretation of the phenomenon being studied (Yin, 2017).

### Findings

The main objective of the study was to explore challenges and gaps of preparing inclusive ECD teachers in a teacher training college in Zimbabwe. The analysis and discussions of the findings are presented in the following sections under the emerging themes that were also predetermined by participants’ narratives and related literature. Data was presented in the following themes: *inadequate knowledge by ECD lecturers, inadequacy of lecturers, lack of proper infrastructure, and lack of support for inclusive education.*

## VI. INADEQUATE KNOWLEDGE BY ECD LECTURERS

The study gathered that teachers’ colleges in Zimbabwe operate under the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education Science and Technology Development whereas teachers trained under this Ministry are employed by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE). MoPSE has an education for all policy currently guiding the day-to-day school enrolment. Teachers trained in the colleges are therefore expected to be fully equipped with skills, knowledge and expertise of handling these children.

Data from lecturers revealed that they had no adequate knowledge of inclusive education. They cited that they were are not adequately equipped to teach inclusive education. One of the lecturers (L1) said:

*I was not trained on inclusive education during my training period 6 years ago. I was not exposed to inclusive education except a few topics on learners with disability. It is now a challenge to implement what I do not have adequate knowledge on. We need seminars and workshops on inclusive education so that we will be able to deliver our job expectations.*

Lecturers reported that they have little knowledge of special needs education received during training and staff development workshops at the college. However, they feel there is a gap which needs to be filled by specific teachings on inclusive education. They reported that they cannot execute their duties well because they feel there is a gap in knowledge.

### 6.1 Inadequacy of Lecturers to Teach Inclusive Education in ECD

Lecturers lamented shortage of staff in the ECD department to effectively teach and implement inclusive ECD programmes. The department which should have a staff complement of twenty lecturers had fifteen only. Participants narrated that staff shortage resulted in heavy workloads and failure to complete the syllabus. According to participants, lecturers could not cover some of the topics and content due to limited time. In



addition, the ratio of lecturer to student was too big that they could not attend to the individual needs of students. Lecturer (L2) said:

*As lecturers, our practices here should reflect what students should meet in the field. Failure to match theory with practice is total failure on our part. The students are many so we end up teaching the basics only due to inadequate time. We are short staffed.*

The college principal confirmed that there was inadequate staff in the ECD section. He lamented that most lecturers were leaving the county for greener pastures while others were transferring to the universities. The college principal explained the process of replacing a lecturer was cumbersome.

### 6.2 Lack of Proper Infrastructure

The study gathered that the college had no proper infrastructure for inclusivity. From the study it was noted that there were no ramps at the entrances of dining hall, hostels and major buildings of the college. During the period of study, the college was constructing ramps for the library and the administration block. Although the college had also embarked on constructing ramps for lecture room and lecture theatre entrances, wheelchair users were complaining that some of the ramps were too steep. The college wardens reported that there were no elevators at both the female and male hostels forcing the physically challenged to be accommodated on the ground floor.

Interviewed students reiterated that they were being deprived their right to choose where to stay just like any other student. They reported that even the lecture theatre had no elevators and they had no option but to sit in the front bay all the time they had lectures. They lamented that the college infrastructure was very discriminating and not inclusive of their different needs. One of the interviewed students was on wheel chair and the other had an artificial leg. Their conditions limited them to participate in a few selected curriculum activities.

### 6.3 Lack of Funding and Support for Inclusive Education Programmes in Teachers Colleges

The study found out that inclusive education programmes and activities were not adequately funded. During the period of data collection, the college was constructing ramps for entrances of major buildings around the institution. The college principal responded that the project was recommended two years ago, but due to lack of funding it was still outstanding. The principal acknowledged that he had quotations for the library requisition computers, braille and hearing equipment to assist affected learners in teaching and learning. However, the principal admitted that the college was not well prepared for inclusive education and this cascaded to the training of students. He reported that the institution alone could not fully fund all the projects but they needed the government to assist in funding some of these projects.

