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Article abstract

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Non-Teaching Stakeholders' Experiences with Inclusive Education in a Private School in Jamaica

Kishi Anderson Leachman
The University of Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

Abstract

The literature is sparse on understanding the experiences of stakeholders with inclusive education in the Caribbean. Using a qualitative single case study, this study explores the lived experiences with inclusive education of non-teaching stakeholders (principal, dean of discipline, guidance counsellor, parents, and educational assistants) in a private school in Jamaica. Data was collected using individual interviews, focus group discussions and secondary data. Thematic analysis was used to interpret and present findings. Key findings revealed supportive school leadership, inconsistent teacher competence and pedagogy, controversies with educational assistants, and parental denial as barriers that undermine inclusivity. Leadership support that goes beyond the principal to include the school board of directors was highlighted as an important consideration. The study provides other implications and recommendations for the inclusive classroom in the Jamaican educational milieu. Although the findings are specific to this case, they can be transferred and applied to inclusive education in other contexts regionally and globally to inform inclusive practices and considerations.

Keywords: Inclusive education; disabilities; non-teaching stakeholders; private school; Jamaica.

Introduction

Inclusive education has gained significant attention in many education systems across the world as it attempts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) which states that by 2030, all citizens should be given inclusive quality education and lifelong learning opportunities (UNESCO, 2017; 2020). Inclusive education is defined as a process of transformation and an effective way to provide all children an equal chance to go to the same school, learn, and develop the skills they need to succeed during their lifetime (UNESCO, 2017; IIEP-UNESCO, 2019). Researchers argue that regular schools with (an) inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building a global inclusive society, and achieving education for all (Ainscow, 2020; European Council of National Association of Independent Schools, 2017). However, this requires transformation and systems change (Schuelka, 2018).

Many successful and unsuccessful efforts have been made to support inclusive and equitable education in public schools, (Anthony, 2011; Singal et al., 2015; Subbey, 2020; Opoku et al., 2021), but there has been less focus on the practice of inclusive education and exploring and understanding the experiences of stakeholders in private schools (Genovesi et al., 2022; Taylor, 2005). With both the private and public sectors involved in education service provision, Opoku et al (2022) argue that it is critical to pay attention to the implementation of inclusive education in private schools. To know what must be done to improve inclusive education, current systems and practices need to be better understood through the undertaking of quality, in-depth research into inclusive education involving key stakeholders (Ainscow & Miles, 2011; Allan, 2012).

Furthermore, *Macleans* (2024) asserts that in the past, "private school" was usually associated with privilege and, often, a racially, socially, economically, and ethnically homogenous student population, but not so anymore. Rather, private schools have evolved to reflect the diverse tapestry of the nation's population. Fostering inclusivity, combating bias, and quashing discrimination have become paramount for private school administrators, staff, and students alike. Moreover, it is a common assumption that private schools operate differently from government schools in practice, and

the available resources and support they provide are often perceived to be more successful in teaching students. Thus, this study explores the lived experiences of non-teaching stakeholders with inclusive education in a private school in Jamaica using a qualitative case study design. Findings from this study may be used as a sensitization tool into inclusive education, inform inclusive policies and practices to support inclusive education, and bridge the gap of literature on inclusive education in private schools in the Caribbean.

Literature review

The literature is sparse on the experiences of non-teaching stakeholders with inclusive education in both public and private schools (Genovesi et al., 2022; Taylor, 2005). The direct experiences of relevant stakeholders can provide valuable information on factors that facilitate or hinder innovations in inclusive education (Damschroder et al., 2009; UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report Team, 2020). In this study, literature related to school leadership, parental involvement, teacher competence and training, and educational assistants will be discussed.

School leadership

Many educational leaders continue to report that they lack the knowledge and skills to oversee inclusive education programs effectively (Murphy, 2018). Sider et al. (2021) explored the experiences of principals supporting students with disabilities in Canadian schools. These researchers found that principals experience challenges with relationships with their teaching and non-teaching staff within the school and encounter challenges relating to staff, allocation of resources, communication, and parental involvement. Similarly, Lawrence (2015) reported that in Trinidad and Tobago, most of the stakeholders including principals had negative experiences regarding the inclusion of these students (Lawrence, 2015). Earlier researchers contend that when school leaders strategically consider the facilitation of teacher learning, teacher learning is enhanced contributing to a higher quality of teaching and learning (Fullan, 2005; Leithwood & Janzti, 2000). However, they assert that very few inclusive school leaders can effectively facilitate teacher learning. Therefore, they need to develop their knowledge of effective ways to enhance inclusive teacher competence and pedagogy.

