

TEACHER CENTERED APPROACHES: THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR TODAY'S INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS

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Abstract

This study is an exploration on the kind of approaches teachers use in their schools and/or classrooms to deliver instruction in inclusive classrooms particularly whether or not learners who have Learning Disabilities (LD) benefit from these approaches. Six primary schools in urban, semi-urban and rural areas were randomly selected and data was collected through classroom observations, interviews and document analysis. Fourteen participants were interviewed. The findings reveal that teachers delivery of instruction were mostly teacher centered a move which seemed to leave some learners minimally benefitting from the teaching and learning process especially learners who have LD. Although participants embrace the concept of inclusive education, this seems to be on a theoretical basis since in practice it seems that learners who have LD were not given learning opportunities which allowed them to participate in the teaching and learning process. Finally, participants identify some barriers such as an examination oriented curriculum, class sizes as the main barriers to practicing learner centred approaches. The study challenges the traditional use of authoritarian approaches of teaching as one way of perpetuating exclusionary circumstances within Botswana schools as it leaves learners who have LD with little chance of accessing the curriculum. A dynamic constructive relationship between curriculum, teachers and learners is suggested, moving from 'teaching the curriculum' to 'understanding and developing inclusive curricula' within a social constructivist discourse.

Key words: teacher-centred approaches, learning disabilities, learner-centred approaches, learning opportunities, instruction.

Introduction

Providing access to the general curricula for learners with special educational needs (SEN) has become a worldwide concern. As Florian and Mclaughlin (2008:3) explain, 'Many countries are experiencing an increase in the number of children being identified as in need of special or additional provision'. As a result, countries are now taking a new direction in making efforts to accommodate the needs of these learners. A paradigm that has gained ground in many educational circles is inclusive education. This shift proposes a rethinking of ways of making education accessible and equitable to all learners. Commitment to including learners from diverse backgrounds and SEN in inclusive settings has been the aspiration of restructuring

education in Botswana. Many advocates of inclusion believe that inclusion is morally and ethically right for learners experiencing difficulties with learning. This belief of what is morally right has however fueled the debate and the controversy surrounding inclusion. Those in support of inclusion cite some advantages for growth in social cognition (Hick et al., 2009; Mitchell, 2008) whereas there are those who express concern about the impact of inclusion on academic learning for learners who are deemed not to have special educational needs (Irmsher, 1995; Douglas, 2010). While the current studies in education support student-centered teaching methods, some classrooms in Botswana are still dominated by teacher centered approaches.

When education is teacher-centered, the teacher retains full control of the classroom and its activities. This then doesn't allow students to express themselves, ask questions and direct their own learning. If the teacher is dominant in the teaching and learning process, chances of student losing sight of their goals become higher as compared to when they are constructing their own knowledge.

Literature Review

Teacher dominated pedagogy and their Challenges

Behavioral theories of teaching and learning have for a long time influenced people's understanding of classroom management. Brophy (2006) supports this by indicating that the primary emphasis for classroom management in a behavioral model is the use of techniques that bring student's behavior under stimulus control when education is teacher centered, the classroom remains orderly and students are quiet while the teacher retains full control and therefore denying them to actively participate in their learning. If the process of teaching and learning is teacher dominated, instruction becomes boring for students resulting in their minds wondering and may miss important facts. These behavioral approaches to classroom management have been viewed as being consistent with a 'traditional or transmission approach to instruction where students are not allowed to express themselves and direct their own learning (Tabulawa, 2006). While that is the case, Cristillo (2010) further alludes that teacher-centered pedagogy is associated with top down, hierarchal pedagogy and for reinforcing passive learning, rote memorization and hindering the development of higher level cognitive skills. He further argues that teacher centered pedagogies are also associated with authoritarian, anti-democratic regimes that exert centralized control over schooling to produce an obedient passive citizenry. Teaching pedagogy is under question, for example in Botswana, UNESCO (2008:19) found out there is lack of cross curriculum teaching both horizontally and vertically, teaching is basically anti-dialogue and designed to stifle the potential of the promotion of the learners to develop a critical perspective towards the program they are taught'. The 1977 National Commission on Education, however, urged teachers to 'relate to pupils as people, not just as receptacles for cognitive materials' (Republic of Botswana, 1977: 107). What the Commission was calling for, among other things, was a change in the student-teacher relationship which, in the case of Botswana, has been found to be excessively teacher dominated (Tabulawa, 2006). Tabulawa continues to argue that the authoritarian pedagogical style in Botswana schools is instrumental to

certain aspects of Tswana social structure in which the child is dominated and subordinated. Such structures are therefore carried to the classroom by teachers and learners. He describes these structures as cultural baggage which informs teachers and learners actions and their respective classroom roles. Contrary to this, Miles and Singal (2010:12) explain that inclusive education provides an opportunity for society to critically examine its social institutions and structures. It challenges didactic, teacher-centered teaching practices, such as rote learning, and so opens up opportunities for developing better pedagogy and greater competence. Development of better pedagogies may pave the way for access to the general curriculum for many learners who might be having difficulties because of such structures and practices. This also compels educators to move away from constraints of the general and collective, whereby everyone was expected to learn everything in the exact manner and the teacher was supposedly the repository of information (Marton & Tsui, 2004). However, these practices reduce educational curricula to a “one size-fits-all type of curricula” (Osberg & Biesta, 2009).