Lecturers and students blamed the college administrators for lack of budgetary commitments towards funding inclusive education programmes. One of the lecturers added that a proposal to construct an inclusive education resource centre was made two years ago but funds were not provided for the project. Furthermore, necessary inclusive education gadgets such as the Braille, hearing equipment, computers should be availed so that student teachers learn how to use them.

### 6.4 Curriculum Content not Speaking to Inclusive Education

Curriculum content of the college does not reflect inclusivity aspects of education as reflected in the in-class and out of class activities. A sample of lecturers' schemes of work, the syllabi, the content and pedagogy did not reflect inclusive education aspects. One of the student said:

*When we go out for teaching practice, we are expected to teach inclusive classrooms. The content that we are taught is too general. We need content that is specific on handling learners with diverse needs. We also need to practise handling these learners before we*

are finally deployed. The content is too theoretical.

Some student teachers highlighted that they needed more lessons on how to handle children from diverse backgrounds in a classroom situation. Lecturers lamented that the Department of Teacher Education was taking too long to approve the new syllabus which reflects inclusivity.

### 6.5 Lack of Policy on Inclusivity in Teachers' Colleges

Some lecturers in the study expressed that teachers' colleges had no clear policy in on inclusive education issues. The policy document analysed by the researcher had no clear directives on how to teach inclusive education aspects to student teachers the college.

### 6.6 Negative Attitudes towards Inclusivity

Some student teachers felt that college administrators had a negative attitude towards inclusivity. They cited the lack of financial commitment, as well as awareness campaigns and workshops for inclusive education. The student said:

*There are many programmes that are being funded by the college. Surprisingly, when it comes to inclusive education matters, the college reports that it does not have enough funds. As students, we feel that our concerns are not being taken care of and the college is prioritising other programmes at the expense of inclusive education.*

The participant student teachers expressed that the lack of support from college authorities was due to their negative attitude to inclusive education. The issue of authorities' negative attitude towards inclusive education seems to have been always a major concern at the college. The student teachers explained that the college was funding other projects while inclusive education was regarded as the government's responsibility.

## VII. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Indicators of quality education are access, inclusivity, qualified teachers, availability of learning materials as well as infrastructure and facilities (UNESCO, 2020). These help maintain quality education in ECD centres. The study findings revealed that ECD student teachers were not perfectly trained for inclusivity. The current practices in the selected teachers' training college were not a true reflection of inclusive education. As a relatively new phenomenon, inclusive education is a practice which attempts to cater for learners from diverse needs (Majoko, 2016). ECD teachers undergo special training are expected to offer specialised and quality education. The expertise include, among others, planning inclusive lessons, designing appropriate learning materials and constructing relevant learning environment. As Maladew (2023) would put it, teachers need skills to diversify their practices so that they create the teaching and learning environment which accommodate all learners. Learners construct new knowledge when exposed to relevant environment (Rapp & Corral-Granados, 2021).

Study findings revealed a gap between quality expectations and the current inclusive practices in teachers' colleges. The assumption that, upon completion of the course or during teaching practice, students should practice what they experienced at college, was therefore misplaced. The ECD department responsible for training ECD teachers was characterised by inadequate lecturers and this compromised the implementation of quality inclusive education. The study gathered that teachers were following the traditional way of teaching for syllabus completion. However, Veerabudren et al. (2021) emphasises that inclusive education demands teachers to migrate from traditional to contemporary ways of teaching.

Physically challenged learners in the study felt that the co-curricular activities at the institution discriminated against them. However, there is a circular which directs institutions to arrange sporting activities for learners with disabilities within their category (Zimbabwe's Directors'

Circular No.1 of 2004). The study discovered that college lecturers were not aware of this policy in schools. Currently there is no policy to speak on inclusivity in teachers colleges.

The study also identified an existing gap between policy stipulations and current practices in teachers' colleges concerning infrastructure. Circular demands the existence of relevant infrastructure for learners with disabilities in schools and the study identified a gap. This is in line with Chireshe (2013) and Makaya (2022) who noted that implementing inclusive education was impeded by lack of proper infrastructure.