The role of the principal in fostering inclusive education for children with disabilities is also paramount. A qualitative analysis of data from stakeholders in six sub-Saharan African countries reported favourable attitudes towards IE for children with disabilities (Hui et al., 2018).
Children with disabilities and their parents in multiple countries appreciated the opportunities for inclusion and learning provided by inclusive education, but also reported instances of peers' bullying and teachers' hostile attitudes (Asamoah et al., 2018; Bannink, Nalugya, & Van Hove, 2020; Brydges & Mkandawire, 2020; Magumise & Sefotho, 2020). They further contend that school principals' experiences can serve as important framing moments to help them in fostering inclusive schools for students with special education needs (SEN).

Another important consideration for school leaders is the assertion made by Glaze (2018), that leaders should ensure that the workplace is devoid of fear and leaders embrace the voices of parents and other stakeholders in decision making. Specific to the Jamaica, Thompson's (2017) suggests that principals in Jamaica should develop a systematic approach to enhance shared leadership with teachers in schools. While leadership experiences and roles are imperative to inclusive education, Ainscow (2020) postulates that forming partnerships that can support and own the process of change is essential.

Parental involvement

Parent involvement is acknowledged as a crucial aspect of the education of students with special needs (Lai & Vadeboncoeur, 2012). Genovesi et al. (2022) studied parents experiences in South Africa and reported that parents explained their children's determination to be like everybody else. Parents equally 'desired to raise their children as *normally* as possible,' although their preferences seemed more nuanced and dependent on the quality of inclusion. In Europe, a study was conducted by

Sukys et al. (2015) with 170 parents of Lithuanian children in inclusive education. They found that only 68.8% of the parents were able to identify their child's specific learning needs and that just over half were involved in the education process at home. Furthermore, one-third of the parents perceived that they were equal partners when communicating with teachers, and more highly educated parents devoted more time to communicating with their children than did parents with a lower level of education. Like other studies (Sider et al., 2021; Bannink et al., 2016; Engelbrecht et al., 2001, 2003; Mangope, 2017; Okyere et al., 2019), Genovesi et al.'s (2022) findings suggest that parents' collaboration with special educators is insufficient, as these are scarcely available.

Teacher competence and training

Teacher training is a fundamental element of inclusion; it is a key factor in improving the professional competence of every teacher, as it contributes to the development of equitable and quality education (United Nations, 2017; Triviño-Amigo et al., 2022) Blackman et al. (2019) postulate that teacher competence should be the focal point of interrogation toward successful inclusive education in the Caribbean. Quality education therefore requires the continuous updating of teacher training (Arnaiz-Sánchez, 2023). Many results have revealed that teachers who have more training in inclusion have more positive attitudes (Bhatnagar & Das, 2014; Kraska & Boyle, 2014; Vaz et al., 2015). They suggest that suggest that long-term training, as well as professional development training, is necessary to affect attitudes.

Researchers argue that there is a need for teachers to understand the meaning of inclusive education, to master inclusive practices and understand what inclusive pedagogy entails (Morina (2020) so that all of them become facilitators of inclusion and not barriers to it (Arnaiz-Sánchez et al., 2023). It is therefore important that teachers are equipped with inclusive strategies to meet all learners' needs. In South Africa, poor collaboration among teachers was reported, where 'teachers in inclusive classes received extraordinarily little support from their colleagues (Genovesi et al., 2022).

Not only is pedagogical training imperative for teachers, but teacher training on how to use Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) as a tool to support the unique needs of individual learners in the classroom (Kovač-Cerović et al., 2016) is essential. Several studies completed in Canada, Asian, and Middle Eastern countries examined IEP use and implementation in the classroom found limited teacher involvement in its development. As a result, this led to frustration (Crawford, 2016) and low teacher efficacy with its use (Gregory, 2015). Teachers need help to improve their ability to use it in inclusive classrooms (Lee et al. (2007). It was recommended that structured mechanisms be put in place that foster collaboration for the development, implementation, and reflection of the IEP to be effective (Crawford, 2016). In Jamaica, individual intervention plans (IIPs), like IEPs are mandatory in special education units which serve only students with SN in public schools (Special Education Policy, 2015) but it is not mandated in private schools

