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Teachers Perceived Competency for Inclusive Education

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Abstract:

This study was conducted to assess the teachers' perceptions of competence for inclusive education. In conducting the study, a total of 497 subjects were randomly taken from 21 second cycle primary schools. The study was carried out at southwestern Ethiopia. Questionnaires and attitude scales were employed in order to gather data. In the analysis of the collected data, quantitative method was employed. Following extensive literature review of teachers' competencies related to Special Educational Needs (SEN), a questionnaire was developed and adopted. It was tested and used to collect data for the study. The findings of the study traces that teachers have positive attitude to inclusion; however, they need training on SEN. In addition, the study showed that teachers showed lack of confidence in their competencies in most dimensions. Authors recommended modifying the existing in service and pre-service teachers training to include competencies related to SEN. It also recommended that provision for continuing professional development and consultancy support for teachers; which in turn will help teachers to develop their confidence and facilitate implementation of inclusive education.

Keywords: Competence, inclusive education, teachers' perceived competence

1. Introduction

Inclusive education has been internationally recognized as a philosophy for attaining equity, justice and quality education for all children, especially those who have been traditionally excluded from mainstream education for reasons of disability, ethnicity, gender or other characteristics (CRS, 2010). Now day's regular schools across Ethiopia are moving towards such philosophy towards the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general classroom.

Historically, Public Law 94-142, the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act* of 1975, is the landmark legislation that assured access to public education for all students, regardless of disability (Keogh, 2007). To implement and practice inclusive education it is important to insure that teachers have the essential competences they require in order to be effective in the teaching learning process.

"revise and strengthen the professional profile of all teaching professions [by] reviewing the effectiveness as well as the academic and pedagogical quality of Initial Teacher Education, introducing coherent and adequately resourced systems for recruitment, selection, induction and professional development of teaching staff based on clearly defined competences needed at each stage of a teaching career, and increasing teacher digital competence". (European Commission 2012a)

Such reforms need to be founded upon a shared agreement in each education system about what it takes to be a high quality teacher: what competences (knowledge, skills and attitudes) they need, how these can be understood, described and deployed and what policies and practical provisions can support teachers to acquire and develop them throughout their careers (European Commission 2013).

Inclusion is based on the philosophy that all students are different in any number of ways (not limited to disability), and in order to meet their learning needs, schools need to adapt and change their practices (Kinsella and Senior, 2008; Oliver, 1990). Under an inclusive philosophy, schools exist to meet the needs of all students regardless of their backgrounds; therefore, if a student is experiencing difficulties, most probably the problem may be with the schooling practices not with the student. To respond the specific needs of children, teachers' competence in teaching students with special needs has great impact.

Teachers are asked to teach in increasingly multicultural classrooms, integrate students with special needs, use ICT for teaching effectively, engage in evaluation and accountability processes, and involve parents in schools (OECD, 2009). Furthermore, a recent World Summit on Teaching noted that teachers need to help students acquire not only "the skills that

are easiest to teach and easiest to test” but more importantly, ways of thinking (creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving, decision-making and learning); ways of working (communication and collaboration); tools for working (including information and communications technologies); and skills around citizenship, life and career and personal and social responsibility for success in modern democracies” (OECD 2011).

The inclusion of children with disabilities in regular classrooms is now a worldwide trend that has been growing in popularity during the last three decades. Several developed countries (e.g., USA, UK, Canada and Australia) have legislation or policies that emphasize an inclusive model of teaching students with diverse needs in regular classrooms. Similarly, several developing countries including Ethiopia have now formulated policies (MoE,2006; MoE,2012) that support the broader principles of inclusive education to educate students with specialized needs (Kuyini and Desai, 2007; Wu-Tien, Ashman and Yong-Wook, 2008). This change in the needs of students at classroom level over this period of time has made it necessary for higher education to change their teacher education practices. Ethiopia, for example, has made it a mandatory requirement for all teachers to complete a subject in special needs or inclusive education. The requirement is based on the premise that without such training, teachers will not be able to meet the needs of diverse student populations in their classrooms (Kuyini and Desai, 2007; Sharma, Forlin and Loreman, 2008; Winter, 2006). Inclusion of special needs education in all teacher education programs as an introductory course is very important but alone that will not facilitate sufficient support to learners with disabilities and learning difficulties. Such an introduction will help teachers to identify special educational needs, but more professional assistance is needed to support teachers in ordinary schools and to provide active learning for students who need education in special classes (MOE, 2006).