Students teachers seemed to regard the lack of support from college administrators as a negative attitude to inclusive education. The study observed that the negative attitudes of ECD lecturers and college administrators can have a significant adverse effects on the effective implementation of inclusive education in teachers colleges. As has been alluded to earlier on, inclusive education is an approach to teaching and learning that awards equal educational opportunities for all learners, regardless of their abilities, disabilities or other diverse characteristics (Veerabudren et al. 2021). Consequently, Makaya (2022) suggests that the negative attitudes by college authorities and lecturers may result in limited expectations, lack of policy, stigmatisation, discrimination, emotional impact, among others. In light of these findings, it is therefore crucial for educational institutions to create an inclusive culture that values diversity (Mafa, 2012) and promotes collaboration among facilitators, learners and societies (Musengi et al., 2010).

## VIII. CONCLUSION

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal number 4 aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting life-long learning opportunities for all. To achieve equitable quality education in early childhood, schools need to align their current practices to meet SDG goals. However, the study gathered that most of the practices at the selected teachers' training college were not inclusive. Additionally,

ineffective and inadequate inclusive education training is reported as the major setback on teachers' lack of understanding of the range of inclusive approaches relevant to ECD. There is therefore a need for effective collaboration among professionals such as psychologists, counsellors and school administrators. A constructivist approach regards collaborations as a prerequisite for inclusive education because they embrace social engagement among all stakeholders (Rapp & Corral-Granados, 2021).

For the successful implementation of inclusive education, current practices at teachers colleges should reflect what is practised in schools. The study concluded that ECD student teachers lack ideas and skills to successfully implement inclusive education in schools due to their non-inclusive training in teachers' colleges. This lack of knowledge exposes teachers to a lot of challenges in the ECD classrooms as reported by several researchers (Makaya, 2022; Makaya, 2022; Mabasa-Manganyi, 2023). It is therefore argued in this study that, if the training practices at the teachers' college are non-inclusive, it means the college lecturers are failing to impart inclusive skills in its student teachers. The study concluded that numerous challenges faced by student teachers would subsequently result in failure by their ECD learners to construct on meaningful inclusivity knowledge and ideas. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals demand that institutions should aim to build and upgrade educational facilities that are child sensitive and provide safe non-violent inclusive and effective learning environment for all (UNESCO, 2004). Inclusive education in ECD settings can only be fully achieved with the support and commitment of stakeholders like universities, teachers and ministry officials. It is therefore difficult to talk of quality education that is learner centred, task-based, hands-on and minds-on activities, if the teachers are not qualified and lack some skills and expertise.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Basing on the findings and the conclusions thereof, the following recommendations are suggested:

- College infrastructure should be adaptable to all learners. The infrastructure ought to have ramps and elevators; and, if necessary, widen the doors of the library and lecture rooms for wheelchair users. All learners ought to participate in sporting activities; therefore, the sporting fields must be refurbished to suit students with disabilities.
- Government and other stakeholders should adequately fund and support teachers' colleges with materials and resources to ensure implementation of inclusive education. The funds could be used to organise workshops, seminars, staff development meetings and awareness campaigns to equip lecturers and staff on inclusive education issues.
- The Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Science and Technology Development and the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should work together to formulate and implement a clear policy on inclusive education. The policy ought to equip lecturers with content on how to teach student teachers with diverse abilities.
- The college academic board should re-structure the college policy, schemes of work, and syllabi to include inclusive education. Furthermore, the board should organise sensitisation and awareness campaigns on inclusive education from time to time.
- College and university lecturers should collaborate and consult each other on matters to deal with inclusive education. This would enable them to conduct research studies and share knowledge on inclusive education.
- More lecturers are needed in the ECD department to teach inclusive education. Manpower inadequacy results in heavy teaching loads which pose difficulties to meet the needs of students with diverse needs.
- In schools, the qualified teachers ought to be equipped with knowledge on how to handle ECD learners with diverse needs.

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