Educational assistants in inclusive settings

Though contextually defined, the role of a shadow aide is to help the children needing to support activities by helping fill in the Gaps in the learning procedure and overall assist the child to create academic and social abilities (Hamid, et al., 2021). They argue that parents and principals have many misconceptions about shadow teachers (Hamid et.al., 2021). However, time spent with educational assistants (EAs) was identified as one of the main support structures necessary to implement inclusion successfully (Anderson, Klassens, & Georgiou (2007). Andersen, et.al. (2023) found that with EAs support, students in a controlled study were able to stay in regular classrooms throughout compulsory education and follow the same progression as their peers in the control group when they transited to upper secondary education. While the efficacy of EAs is controversial, (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2012; Rutherford, 2011; Sansotti & Sansotti, 2012), the presence of EAs is seen as the most desirable form of support by teachers at the beginning of their career, although reliance on educational assistants appears to be diminished as a result of additional experience and professional development (Hemmings & Woodcock, 2011).

Methodology

In this study, I utilized a qualitative single case study design with an embedded unit of analysis to answer the main research question which is, how do non-teaching stakeholders describe their experiences with inclusive education? Creswell (2014) and Yin (2017) describe the Qualitative Case Study (QCS) approach as an exploration of a case over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information. Using a qualitative case study enabled me to gather detailed accounts of participants` experiences. I spent approximately five months at the private school in Jamaica, gathering data to understand the experiences of the participants. The school was selected using a purposive criterion sampling. I developed a list of criteria related to size (over 1000 students), location (accessible), inclusive education practices (currently practices inclusive education) and with no segregated programs. The school that met all the criteria was chosen.

School context

The school is a privately-owned preparatory school located in urban Jamaica. The campus houses 11 classrooms in the kindergarten department and 30 classrooms between Grades 1 and 6. The population is "multi-ethnic" and "multi-national" with students from varying ethnic backgrounds such as Indians, Chinese, Jamaicans, and white Americans. The average teacher-student ratio is 1:25. A teacher assistant is placed in each class. The school has a staff of 75 teachers and a student population of 1,002. There are no trained special education teachers at the primary level at the school; however, the principal has training in Special Education. All teachers have at least a bachelor's degree in early childhood education or primary education.

Currently, the school supports students with autism, intellectual disabilities, attention deficit hyperactivity disorders, learning disabilities, and students requiring behavioural support. The students come from a middle-upper-class socio-economic background as indicated by the occupations of their parents (lawyers, medical doctors, entrepreneurs, teachers, etc.).

Participants, data collection and data analysis

This study involved 12 participants within the case (school) who were purposively selected using criterion sampling. Participants include the principal, dean of discipline, guidance counsellor, 6 parents of students with and without disabilities and 3 educational assistants. Data collection included focus group discussion and individual interviews. For analyzing the data, I combined the first two stages (preparing the data and managing the data) of Creswell (2014) stages of data analysis and the six phases of thematic analysis (familiarity with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining, and naming themes, producing the report) proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). To ensure trustworthiness of the study, I engaged in triangulation to corroborate evidence by employing multiple data collection methods such as focus groups, interviews, observation, and secondary data. Expert collegial audits were done as well as member checking to ensure that what I am representing is what the participants have said and intended to say. Inter-coder reliability was done to minimize biases in the themes generated.

Ethical considerations

Several steps were taken to adhere to the ethical guidelines for recruitment, participation, and data collection such as gaining ethical clearance from the UWI Faculty of Medical Sciences Ethics Committee and official access letter generated by the School of Education to the principal of the school informing the school of the impending study. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the participants who were explicitly reminded that they had the right not to participate and if they chose to participate, they had the right to withdraw at any time.

Limitations of the study

This study explores the experiences of non-teaching stakeholders with inclusive education at one private school; hence, the results cannot be generalized to other schools in Jamaica. However, findings might be transferable to both public and private schools.

Findings

This research sought to answer the main research question: "How do non-teaching stakeholders describe their experiences with inclusive education in a private school? The following four themes emerged from the analysis of the data: supportive school leadership, inconsistent teacher competence and pedagogy, parental denial as a barrier to support.

Supportive school leadership.