Inclusive ideology

The concept of inclusive education comes as a paradigm shift from the idea of placing people with disabilities in permanent institutional care which was a form of isolation to a paradigm which focuses on ensuring opportunities for participation and sharing (Singh, 2010:12). Sands, Kozleski & French (2000) also argue that historically, education authorities believed that separate education for learners with diverse needs was seen to address these needs. This is exemplary of the practice of focusing on impairments rather than on emphasizing on strengths of learners. Nind, Sheehy & Simmons (2003) cautions that the move from segregated special education in special schools to integration and the development of units within schools, then to inclusion of pupils in mainstream settings has been fueled by various ideologies and perspectives which marked their moments in history. According to Slee (2001) inclusive education means there is no separate special education placement for any student, and that all students are placed full-time in the regular classroom with appropriate support within that classroom. Inclusive education in a more holistic approach means that schools need to be cognizant of the different learning needs and optimal learning environments for all learners, not just those with disabilities (Lewis & Norwich, 2005). Inclusive education is about listening to the voices in a school community and empowering all members to develop an approach to schooling that is committed to identifying and dismantling actual and potential sources of exclusion as explained by Gillies & Carrington (2004). Above all, it is about a philosophy of acceptance where all people are valued and treated with respect (Swart, Engelbrecht, Eloff, Pettipher & Oswald, 2009). Leitch (2006) points out that while general concepts such as acceptance, value and respect are noble when defining inclusion, they are not particularly helpful in defining what actually should be found in an inclusive environment. The goal of inclusive education is not to leave anyone out of school but giving equal opportunities for all to be full members of school and to be later included in the society. Such a view of inclusion presents a challenge to existing structures and systems that are still contributing to the barriers that learner’s experience. In other words effective teaching is

effective teaching for all students (Ainscow & Miles, 2008). A policy of inclusion is generally understood around the world as part of a human rights agenda that demands access to, and equity in education. (Florian, 2008). The concept of inclusive education is thus a very complex one and it is multifaceted in the sense that there is no one 'inclusion'. Masalela (2008) explains that inclusion can be viewed as a government rhetoric, inclusion as seen by schools and teachers within those schools, inclusion according to parents, inclusion according to children themselves and inclusion as contested by various academics. Inclusion therefore is contentious since it has multiple interpretations and means different things to different people. As a result, its implementation will depend on how it is viewed or interpreted in a given context. No matter how it is viewed and interpreted, the bottom line is that inclusive education has to acknowledge that each learner has unique abilities and needs. The focus in the wider definition for inclusion is on the restructuring of schools and systems to increase the participation of those with special educational needs and that they be provided with opportunities and be treated with respect. This kind of approach encourages those involved to view the need of a person not evaluated as good or bad, but is considered as ordinary. Therefore, within inclusion, education and other services are improved to overcome barriers to learning (Ainscow, Booth & Dyson, 2004).

Learner centered approaches and inclusive pedagogy

Students are more interested in learning activities when they can interact with one another and participate actively in their learning. A paradigm shift which educators are now encouraged to embark on which is in line with an approach based on constructivist principle of learning. In a constructivist classroom, learning becomes more of a shared activity where knowledge is constructed by both the teacher and the learners rather than transmitted directly by the teacher. A constructivism approach therefore views a classroom as a learning community that constructs shared understanding (Brophy, 2006). This is supported by Swart et.al (2009) by alluding to the fact that inclusive school communities have the potential to serve as the context for the creation of a system of education, and ultimately a society that reflects an emotional sense of community, caring and belonging. It is approach towards learning is also in line with principles of inclusive education which believe that learners are to be included and should benefit in the processes of teaching and learning including those with special educational needs. In order to complement this shift in instructional approaches that are teacher dominated, further impetus has been proposed by various researchers. Mosston & Ashworth (2002) indicate that in the student centered approaches, students play a significant role in the decision making processes. Moving from teacher dominant approaches may encourage educators to move into the ideological realm of liberal humanism which attest to the idea of attending each individual child. Learners diverse presence in our classrooms today compel teachers to provide access and equal quality education for everyone by using approaches that are learner centered in order to enable all learners to participate in their learning as much as it is feasible. Burman (2007) explains that today's educational thinking has moved from teacher dominated approaches and it is informed and concerned with an idea of the learner as a unique and self-actualizing agent. He further emphasizes that for learners to participate in their learning enables them to showcase their

potential and hence becoming who they are. Approaches that are inclusive of complexity and diversity create new spaces of thought. In other words, if approaches are learner centered, learning deepens, widens and expands and takes irregular paths rather than following a linear progression (Weimer, 2002).