Implementing inclusive education is not an easy task and requires significant change to facilitate improvements in the way teachers have been working in the classroom. Although an earlier common misconception was that inclusion is just about placement of students with diverse learning needs in regular classrooms, more recently, researchers argue that it is much more than placement (e.g., Winter, 2006). It is about the quality of the school experience and about how far they are helped to learn, achieve and participate fully in the life of the school (DES, 2004).

Teaches competence in inclusion setting is a central determinant of students' achievement mainly for students with special needs. The demand to educate students with disabilities in inclusive education setting continues to grow worldwide. Following the passage of several national and international instruments, it has become a major policy focus in Ethiopia as well. The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (1995), the Education and Training Policy of Ethiopia (1994), The Special Needs Education Program (2006), the Education Sector Development Program IV (ESDP IV-2010-2015) and the Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP-2010-2015) are some of the major pertinent government documents which promote the right of persons with disabilities in Ethiopia.

The Special Needs Education (SNE) Strategy Program stresses that inclusive education to be the road map to realize access, equity and quality education at all levels of the educational system. It emphasizes that schools should ensure whenever possible the education of students with disabilities and their peers without disabilities to be in the same place. A natural corollary of such expectation is that regular classroom teachers would be required to possess the appropriate attitudes, knowledge and skills in order to fulfill their new roles of teaching students with special needs in their classes and responsibilities.

All teachers are expected to welcome children with diverse learning needs into their classrooms and provide them access to the general curriculum. As greater numbers of children with special needs education are expected to spend more time in general education classrooms than special schools, the quality of their instruction and the services necessary to meet their needs have become a more integrated feature of the learning environment.

Regular school teachers are, now, increasingly required to be sensitive to the curricular needs, styles of learning and levels of motivation of students with disabilities. They are expected to design appropriate learning materials and to adapt instruction to meet the educational needs of students with disabilities. Specifically, they would be required to design, implement and evaluate the educational program which had to be based on the students' assessed needs. They would also be required to participate in Individual Education Program (IEP) meetings and work in partnership with special education teachers, paraprofessionals, parents and other service providers (Ashman & Elkins, 2009). Kochhar & West (1996) emphasize that in inclusive education classrooms regular school teachers are required to teach content differently: it must be integrative, flexible and interdisciplinary. In contrast to traditional, teacher-centered instructional approaches in which the teacher stands in front of the classroom and 'lectures' to the entire class, in the inclusive classroom, the focus shifts from teaching to learning. It is further suggested that regular classroom teachers are now required to create situations in which active student learning is maximized.

The education and support of children with special needs demands highly educated, skilled, and professionally autonomous and committed teachers who can adapt teaching and curricula to the needs and resources of pupils with learning and other difficulties, and for school leaders who are change agents in the development of their schools. But it was observed that some regular education teachers view the inclusive setting as difficult and stressful especially when they need to collaborate with related service professionals such as psychologists or speech, physical or occupational therapists (Friend & Cook, 2012). The question of whether teachers are well-equipped to tackle this challenge is a critical one. The researchers' experiences show that there is acute shortage of pieces of research carried out in the area of teachers' competency in inclusion

in Ethiopia. As Ethiopia is moving towards the realization of inclusive education, it is important to determine teachers' perception of their own competence for such relatively new approach of school settings.

2. Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to find out teachers' perceived competence in inclusive education. The objectives of this study were to:

- To determine teachers' competency level with respect to teaching in inclusive setting.
- To find out the relationships between teachers' competency and their experiences and demographic factors such as age, gender, educational qualification, teaching experience, experience of teaching children with disabilities, contact with persons with disabilities, in-service or pre-service training on inclusive education.

3. Methods and Procedures

A descriptive survey study was designed to effectively examine teachers' perceived competence for inclusive education. For the study quantitative research design was employed to determine teachers' perceived competence as well as the relationship among variables. Second cycle government school teachers were sources for the data gathered.

Geographically, this study focused on parts of south western Ethiopia. Which was selected purposively; this helped the researchers to easily gather relevant information comparatively in nearby environment. From six zones and one special woreda; 21 government primary schools were selected randomly. The zones were Jimma; Illu aba babor; East Wolega; Weast Wolega; Kaffa and Kelem Wolega, and yem special woreda.

A total of 497 teachers participants were selected randomly to fill questionnaires (competency scale). Out of these 262 were males; 235 were females. All participants were full time teaching staff in selected schools.