The findings show staunch support from school leadership. The participants shared that the principal has a deep desire for change, establishes and maintains a strong relationship with the staff, and her problem-resolution practices were collaborative. For example, the dean of discipline stated that the principal had a good relationship with the principal, and that she felt encouraged by efforts made to resolve conflicts collaboratively. During the interview, "Mrs. Turnbull" articulated with a smile, "Well we have a good relationship with Administration as I have said before whenever there is a problem, we tackle it together as a group"

Ms. Williams, the guidance counsellor, stated that while the principal had always been supportive, it took some time for the school board to recognize the need for inclusive education. This delay affected the decision-making process regarding enrolling students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. Ms. Williams iterated, "I really cannot say that I've been unsupported, but I think what I can say is even the board over time has come to recognize where they need to be and that has helped with the decisions." This suggests that while the principal may support inclusive education in private schools, barriers may come from the school board which governs the major decision process in the overall running of the institution. It can be inferred that school leadership in private schools does not constitute the principal only but considers the school board's significant role in the overall decision-making of these institutions. Hence, successful inclusive education requires the support of both the principal and the school board.

While many stakeholders consider the school leadership to be supportive of inclusive education, some participants highlighted shortcomings with the level of support, especially regarding resources. Some parents expressed satisfaction with the school leadership. For example, Melissa, a parent of a child with a disability, applauded the school leadership for their efforts in meeting their children's needs. Melissa said, "I really appreciate the assistance the principal and the guidance council office provided in helping to address the disabilities of my child."

Inconsistent teacher competence and pedagogy

Findings show that many stakeholders such as the principal, guidance counsellor, and parents voiced concerns about the inclusive teachers' training and teachers' use of strategies. Stakeholders corroborated that teachers need more training in meeting the needs of the students because teaching students with disabilities is different from teaching non-disabled peers in inclusive classrooms. To illustrate her point. Mrs. Turnbull, for example, expressed, "Teachers need more training.... I think they need specialized training because teaching General Ed. and teaching Special Ed. are two totally different things." In addition to the concerns about inclusive teachers' training, stakeholders shared mixed feelings about the teachers' pedagogy with feelings of dissatisfaction more dominant. The principal conceded that the inclusive teachers in her school are not equipped with effective strategies to meet the needs of the students in inclusive classrooms alluding to the use of differentiated strategies. She pointed out that she is not happy with teachers' pedagogy and believes appropriate strategies are not used. She said:

> And so being in a General Ed. classroom, teachers need more strategies as to how to differentiate and how to meet the needs of the children…. All, all the children in the classroom. I am not happy that this is being done adequately.

Slavishly teaching the curriculum and not necessarily allowing for flexibility in their teaching methods was also expressed. She articulated that teachers need to be more creative in how they implement the curriculum. She stated "the curriculum is taught in a very standard way and not adapted to meet the interest of the children. There was a need for more creative approaches to learning."

Parents articulated mixed views on the effectiveness of teaching. One parent shared that teachers were ineffective in meeting the needs of her child with disabilities in the inclusive classroom. She mentioned the need for teachers to pay more attention to her child's needs, but she did not specify any approach used by the teacher. She said:

> There was no direct help from the class teachers with respect to addressing his disabilities……I do not think that the teachers were effective at all in meeting the disabilities of my child. I think that they need to be more involved in paying attention to and addressing the needs of children with disabilities.

On the other hand, Marsha, who is also a parent of a child with disabilities, opined that the teaching was sometimes effective, but it required a lot of reinforcement at home in areas the child did not find interesting such as Integrated Studies. She expressed that the class teacher did not teach some topics in a way that made her child relate to the lesson, supporting a lack of flexibility.

Findings indicate that parents of students with disabilities experienced a lack of individualized instructional support for the students with disabilities in the inclusive classroom. They articulated that while the school identified a shadow [educational assistant] for their children, there was not enough individualized support from the teacher to meet the needs of their children. For example, Susan expressed:

> They (the school) accommodated a shadow [educational assistant] in the class and would provide a slightly elevated level of monitoring prior to the educational assistant. Overall enough support was not being provided on an individual level for him.

Despite the dissatisfaction that parents voiced with the teaching in the inclusive classroom, having the child in the inclusive classroom was the preferred choice as against a special education institution for one parent because it provided her with the opportunity to compare her child's learning with non-disabled peers. For example, Susan communicated, "It was preferred to have him in an inclusive institution. It allowed me to feel more at peace when I compared him to his classmates and found he could execute his classwork at a high level on par with his peers." The experiences of stakeholders regarding teaching and learning in the inclusive classroom vary but are mostly unsatisfactory.