Learning Disabilities (LD) – what are they?

A concise description of learning disabilities is a neurological condition that interferes with a person's ability to store, process or produce information. (Lerner & Jones, 2012). LD according to Learning Disabilities of America (2009), LD can affect the person's ability to read, write, speak, spell, compute math, reason and can also affect one's attention, memory, coordination, social skills and emotional maturity. Children who have LD generally have a range of difficulties which often are realized when they are in school, without some form of special provision many of these children may not develop sufficiently to realize their potential. Lerner & Jones (2012) indicate that about 46% of all students with disabilities are identified under the category of learning disabilities and about 26% are in general education classes. They continue to indicate that if provided with the right support and interventions, students with LD can succeed in school. However Lerner & Jones explain that general education classes or inclusive classrooms can provide them with greater access and a right to participate and benefit socially and academically. While Gargiulo & Metcalf (2010) allude to the fact that inclusion is based on the conviction that these children have a right to participate in environments as close to normal as possible and that a major goal supporting inclusion philosophy is to ensure they have experiences in school with students who do not have disabilities. At the same time, the current climate in schools seems to be focused on greater accountability, increased standards, and high-stakes testing for all students and this move overlooks accommodating students struggling with understanding the content as teachers focus exclusively on content. (Deshler, Schumaker, & Woodruff, 2004)

Statement of the problem

Government of Botswana's aim is to make learning more learner centered and more inclusive but classrooms are still teacher dominated, learners with LD are still not accessing the curriculum and knowledge is still from the teacher to the learner a situation which leaves these learners to be passive during the teaching and learning process.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to explore and find out what kind of approaches teachers use in inclusive classrooms and if these approaches assist learners to take part in their own learning. It was reasonable to consider that teachers in order to buy in the idea of inclusive education, their practices should reflect and be within a social constructivist discourse. Consequently, the research questions focused on how teachers approach their instruction to include all learners especially those who have LD so they take part in their learning. The researcher was specifically interested in a) what approaches teachers use during the teaching and learning process b) how

they include learners who have LD to take part in their learning and c) how the philosophy of inclusive education influences the way they approach their lessons.

Methodology

Research Setting

The study was conducted in six primary schools in Botswana, situated in urban, semi-urban and rural areas. All were inclusive schools with a population ranging from 150 to 950. Two schools were chosen from each of urban, semi-urban and rural areas. The reason for choosing schools in different areas was to find out if teaching in such areas had any impact on teachers' pedagogical approaches.

The schools were chosen by education officers based on the information the researcher gave with an understanding that all schools in Botswana are expected to operate within the new policy guidelines of inclusive education. It was assumed in this study that since inclusive education has been adopted by the government of Botswana as a way of educating all learners, all teachers would be aware of the concept of inclusion and their understanding would provide valuable information to this study. In each school, classroom observations were carried out and teachers were interviewed and documents were obtained and analyzed.

Working Group

The sample size of the study was 14, inclusive of teachers, Heads of departments (Learning disabilities) and head-teachers. The choice of teacher participants in each school was made by head-teachers based on our discussions. Teachers who participated were purposely chosen from different sections: lower (STD 1-3), middle (STD 4-5) and upper (STD 6-7). For example: each section had two or four classes and only one teacher was selected from a section. In one school, one teacher would be from upper whereas the other teacher would be from lower section, or it could be lower and middle section depending on how the school found it fit. The reason for choosing participants teaching different standards was to gather balanced information on whether or not teaching a particular standard has an impact on teacher's pedagogical approaches.

Participants chosen were those who had training in special education, those who attended short courses on awareness in special education and those with no training in special education. The reason for this variation was to find out whether or not training in special education has any impact on the way teachers approach their lessons. Furthermore, impromptu interviews were extended to heads of departments (learning Disabilities) as they are referred to in schools to triangulate the data.

Data Collection

A series of steps were followed to collect data for this study. Prior to data collection a certificate of research approval was obtained from the University of Botswana through the office of ORD. Completion of online forms which is a requirement of the Ministry of Education Skills and

Development (Research Unit when seeking permission to do research in Botswana schools was the next step. After receiving the research permit other permits from the Regional Offices for urban, semi-urban and rural areas were obtained. Telephone appointments were then made with head-teachers of all six schools to be involved in the study. At the schools, research permits were produced which clearly outlined the purpose of the study to both the head-teachers and teachers, assuring them it was not an evaluative but an explorative process. Before the actual observation and interviews, there was an opportunity to conference with the teachers and each teacher was asked to provide a schedule for class visits which was agreed upon by both parties.