For data collection document analysis and questionnaires were used. The questionnaire was (Likert type five-point competency scale), developed and adopted to examine the teachers perceived competency for inclusion with necessary modification. It was reviewed and improved by experts. The instrument was prepared in English language then translated to participant teachers' mother tongue with appropriate language experts. The questionnaire was piloted before actual use. Here vague items, unclear idea or ambiguous items, etc. were corrected based on the feedback. Moreover, the experts reviewed and evaluated the questions' validity for measuring the variables that relate to the competency of teachers for inclusion.

First, before developing the instruments, related literature was made and items were prepared in English. Next, considering the difficulty of the English language for the subjects, the items were translated into Amharic and Afaan oromoo before pilot testing. Instructors from special needs and inclusive education and psychology department of the Jimma University translated the items to Amharic and Afaan oromoo language. Instructors from English department of Jimma University translated the Amharic and Afan Oromoo version back to English. The difference appeared in the forward and backward translations was corrected by the translators jointly and rewritten accordingly.

Finally, the instruments were tested on a pilot study. It was carried out on 20 (12 male and 8 female) teachers at Jimma Jiren primary school. Respondents were selected randomly; But none of them included in the main study. Based on the obtained feedbacks from the pilot test the instruments were redeveloped by the researchers.

The data collecting process had been took place in February and March by the researchers and four field assistants. Prior to administrating the instrument, recruitment was done for assistant data collectors. Then with a letter of permission from Jimma University research and post graduate coordinating office data collecting had been continued for two months in selected study sites.

The analysis of the data was done using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 20 software. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to report the results.

4. Findings

The sample of the study consisted of 497 primary school teachers from 21 government primary second cycle schools in south west Ethiopia. Among the respondents male teachers accounted for about 51.5% of the sample whereas, the female teachers comprised 48.5% which shows each sex almost comprises half of the sample. Most respondents were in the age range which is less than 30 (n = 226). Overall, the majority of respondents were diploma holders (60%). For nearly more than half of them (54.7%) had taken courses related to special needs and inclusive education. On the other hand, small number about (17.5%) of the teachers had got in-service training on special needs and inclusive education. Besides, small number about (20.92%) of the respondents had person with disability as relative, friend or staff member. Nearly half of them (49.25%) had taught student with special educational needs.

Characteristics	Group	Frequency	Percent
sex	Male	256	51.50
	Female	241	48.49
	Total	497	100
Age range	<30	226	45.47
	31-40	192	38.63
	41—50	59	11.87
	50+	20	4.02
	Total	497	100
Educational Level	Degree	131	26.35
	Diploma	300	60.36
	Other	66	13.27
	Total	497	100
Training of SNE in training Institution	Those who obtained training	272	54.72
	Those who didn't obtain training	225	45.27
	Total	497	100
In-service Training of SNE	Those who obtained training	87	17.50
	Those who didn't obtain training	410	82.49
	Total	497	100
Having individual with disability as relative, friend or staff	Who have individual with disability as relative, friend or staff	104	20.92
	Who do not have individual with disability as relative, friend or staff	393	79.07
	Total	497	100
Teaching students with disability	Those who used to teach	245	49.29
	Who never taught	252	50.70
	Total	497	100

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of respondents (n=497)

4.1. Gender

In order to test whether there is statistically significant difference in teachers' perceived competence due to gender difference (between male and female) independent sample t-test was computed. The result indicated that there was no significant difference at $p < 0.05$ in male and female teachers' perceived competence towards teaching students with disabilities in inclusive setting ($t=0.62$, $df=495$, $p=0.537$).

4.2. Age of Teachers

To determine whether there is statistically significant difference in perceived competence among teachers due to their age group (<30, 31—40, 41—50, 50+) a One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was computed. The result indicated that there was significant difference in the four age group among teachers' perceived competence towards teaching students with disabilities in inclusive setting ($F=6.42$, $p=0.0001$). Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for age group <30 ($M=81.83$ $SD=11.96$) was significantly different from the age group 40-50 ($M = 88.69$ $SD=6.81$).

4.3. Educational Level

To see whether there is statistically significant difference in teachers' perceived competence towards teaching students with disabilities in inclusive setting due to their educational level (Degree, Diploma, Others) One way ANOVA was computed. The result indicated that there was no significant difference at $p < 0.05$ in the three educational levels among teachers perceived competence towards inclusion of students with disabilities ($F=1.626$, $p=0.198$).

4.4. Teaching Experience

The mean of the group indicates that teachers participated in the study have good teaching experiences ($M=13.7$, $SD=9.4$). research out puts indicate that longer student teaching experiences, concurrent with coursework, led to better teaching and a more sustained commitment to the teaching profession.