Controversies with educational assistants

Findings revealed that educational assistants in the classroom were a major contributor to the academic success or failures of students with disabilities. Stakeholders shared that improvements have been observed when students have been supported by educational assistants. Despite the improvement observed with educational assistants in the classroom, the principal alluded that educational assistants lack enough training. She believes that children's experiences are influenced by the training of the educational assistants, suggesting the vital role the educational assistants have in the classroom. The principal affirmed:

> Now that we have streamlined the whole shadowing [educational assistant] process. I think it is a little bit more effective. I still believe, however, that we need to do some more training on these educational assistants and because that in and of itself will determine the children's experiences in the classroom.

Parents' experiences with the educational assistants for their children were "bitter-sweet." They agreed with the principal's view that improvements were evident with the help of educational assistants, but it was dependent on the competence of the shadow that was placed on their children, as regression in the learning of their children was observed with some educational assistants. The data also show that educational assistants have changed at least once since the start of the program which was in effect only seven (7 months) up to the time of data collection. For example, Melissa described her experience saying:

> He has improved overall but did better with some of the educational assistants compared to others. He was frustrated with some of the educational assistants as he felt they were too hard on him. He regressed with the last shadow.

Parental denial as a barrier to support

Even though the principal, guidance counsellor, and dean of discipline gave credence to some of the parents for their involvement and support in their children's learning in the inclusive classroom, they corroborated that in their experiences, parental barriers were one of the major setbacks to positive learning outcomes for some of the students with disabilities in the inclusive classroom. Mrs. Turnbull, the principal, reported that parents are enormously supportive, once they have accepted that the child has a learning need. She revealed:

> They provide whatever resource for support. They are extremely supportive. And in fact, well, put it this way, once they have accepted that the child has additional need... then they become supportive once they realize that it is in their child's best interest...

Experiences with parental denial were corroborated by several participants as a barrier to successful learning outcomes. The dean of discipline and the guidance counsellor/clinical psychologist shared that they experienced that many parents are sometimes in denial of their children's challenges while some acknowledged their children's challenges. Ms. Palmer exclaimed, "many of the parents are in denial . . . so we have to be careful of the words you say and use...some of them accept readily, others are still in denial." Ms. William's, however, described her experiences with parents by highlighting three types: parents in denial, equipped and learned parents, and those who ignore you completely. For parents equipped and knowledgeable of their child's diagnosis, they provide assessment reports and resources that the child needs making it easier for the school to accommodate the child. Parental denial, however, was associated with grief, a process through which parents try to cope with the diagnosis of their child or grandchild. Ms. William's stated:

> You will have that challenge where there might be dual parenting denial. You have the parents telling you that there is nothing wrong with their child or grandchild. And so, you're having this conversation and it's kind of a grief process for them, "Oh, I thought my child was perfect and now you're telling me this . . . you have the parents who come fully equipped, they come and they come with the assessment- they tell you what their child needs, they're educated as to what the child's challenges are, they try to provide the support, and all we do is facilitate. You also have those that ignore you totally- that is the third one (chuckles). You tell them, and they go, "No, no." It is a matter of pride or something else, so they just ignore you.

Parents of children with disabilities also shared their experiences with support for their children with disabilities in the inclusive classrooms. Melissa attested that she is an incredibly supportive parent who monitors her child's learning. She asserted, "I am very involved in monitoring what my child is taught and in ensuring that he is being taught the correct information." Another parent, Susan elaborated on how her support for her child with disabilities in the inclusive classroom is demonstrated. She elaborated that she maintains contact with the class teacher, provides reinforcement at home, and sits in class with her child when the shadow is unavailable/or absent. She boldly professed:

> I made sure to keep in contact with the teachers to address any challenges he had at school and would shadow him if the shadow were absent. I also worked closely with them to ensure therapy sessions addressed what he learned at school, and I recapped lessons in areas that he would not focus on in school.