Data Collection Tool

Multiple data collection methods were employed to obtain information intended to answer the questions of this study: observation, interviews and document analysis. These methods allowed me to obtain a good indication of teachers' understanding of what they were doing in their classrooms. A sound understanding of this process can be achieved if the data collected relates specifically to the 'real life', day-to-day experiences of the teachers (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Data were collected over a period of two months with one week in each school and weekends used for data analysis. The seventh and eighth week were used for data verification i.e. for any missing information and any further clarification on some issues.

Direct Classroom Observations

This study employed direct classroom observations before embarking on interviews. The observations focused on finding out what approaches teachers were using during the teaching and learning process, how they included learners who have LD to take part in their learning and how the philosophy of inclusive education influences the way they approach their lessons.

The duration of observation was 40 minutes per teacher. An observation guide was used with the intention to provide a consistent approach to maintaining field notes, and to enable the focus of the work to be clearly defined. A separate notebook was also kept to record any emerging issues after which the two were collated to support and enhance information recorded during observation. Each participant was afforded an opportunity to clarify any data from the observation notes to assist the researcher in understanding why they did what they did.

In School A, each teacher was observed twice teaching two different subjects whereas in the other five schools teachers were observed once teaching only one lesson. The reason for this approach was that, when observed twice, teachers altered their teaching following the interview from the first lesson. As a result, this could have somewhat affected the outcome of the data, so for that reason only the first lesson was included in the data. All observations were conducted by me (the researcher) and field notes as well as the schedule were maintained for use during data analysis.

Interviews

Unstructured interviews were used, questions were based on the lesson observed and this allowed as much flexibility as possible unlike structured interviews which do not usually allow the interviewer to deviate from a rigid protocol (Esterberg, 2002). Unstructured interviews also allowed me to change or adapt questions to meet the respondent's understanding and/or belief. Furthermore the flexibility allowed the researcher to gain more from the interview. Interviews were conducted immediately after lesson observations to discuss the process of the lesson and their reasons and understandings for their actions. Furthermore interviews were used to find out how their actions and understanding may seem to relate to the national requirements (standards and curriculum).

Using interviews helped the researcher to probe and ask for more clarifications and elaborations to get answers to the research questions. In this case, interviews produced evidence to clarify and articulate the data established by observations. Interviews were conducted at a place and time which was chosen by the participant for their own convenience and comfort. An interview guide was used for head-teachers only; the reason for using an interview guide was to make sure all issues of concern were addressed. The duration of interviews was between 15-25 minutes for each teacher and head-teachers and since interviews were tape recorded this gave the researcher an opportunity to listen to them repeatedly to capture exactly what the participant said. After each interview, participants and the researcher listened to the tapes to verify points as well as ensuring accuracy and clarity. All audio tapes were transcribed before the analysis stage.

Document Analysis

Documentary evidence was used in this research to supplement information obtained by other methods. For this particular study, teachers' lesson notes, children's exercise books were used. Having gained access to the documents selected for document review, data that was of interest was gathered. Studying the sources gradually helped the researcher to gain comprehensive knowledge on what type of approaches teachers were using to teach. One advantage of this method is that it enabled the review of documents repeatedly to understand the issue under study. As indicated by Bell (1993) document analysis allows the researcher to 'squeeze the last drop' from each document. As Stake (1995:68) also posits that 'documents serve as substitutes for records of activity that the researcher could not observe directly'. These records assisted the researcher by providing information she could not gain from interviews and observations.

Data Management

After collecting data from the first school, the researcher immediately began her analysis by listening to interview tapes, reading the interview scripts, observational notes and teachers' lesson notes. This was a way of finding out what alterations to make or what to add before going into other schools. Having collected all the data from all schools, it was organized and interpreted guided by levels of coding from Creswell (2005) which are 1) open coding 2) axial coding and 3) selective coding.

Level 1: Audio-recorded interviews were transcribed manually and were filed in a notebook leaving space for coding, memos and notes. Field notes were revised and documents reviewed. Each page of transcriptions and field notes were coded in the upper right-hand corner for easy identification of various sources. Transcripts were re-read several times in order to get a sense of the whole data before breaking it into parts. The next stage was to write memos in the margins of the text which were key phrases, ideas and concepts occurring to me. Through this process, data was sorted according to unique information for each school, ‘developing tentative ideas about categories and relationships’ (Maxwell, 2005). This was an initial process which helped in exploring the database (Creswell, 2005). Data was read and re-read in order to develop categories and themes, and as Miles & Huberman (1994) explain, such coding allowed the researcher to fracture the data thereby reaching higher levels of abstraction by seeing the data in different groupings.