4.5. Training on Special Needs Education (SNE)

To test whether there is statistically significant difference in perceived competence among teachers due to exposure to pre-service training course in special needs and inclusive education between groups who attended training ($n=272$ $M=85.88$ $SD=8.85$) and those who didn't attend training ($n=225$ $M=79.62$ $SD=13.68$), independent sample t-test was computed. The result indicated that there was statistically significant difference at $p<0.05$ ($t=6.146$, $p=0.0001$) in teachers perception about their competence towards inclusion of students with disabilities among groups who attended training and those who didn't attend training. Moreover, the analysis for in-service training of special needs and inclusive education between groups who attended training ($n=87$ $M=83.75$ $SD=11.13$) and those who didn't attend training ($n=410$ $M=82.89$ $SD=11.84$), was statistically not significant at $p<0.05$, ($t=6.22$, $p=0.534$) level.

4.6. Exposure to Persons with Disability

To assure whether there is statistically significant difference in perceived competence among teachers who have person with disability as relative, friend or staff member ($n=104$ $M=83.33$ $SD=10.79$) and those who didn't have person with disability as relative, friend and staff member ($n=393$ $M=82.97$ $SD=11.95$), independent sample t-test was computed. The result reveals that there was statistically not significant at $p<0.05$ ($t=0.28$, $p=0.77$) level which is greater than 0.05.

The analysis for teaching students with disability between groups who taught student with disability ($n=245$ $M=85.43$ $SD=9.51$) and those teachers who never taught students with disability ($n=252$ $M=80.72$ $SD=13.12$), showed that there was statistically significant difference at $p<0.05$, ($t=4.571$, $p=0.0001$) in perception of their competence towards inclusion of students with disabilities among groups who taught students with disability and those who never taught students with disability.

4.7. Knowledge about Disability

To determine whether there is statistically significant difference in perceived competence among teachers based on their understanding levels (having low level of understanding about disability issues, having medium level of understanding about disability issues and having high level of understanding about disability issues) One-way ANOVA was computed. The result indicated that there was significant difference in the three understanding levels among teachers' perceived competence towards teaching students with special educational needs in inclusive setting ($F=22.70$, $P=0.0001$).

Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for group having high level of understanding about disability issues ($M=86.90$, $SD=10.34$) was significantly different than the group having low level of understanding about disability issues group ($M=76.73$, $SD=14.61$).

5. Conclusion

This study encompasses the results of descriptive survey conducted on 497 subjects consisting of 256 male and 241 female teachers. The research questions were designed to collect information on to what is the relationship between teachers' competency and in-service or pre-service training, to what extent relationship exist between teachers' competence and training on special needs education and demographic factors. Based on the discussions made, the following conclusions are drawn.

Urgent attention is required in terms of teachers' professional development education, as shown by the results which demonstrated a definite lack of knowledge and skills concerning meeting the learning needs of students with special educational needs. It was obvious that regular teachers consider themselves to be inadequately equipped to meet the needs of pupils with SEN, and become more self-confident as their professional development is allowed through in-service provision (Avramidis et al, 2000; Larivee, 1981; Mittler, 2000; Okpanachi, 1995). However, a foundation for all the in-service updating could be laid in all initial teacher training courses. Hence, there should be a significant element of preparation in this respect before new teachers start their career.

Pupils with SEN are taught in the same school environment without any modification to the buildings to facilitate their learning and movement. Other physical resources, such as learning aids and teaching materials are extremely rare as to-date, only children with minor disability are accepted at basic schools and are taught with the available resources made for children without SEN. This is, perhaps not surprising given the lack of proper evaluation of the likely demand prior to implementation of the policy; it is entirely in keeping with the literature which emphasizes the importance of supporting teachers with appropriate physical resources (Avramidis and Norwich, 2002).

The positive orientation to inclusion amongst the teachers in the current study, suggests that the request for more specialist human resources is a first step in their own overall learning process, that is to say, that with the opportunity to observe specialist teachers at work, this reflects the situations encountered elsewhere in the world when integration was in its early stages. Allocating pupils with SEN in mainstream classrooms with teachers who have neither the knowledge nor skills to include them effectively may well result in complaints from parents, and indeed from other children. Indeed, the teachers in this study believed that in-service training was their most pressing need. However, pre-service training in SEN should be included for new teachers as mentioned earlier.