Discussion

School leadership beyond principals

A culture of inclusion in education requires a shared set of assumptions and beliefs among policymakers (Ainscow et al., 2020). The findings from this study reveal and emphasize the importance of examining school leadership beyond school principals to include those governing principals such as board of governors. NCSE (2011) and Glaze (2018) asserts that for effective inclusive education, several considerations should be made, including strong leadership management which involves not only the principals and teachers but also the board of directors, pupils, disabilities team, ancillary staff, parents, and guardians. Although efforts have been made by the principal to

create an inclusive culture, a continuous discussion with the board of directors was paramount. As articulated, it takes the full support of the leadership including the board members to achieve the implementation of inclusive practices at the school. Discrepancies between leadership visions can impede the process of transformation to support inclusion. (Murphy, 2018) asserts that many educational leaders continue to report that they lack the knowledge and skills to effectively oversee inclusive education programs.

In contrast, the principal in this case is knowledgeable of inclusive education practices, but other factors such as teacher training, parental involvement, and resources have influenced successful inclusive practices. These findings are like the insights of Sider et al. (2021) and Genovesi et al. (2022) who found that principals experienced many challenges with supporting students with special education needs in schools such as community support, attitudes of staff, resources, and parental involvement in inclusive schools. It could be concluded that leadership knowledge of IE does not constitute effective inclusion. Findings show that it takes a visionary, transformative and collaborative leader which Day and Leithwood (2007) and Sergiovanni (2009) view as integral for implementation of inclusive practices and empowerment of staff.

Staff training and competence

Researchers contend that few inclusive school leaders know how to facilitate teacher learning effectively; therefore, there is a need for more knowledge about effective conditions and programmes that support teacher learning (Sider et al, 2021; Fullan, 2005; Leithwood & Janzti, 2000). This holds true for the school leader in this study. While the principal expressed the desire for the training of staff, a clear plan to achieve this was not expressed. Arnaiz-Sánchez, (2023) opines that quality education therefore requires the continuous updating of teacher training. However, findings from this study suggest that the principal must facilitate the learning of teachers and educational assistants. While the efficacy of EAs is controversial as was found in this study, (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2012; Rutherford, 2011; Sansotti & Sansotti, 2012), the presence of EAs is seen as the most desirable form of support by teachers. Lack of training for teachers may be deemed a barrier to successful education for all and as Arnaiz-Sánchez et al (2023) warns, schools need to ensure that teachers become facilitators of inclusion and not barriers to it.

The need for participation in round table talks with the administration about students in the inclusive classroom was articulated as paramount by stakeholders in this study. This suggests that involving stakeholders in decision making regarding children with disabilities is a priority. This is crucial for teachers and other staff members such as educational assistants, guidance counsellors, and the dean of discipline. This would allow for greater collaborations and allow them to participate in decision-making and keep abreast of students' development. This finding supports Thompson's (2017) suggestion that principals in Jamaica should develop a systematic approach to enhance shared leadership with teachers in schools. I concur with Ainscow (2020) who postulates that forming partnerships that can support and own the process of change is essential.

At the school, the use of Individualized Intervention Plans (IIP) or Individualized Learning Plans (ILP) is not used in the inclusive classroom to meet the individual needs of students with disabilities which may be a contributing factor to parents concerns that adequate individualized support is not given to their children with disabilities in the inclusive classroom. Stakeholders share that the lack of use of IIPs was influenced by two factors; the challenges with its development (time-consuming and requires a lot of monitoring) and lack of teacher training with its use as a resource in the classroom. Findings are like Crawford (2016) and Gregory (2015) who found limited teacher involvement in IEP development in Canada and limited knowledge of how to use it in the classroom. I support Kovač-Cerović et al. (2016) who assert that using IEP effectively may help overcome barriers that children may be experiencing in access to learning. Therefore, the teachers' inefficiency with its use as a resource is problematic and requires immediate measures to address this issue. This can be facilitated through training sessions by trained professionals who have experience with its development and use. Like Crawford (2016) postulate, effective measures for collaborative training in developing and using IIPs must be considered at the school.

Collaboration

The principal in this case voiced that lack of collaboration between teachers may be influencing effective teaching and learning in inclusive classrooms. There is no Special Education Teacher employed at the primary level; hence, co-teaching and collaboration between a special education teacher and the general education teachers in the inclusive classroom is non-existent. This is consistent with Genovesi et al, (2022) findings who reported poor collaboration among teachers with teachers in inclusive classes receiving extraordinarily little support from their colleagues. Does this mean that co-teaching which involves two general education teachers is not doable and effective? In any context, Mastropieri et al. (2005) argued that teachers who collaborate well together are likely to experience success. Considerations for bringing in a specialist teacher means more money which may cause an increase in private school fees is imperative.