Level 2: The second step was to apply these categories and relationships and to compare the commonalities across all schools. This was the beginning of emergence of themes common to all schools. Thereafter, data was collated into one data set so that it could easily be managed from one point. Having done this, the relationship between categories were established and helped to group them into coding families. The interrelations between all established categories resulted in these categories falling under a label relevant to them.

Level 3: Once this process of merging those with a close relationship was completed, all steps were revisited to cross check for any information that might have been missed before analyzing the data.

Data Analysis

Approaches used by teachers

Regarding what approaches teachers use during the teaching and learning process, data from observation analysis (OBS) and from document analysis (DA) revealed that classroom discourse was mostly characterized by the following pedagogical approaches: discussions, question and answer and whole class teaching [where the teacher stands in front of the class and teaches while learners are listening]. Only two teachers (from schools A and D) were observed employing small group teaching and outside classroom teaching. Under the section of instructional strategies in teachers’ preparation notes, methods dominating were question and answer and discussion while outside classroom teaching, and small group teaching methods were stated and used by only two teachers. Data from classroom observations corroborated teachers’ preparation notes where most statements focused on what the teacher will do as opposed to what learners will do.

Following are two examples of how teachers approached their lessons and their reasons for using these approaches: The first one is an excerpt from the Setswana (native language) lesson observed (Standard 3).

Teacher A: Balang mafoko a a latelang (Read the following words on the board)

Whole class: gagamatsa (tighten), bofa (tie)

Teacher A: mafoko a raya... (These words mean) (Teacher explains what words mean)

Teacher A: Jaanong kwalang mafoko mo dibukeng tsa lona (Now write these words in your exercise books)

(OBS: 1). Teacher A School B. 11/02/17.

The second excerpt is from a Creative and Performing Arts – CAPA lesson (Standard 6) observed and this is what transpired:

Teacher: In your small groups I want you to go to the library section and research about the objects you brought to class. [Learners go to the library to research]

[Upon their return] Teacher: In your small groups I want you to discuss and share information on what you discovered. [Learners sit and discuss]

Teacher: Now let's have groups reporting on what they found. [Each group goes to the front and shares with the whole class]

Teacher: Each of you now draw the object you liked most

[Learners individually drew their choice of object]

(OBS: 2). Teacher B School B. 11/02/17.

The above excerpts demonstrate two different ways of how teachers approached their lessons. The first teacher employed whole class approach where the teacher is dominating the teaching and learning process whereas the second teacher used small group and inquiry approaches where learners were given the opportunity to construct their own learning. During the post lesson interview, when Teacher B was asked about the choice of approaches she employed during classroom teaching, she remarked: 'If you just lecture to these students they won't learn, some of them will not learn. They learn better in their small groups when they get to see things for themselves'.

It could be concluded that the two teachers had different ideologies when it comes to pedagogical approaches. It seemed that Teacher B believed in learning by discovery while Teacher A believed in using a whole class approach where the teacher is more dominant than the learners.

Class sizes

Data suggested that most teachers with large class sizes believed in a whole class approach where transmitting knowledge while learners were regarded as passive recipients of knowledge was the best method they can employ to teach all learners. 'Group work [meaning teaching all

learners at once] is easy and you can teach at once' (Teacher B School C). Still on the issue of pedagogical approaches, I sampled the Botswana Primary School Syllabi for lower and Upper Classes to find out its philosophical stance regarding pedagogical approaches and they clearly stated that; The syllabus is learner-centered in its approach...It provides learning experiences that aim at enhancing the learners' intellectual development and creativity (p.127).

Understanding of inclusive education

Data from the study suggested that most teachers did not understand the concept of inclusive education as they indicated and felt comfortable in having learners who have LD in their classrooms but nothing suggested that their presence influenced their way of approaching lessons as suggested by the way they planned and delivered the content which was more teacher centered than learner centered.

Discussion

Teachers in the six schools the researcher visited seemed to be mostly preoccupied with transmitting knowledge while learners were regarded as passive recipients of knowledge. The practices of teachers were found to be contrary to research that renders rote learning (learning by repetition) in favor of creating avenues and or opportunities for learners who have LD to construct knowledge (Phillips, 1995). An authoritarian pedagogical style is what, perhaps most saliently characterizes schooling in Botswana (Tabulawa, 2006). Tabulawa argues that these role patterns are antithetical to a learner-centered pedagogy which education policy guidelines advocate for in Botswana. He further argues that teachers see themselves as figures of authority and the child could only be expected to authenticate a pedagogical style in which the relationship between themselves and the teacher is clearly authoritarian. Leyendecker et.al (2008) also alludes to the fact that the assumption may engender cultural conflict because it challenges the authority vested in teachers as 'the' person in the classroom who possesses knowledge. Traditional education functioned as a legitimation of the Tswana social structure where the aged act as repositories of wisdom. Obiakor & Offor (2011) explain that adults were considered role models as they handed-down family traditions from one generation to another.