In respect of the widespread comments regarding the need for more specialist teachers and the need to develop more skills in mainstream staff, the academic progress of children with special needs is clearly also dependent upon the expertise of

those delivering the curriculum. There is a good opportunity that when the initial problems of implementation have been addressed, greater ability to manage children with special educational needs will eventually result in greater academic achievements on their part.

The findings of this study have highlighted the need of mainstream school teachers in study sites for the competencies required to enable them to meet the needs of children with SEN. There is a need for a range of suitable training and advice to be available and accessible and known about, so teachers can avail themselves of it as and when they need it, and in the form that is most convenient and acceptable to them. With this consideration in mind, the authors recommended that:

- Teachers' training institutions should include compulsory components that prepare trainees for including children with SEN in the mainstream classroom.
- More advanced in-service training should be designed for those teachers who have already developed some skills, to make them more competent.
- Educational institutions have to critically revise and analyze the content and the means of delivery of the in-service trainings. It needs to integrate theoretical and practical aspects of special needs and inclusive education.
- In-service training courses of varying length and format should be made available as part of a program of professional development, to enhance teachers' skills and confidence in dealing with pupils with SEN.

6. Appendix

Jimma University
College of Education and Behavioural Science
Self-Efficacy in Implementing Inclusive Practices Scale

The purpose of this survey is to determine the primary school teachers' perception of competence toward inclusion and to gather information about the types of training and experience that teachers have. There is no right or wrong answers so please address the questions to the best of your knowledge and provide us with what you believe. This information will remain confidential as to individual responses.

Thank you!

Section I- Demographic Information

1. Gender: Male Female
2. Age: Less than 30 31-40 41-50 51 +
3. Education level: Degree Diploma Other
4. Field of your study _____

Section II: Your Training and Experience

5. Years of teaching experience: _____
6. Did you learn special needs education course in university or college?
A. Yes B. No
7. Did you get any in-service training which is related to special needs education?
A. Yes B. No
8. If yes, how much time _____
9. Do you have friend or relative with disability?
A. Yes B. No
10. Do you have experience of teaching students with disability?
A. Yes B. No
11. How do you assume the knowledge you have about students with disabilities and special needs education?
A. Low B. Medium C. High

Section III: Teacher Efficacy to Implement Inclusive Practice

Instruction: Please mark '√' on the number that best represents your opinion about each of the statements. Please attempt to answer each question

1 2 3 4 5
Strongly disagree Disagree Agree somewhat Agree Strongly agree

No.	Statement	SA	A	ASW	D	SD
1.	I can use a variety of assessment strategies (for example, portfolio assessment, modified tests, performance-based assessment, etc.	5	4	3	2	1
2.	I am able to provide an alternate explanation or example when students are confused	5	4	3	2	1
3.	I am confident in designing learning tasks so that the individual needs of students with disabilities are accommodated	5	4	3	2	1

4.	I can accurately gauge student comprehension of what I have taught	5	4	3	2	1
5.	I can provide appropriate challenges for very capable students.	5	4	3	2	1
6.	I am confident in my ability to get students to work together in pairs or in small groups.	5	4	3	2	1
7.	I am confident in my ability to prevent disruptive behavior in the classroom before it occurs.	5	4	3	2	1
8.	I can control disruptive behavior in the classroom.	5	4	3	2	1
9.	I am able to calm a student who is disruptive or noisy.	5	4	3	2	1
10.	I am able to get children to follow classroom rules.	5	4	3	2	1
11.	I am confident when dealing with students who are physically aggressive.	5	4	3	2	1
12.	I can make my expectations clear about student behavior.	5	4	3	2	1
13.	I can assist families in helping their children do well in school.	5	4	3	2	1
14.	I can improve the learning of a student who is failing.	5	4	3	2	1
15.	I am able to work jointly with other professionals and staff (e.g., aides, other teachers) to teach students with disabilities in the classroom.	5	4	3	2	1
16.	I am confident in my ability to get parents involved in school activities of their children with disabilities.	5	4	3	2	1
17.	I can make parents feel comfortable coming to school.	5	4	3	2	1
18.	I can collaborate with other professionals (e.g., itinerant teachers or speech pathologists) in designing educational plans for students with disabilities.	5	4	3	2	1
19.	I am confident in informing others who know little about laws and policies relating to the inclusion of students with disabilities.	5	4	3	2	1
20.	I am confident in adapting school-wide or state-wide assessment so that students with all disabilities can be assessed	5	4	3	2	1

Table 2

7. References

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