Parents are partners in their children's progress in school. Parents at the school voiced the need for more honest communication between the home and school which involves not only the weaknesses of their children but also strengths, limitations, and changes in their children's learning plan. Blackman et al. (2019) postulate that teacher competence should be the focal point of interrogation toward successful inclusive education in the Caribbean. However, findings from this study reveal that teachers cannot be the sole and most important predictor of successful inclusive education, but rather a collaborative approach with teaching and non-teaching stakeholders. All hands on deck are required. Furthermore, findings support Glaze (2018) assertion that leaders should ensure that the workplace is devoid of fear and leaders embrace the voices of parents and other stakeholders in decision making.

Parental involvement as a catalyst for change

Like Genovesi et al. (2022), findings from this study reveal that parents of children with and without special needs are mostly supportive of their children in inclusive classrooms. Some parents shared that they are active participants in their children's learning which is demonstrated in their constant communication with their children's classroom teachers, reinforcing concepts at home, and even filling in for shadows when they are absent. Thus, the finding supports Afolabi (2014) that getting parents involved is an effective strategy for schools to successfully educate children with disabilities. The involvement of parents was done on the parents' part as the school identified several gaps in their efforts to interact more with families of children in inclusive classrooms, highlighting that the school can do more to encourage parental involvement.

The role of parents in inclusive education at the school is that which Fylling and Sandvin (1999) describe as an "implementer" where they fulfil the demands of the school and are not seen as a client who is a part of the child's problem. Parents of children with special needs are not involved in their child's learning plans as none is developed. Parents are not a part of the selection process of the shadow [educational assistant] which indicates parents' ignorance of their rights or the process. It may also indicate parents' trust in the school in meeting the needs of their children. For example, Mrs. Turnbull expressed with a sigh "The parents to be, to be honest, people do not know what they do not know and so for the most part, they have been presented with what we have now. So, they are happy with it, not knowing that there could be something better."

This study shows that parental knowledge is crucial in successful learning outcomes for students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms as relying on the school system to provide effective learning outcomes for their children can have negative implications. It is imperative, therefore, that measures are put in place not just by schools but the government to educate and sensitize parents across Jamaica of programs that exist for students with special needs in the country. This study is therefore crucial to help sensitize parents and other stakeholders of the importance of partnership in inclusive education and provide relevant and current data that stakeholders can use to make decisions concerning parental involvement and inclusive education.

Conclusion

The experiences of stakeholders as shared in this article act as evidence from the lived experiences with inclusive education. According to researchers (Ainscow, 2020; Ainscow et al., 2006; 2012), evidence is the lifeblood of inclusive development and needs to align with presence, participation, and achievement of all students. Engagement with evidence is also crucial as it can provide stimulus for professional learning. Findings from this study show that strong school leadership encompasses support from not just the principals of schools, but members of the school board. Other experiences related to lack of training of teachers and educational assistants, inconsistent student progress, negative and positive impact of educational assistants in the inclusive classroom on students, issues around parental involvement related to denial and attitudes of stakeholders were dominant. Based on the evidence from this study, I advance the following conclusions and recommendations.

1. Teacher competence in methodology, knowledge, and use of IIP's influences the education and support of all students in the inclusive classroom.
2. Shadows in the inclusive classroom have a direct influence on the learning outcomes of students with special needs and their non-disabled peers in inclusive classrooms.
3. A community approach that involves co-teaching and partnering with other institutions/organizations is imperative for identifying and using best practices in the inclusive classroom to foster optimal learning of all students.
4. Parental involvement in inclusive education does not entail the provision of resources and presence at school, but it also encompasses a strong and honest reciprocal communication between home and school for successful monitoring of learning for students with special needs.

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About the Author

Dr. Kishi Anderson Leachman is an Assistant Professor of Inclusive Education in the Faculty of Education at the University of Winnipeg. She obtained a PhD in Educational Psychology with a research focus on Inclusive Education from the University of the West Indies, Mona Campus. Dr. Anderson Leachman is passionate about equitable and appropriate education for children with disabilities. Her work is focused on inclusive education experiences and practices at the classroom and system levels locally and internationally.

eMail: k.andersonleachman@uwinnipeg.ca ; kandersonleachman2@gmail.com