The pervasiveness of the use of teacher-centered approaches in Botswana classrooms have been reported in previous studies. Cohen et al (2001), in their study in Botswana, observed that the most striking features of contemporary classrooms today were a formal style as characterized by strict, overt discipline, a high degree of social distance between teachers and students, a 'chalk and talk' type of lesson with little interaction between one student and the another, individual work with no talking and emphasis on book work. Tabulawa (2006) suggests that is because of the authoritarianism inherent in Tswana society where the elder is the one to speak while the child listens. The researcher noted, however, that the Botswana Primary school syllabi (2005) indicates that, teaching and learning is expected to be learner-centered. Findings from observations in the schools visited revealed that most lessons taught were mostly characterized by undemocratic lesson approaches (mostly teacher-centered) (see OBS: 1). Evidence from findings revealed that Botswana classrooms were undemocratic if we go by observations made

by Lumadi and Awino that for democracy to prevail in Botswana classrooms, learners should be seen as contributing members of the class and their decisions be incorporated in the teaching and learning process. In support of this idea, in his paper entitled 'Democracy in Botswana', Masire (2006) observed that participating and inclusive democracy was practiced in Botswana, he gave an example of the Kgotla (traditional meeting assembly) as a system that has a participating arrangement, where everyone is allowed to give his or her opinion so that it can be discussed and the good of it taken advantage of. This shows that although government allows a process of democratic interplay that should provide a favorable environment towards democratization of the Botswana classrooms (Lumadi & Awino, 2009), the real practice in classrooms does not support the government's view of democracy.

Use of undemocratic lesson approaches is confirmed by Polelo (2005) in his study 'Inside undemocratic schools' in Botswana, he found that most teaching in classrooms was teacher-centered and was punctuated by recitation and rote learning. Tabulawa (2006) cautions that learner centeredness is a political and ideological scheme to transform human relations even though it is encapsulated in value free educational terms. What happened in the classrooms observed supports Tabulawa's argument because teachers' actions reflected the Tswana tradition of speaking being left to the elderly. As a result, expecting teachers to easily ignore this tradition may not be as easy as the governments' guidelines suggest. Therefore, learner centered approaches might not be compatible with such beliefs due to different personal and contextual factors. Furthermore Akyeampong (2001) in his paper 'Conceptualizing Teacher Education in the African Context' argued that progressive teaching methods such as 'child centered', reflective practice approaches stand little chance of gaining ground in classroom practice because school textbooks and curriculum documents are written mostly in a deterministic style that corresponds with and validates the prescriptive and authoritarian structure of teaching and learning. Furthermore, Leyendecker et al (2008) point out that examination system is aligned less with active learning and learner centered pedagogy and more with direct instruction, pushing the teaching to be more teacher centered.

Findings emanating from the study seem to confirm John Locke's theory where he postulated that 'the mind was a blank slate or tabula rasa, and that we are born without innate ideas, and knowledge is instead determined only by experience derived from sense perception' (Locke 1991:5). This was evidenced by teachers' presuppositions that they have to imprint ideas on learners rather than treating them as people with an innate ability to construct knowledge. Findings in earlier research (Mitchell, 2008; Leyendecker et.al, 2008) challenges educators to develop a wide repertoire of teaching strategies and move away from assuming that learners in every class are a homogeneous group, and above all encourage educators to listen to 'hidden voices' in order to make schools and classrooms more inclusive. Miles & Singal (2010) argue that inclusive education challenges didactic, teacher-centered teaching practices and so opens up opportunities for developing better pedagogy and greater competence. However, Tomlinson

(2002) strongly warned, teachers ignoring these fundamental differences may result in waning students' motivation which ultimately results in some learners falling through the cracks in the process of learning. Glat et al (2007: 7) position this by pointing out that this is the point where inclusion is no longer a philosophy, an ideology or a policy, becoming instead a concrete action in real-life situations, involving individuals with specific difficulties and needs. On the contrary, Tabulawa (2006) argues that to expect teachers to shift from the known pedagogical paradigm (transmission-reception pedagogical style) which informs their world is not an easy thing. What Tabulawa suggests here, according to Lumadi & Awino (2009), is that people are usually resistant and afraid of change. The idea of change means moving from the comfort zone which teachers are used to; this then calls for understanding the socio-cultural and historical roots of education development in Botswana. Without high quality initial training, teachers largely teach the way they were taught therefore it is difficult for them to adapt and adopt learner centered pedagogy (Leyendecker et. al 2008) In his ethnographic study of Botswana teachers' pedagogical classroom practices, Tabulawa (2006) noted that: The historical and empirical evidence... indicates that the authoritarian pedagogical style that so much characterizes classroom practice in Botswana has evolved over a long period of time and is now part of the immunological condition of the education system. Pedagogic innovations that are not pre-adapted to this condition would not be easily institutionalized.

It must be noted that counter to the argument brought forth by Tabulawa about teacher centered approaches in most Botswana schools, National Curricular in Botswana seek to promote such skills as analysis, creativity, critical thinking and problem solving. The aim of this reform is to enable teachers to move away from standard "learning by rote" methods and to utilize alternatives that encourage inquiry among students as they develop, research and reflect on new ideas (Leyndecker, et. al 2008).

In terms of using socio-cultural contexts as a framework for understanding the dominant pedagogical styles in classrooms visited during this study, Tabulawa is arguing that pedagogical change is simply not a technical matter, and that is because pedagogical practices really reflect the evolution of certain social values, real change can only occur if they are born out of existing realities shaped by these values. Research has shown that resistance to pedagogical changes is indeed due to clash in social values, for example, O'Sullivan found that some Namibian teachers having been educated in the Bantu Education system which did not encourage them to ask questions, to criticize or to develop and express their own ideas were less enthusiastic about reflective teaching approaches (Akyeampong, 2001:6). In the context of the Botswana culture, elders are respected and the role of the young is to refrain from being pre-occupied with questions. The argument presented by these researchers is that such deeply rooted cultural assumptions have contributed to the resistance to educational change in many countries. Akyeampong positions it by pointing out that pedagogical styles are not value-free and as a result, encouraging a dialogic pedagogical stance in cultures that do not share the same epistemological and ontological assumptions about the social construction of knowledge is

unlikely to produce meaningful transfer. Maher (2007) adds that teachers fear that a change in pedagogy from the choral method would lessen their control over students (Kwa-Zulu Natal, South Africa) [Choral method is when the teacher asks children to repeat what she/he says in unison]. Additionally, these findings do not affirm research in inclusive education which places emphasis on planning for multiple intelligences with a basic intention to connect with children's different intelligence strengths (Pritchard, 2005). It seemed that participants of the study took for granted that learners who have LD would naturally learn without considering their varied learning styles [as indicated by the type of methods of teaching they used which were more teacher centered- OBS: 1. Such a perception rested on their belief that when learners do the same activities, they are treated the same. The same treatment as perceived by some participants secures or promotes equality and as a result, they were more concerned in treating learners similarly than meeting their divergent needs through varied instructional provision. Therefore, access to education is questionable if teachers are comfortable with having these learners in classrooms even though they do not necessarily benefit from the teaching and learning process.

Conclusion

If Botswana as a country has to adopt inclusive education as an initiative to educate all its citizens, Ware (2003:160) explains 'we need to move beyond Inclusion as a 'special education initiative' and frame inclusion through a more 'humane understanding of disability'. Given these cultural differences, inclusive education could no longer be a UNESCO model, but it has to become a concept that can be applied differently in different countries. In terms of contribution to theory, the study brings to surface another dimension of understanding curriculum for learning to be beneficial to all learners. Methods of curriculum delivery must be refocused from the traditional curriculum delivery approach which involves uplifting what the curriculum suggests and transmitting it to learners to a more engaging approach which perceives curriculum as much more than subject knowledge. This approach to curriculum delivery allows greater flexibility (open-ended standards) as to what, when, where and how learning will take place as well the role of teachers during classroom interaction. Such an approach could encourage interaction between the teacher, learners and the curriculum. As this interaction occurs, social relations may be developed and this gives the teaching and learning process a totally different approach of understanding that learners may benefit from the process more than they can benefit from the curriculum. Policies mandating exclusive use of summative assessments (tests and examinations) should be a thing of the past if teachers have to change their ways of approaching lessons given the diversity of learners in their classrooms. Vavrus, Thomas & Bartlett (2011) explain the need to have theories and methods associated with the pedagogy to equip the teachers and the teacher educators with practical and effective skills to promote critical thinking and inquiry-based learning through the use of learner centered approaches. Adoption of using learner centered approaches according to data in this study was made extremely difficult by overcrowded classrooms. Having discussed that, I now propose a dynamic, constructive relationship between curriculum, teachers and learners hoping to help teachers to move away from teaching 'the

curriculum’ to ‘understanding and developing curricula’. This move is in line with the constructivist way of teaching which embraces treating the learner as the most important feature in the teaching and learning process. Therefore, a paradigm shift is proposed (fig. 1.1)

Fig 1.1 Shift from old ways of approaching curriculum to a more engaging approach. From teaching ‘the curriculum’



Figure 1.1 Teaching ‘the curriculum’

To understanding an interactive inclusive curricula

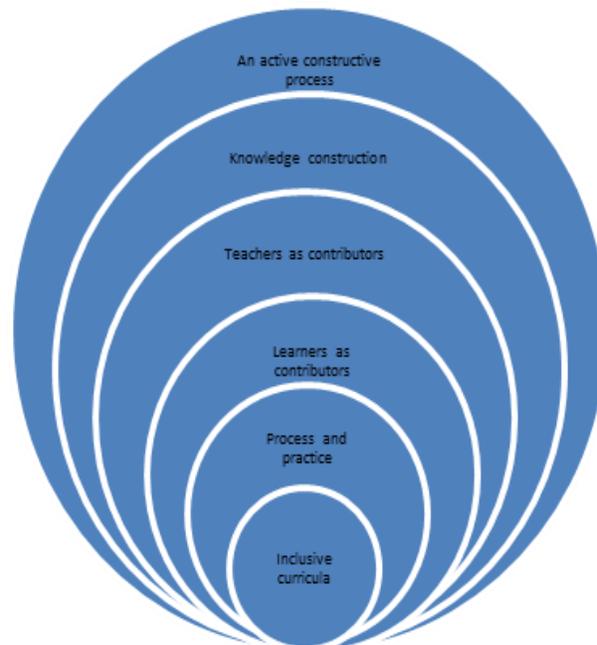


Figure 1.2 Interactive inclusive curricula

As illustrated in figure 1.2 developing curricula require teachers to have an openness to change their old approaches where curriculum has prefabricated content knowledge which has been designed by somebody who is not in touch with the realities of the classroom. This prefabricated content knowledge is then taken and passed to the learner and through tests and examinations some particular outcome is expected. This approach becomes a receptive process because learners are told what to know rather than constructing their own knowledge. An argument brought forth here is that the current approaches of teaching ‘the curriculum’ as suggested by the findings of this study seem to be inadequate in meeting the needs of learners who have LD. Therefore, an alternative approach which focuses on the process and practice of inclusive curricula is suggested. Under this model, learning is constructed and both teachers and learners are considered contributors in the construction of knowledge. Having all these components under this model makes the whole approach an active constructive process which may engage learners to build their confidence, self-esteem and self-motivation through this kind of interaction. An inclusive curriculum looks at what is feasible, workable and manageable given the uniqueness of individual learners within a given situation.

An inclusive curriculum is interactive and allows learners to contribute towards their own knowledge as well as recognizing the different learning abilities of individual learners. Furthermore, an inclusive curriculum requires pedagogies that respond to the social construction of difference in the school which are conducive, enabling success for all learners.

Recommendations

In light of the findings and the operational parameters of this study, insights gained have opened the ground for future research. These recommendations have implications for policy makers, teacher trainers, teachers and future researchers. This research could be a base for teachers to adopt a different approach of understanding that when learning, children engage in intra and interconnectedness with the rest of the world and therefore should be given opportunities to allow them to do such instead of depending on teachers as repositories of information. It is clear from this study that inclusive education should be defined as a social and cultural discipline, because limiting its definition could be difficult in some settings leading to it becoming a complex and problematic concept.

Artiles & Dyson in (Mitchell, 2008) argue that ‘inclusive education is a multi-dimensional phenomenon with different countries developing not simply at different rates but in quite different directions.’ Therefore, there is a need for policy makers to define inclusive education in a way that would reflect the culture and beliefs of Botswana. Such a move may ensure effective and systematic implementation of inclusive education in Botswana schools which may benefit all learners resulting in becoming members of school community not visitors in regular classrooms. The study showed that what was happening in schools and classrooms as a way of implementing inclusive education was not what policy guidelines were reflecting. This showed that there was disconnect between policy and practice. Therefore, this can be a base for research which will

focus on closing the gap between policy and practice and also, this has the potential to improve strategies in considering participation of stake-holders for the implementation of inclusive education. This study has the potential to influence teacher trainers to incorporate policy issues into their programs in order for teacher trainees to create knowledge based future developments. Also, the study can help schools produce reports on how learners who have LD are helped and how remediation is used to best address the needs of these learners.

Having undertaken this research from the Botswana context, these recommendations may not be applicable to other contexts but they may add much to the understanding of why teachers' dominant pedagogical approaches seem not to be giving learners opportunities to fully participate in their own learning. For us to think of ethics and justice in education, a fundamental shift is necessary. Finally, future researchers willing to take similar research may find it useful depending on their area of inquiry.

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