

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Educational psychologists' support roles regarding the implementation of inclusive education in Zimbabwe

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Email: elliottnkoma@gmail.com**Abstract**

This article focuses on a phenomenological study of trainee/educational psychologists' lived experiences regarding the support roles in the implementation of inclusive education practices in Zimbabwe. In-depth phenomenological interviews were done with 16 purposely selected participants (13 trainee/educational psychologists located at three administrative offices and three experts on inclusion from three universities) and data was transcribed verbatim and thematically analyzed. Monthly/annual reports from trainee/educational psychologists were used as reference material. Three major themes emerged from the support roles: (1) diverse views on inclusion; (2) critical roles, successful and unsuccessful experiences in implementing inclusive education; and (3) impact of experiences on rendering support services. Key findings indicate that advocacy and consultation, assessment and placement, and in-service training were viewed as critical and successful experiences, whereas negative teacher attitudes and limited resources were viewed as barriers toward the implementation of inclusive education practices. The impact of experiences indicates inadequacy in the provision of support services. Annual reports of trainee/educational psychologists indicated inadequate ongoing training on inclusive education practices. These findings are discussed in relation to the inclusive education literature.

KEYWORDS

educational psychologist, inclusive education, support roles

1 | INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research was to examine educational psychologists' experiences in their support roles regarding the implementation of inclusive education in Zimbabwe. Educational psychologists in Zimbabwe are divided into trainee/educational psychologists and qualified educational psychologists. A trainee/educational psychologist in this

article refers to someone with a foundation degree in psychology and is required by the Allied Health Practitioners Council of Zimbabwe (AHPCZ) to attain a Master of Science degree in educational psychology within 5 years of completion of their internship. This internship program includes child assessment and placement, report writing, teacher, school, and parent consultation, special needs education programming, child advocacy, and legal aspects of school psychology practice. The trainee has field placements in institutions that have students with disabilities, mainstream schools, and psychiatric settings to provide him or her with hands-on practical experiences with students with disabilities and learning difficulties. A qualified educational psychologist is an individual who has fulfilled all academic and internship requirements and has been registered by the AHPCZ as a practicing educational psychologist and has less than 2 years of independent practice.

The roles and responsibilities of educational psychologists were briefly stated in the previous paragraph. Other responsibilities include program development and evaluation, research, and supervision of trainees or interns. An educational psychologist's roles in supporting inclusion includes elimination of certain causes of barriers to learning and provision of support to the learner over and above that being provided by the school (Mohangi, & Berger, 2015). Barriers to learning refer to why some learners experience educational difficulties (Walton, Nel, Hugo, & Muller, 2009) and may be extrinsic and/or intrinsic to the learner (Nel, Engelbrecht, Nel, & Tlale, 2014). Intrinsic barriers are located within the learner, which may include physical, sensory, chronic illness, neurological, and developmental impairments, whereas extrinsic barriers are those factors found outside the learner that impact on learning, such as lack of parental involvement in education and family problems like divorce, death, violence, and poverty, in addition to inaccessible and unsafe environments, inappropriate and inadequate provision of support services to schools, and lack of enabling and protective legislation (Beyers, & Hay, 2007).

Internationally, inclusive education is regarded as a right of every learner to be part of mainstream classrooms (Engelbrecht, Nel, Nel, & Tlale, 2015), wherein learning is of a high standard for all, with supports provided to learners and teachers to enable them to be successful (Dudley-Marling, & Burns, 2014). This implies equal opportunities in accessing learning resources, services, and experiences (Baldiris, Zervas, Fabregat, & Sampson, 2016). Inclusive education thus entails that learners with diverse barriers to learning be included and receive appropriate instruction in general education classrooms.

Engelbrecht and Articles (2016) indicate that the rollout of inclusive education in Africa is challenged by poverty, limited or lack of human and material resources, large numbers of underqualified or unqualified teachers, discriminatory attitudes, inflexible curricula, lack of clear conceptualization of inclusion, the lack of participation of parents and community organizations in decentralized processes of decision-making, lack of policy integration, as well as colonial legacies that perpetuate inequities. However, in the Zimbabwean context, the challenges include underfunding by the central government, high job attrition rates of registered psychologists, and students with disabilities and their families who are unaware of school psychology services and the type or relevance of the services (Mpfungu, Zindi, Oakland, & Peresuh, 1997); families with strong indigenous cultural beliefs about disabilities also prefer to seek services from traditional healers, often in place of psychologists (Mpfungu, 2003). This implies that educational psychologists who argue for inclusive education practices struggle to implement such practices.

The following section provides some context about school psychological services and inclusion in Zimbabwe. It includes the structure, personnel and their roles, and challenges faced by educational psychologists.

2 | SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN ZIMBABWE

The Zimbabwe School Psychological Services and Special Needs Education (SPS and SNE) department falls under the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and has the primary responsibility for supporting schools in their inclusive education practices (Mpfungu, Mutepfema, Chireshe, & Kasayira, 2007). The department is found at each of the ten provincial education offices in the country and provides free school psychological services to all learners in the country (Mpfungu et al., 2007).

The chief psychologist is the director of the SPS and SNE and is assisted by two deputy directors (one from School Psychological Services and the other from Special Needs Education) in his/her functions, and they are located in Harare, head office, Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (Mpofu et al., 2007). At the head office, there are four education officers responsible for school programs in hearing impairment, mental retardation, visual impairment, and guidance and counseling. A principal educational psychologist is the head of School Psychological Services at each of ten provincial offices in Zimbabwe.

The department consists of trainee/educational psychologists, remedial tutors, speech correctionists, and guidance and counseling education officers who provide school psychology-related services (Oakland, Mpofu, Glasgow, & Jumel, 2003). The School Psychological Services department provides services on a peripatetic basis by visiting schools for purposes of consultation and providing services (Mpofu et al., 2007). The department of SPS and SNE has the following core responsibilities: (1) supporting schools in their inclusive education practices and expanding the educational provision for learners with special educational needs, (2) in-service training of school psychological services personnel, teachers, head teachers, and education officers on issues and practices in special needs education, (3) raising awareness of learners with special educational needs and inclusive schooling among teachers, head teachers, parents, and communities country-wide, and (4) promoting early identification and inclusive interaction programs for learners with special educational needs (Zimbabwe Action Plan, 2005, p. 30).

The department faces many of challenges with respect of the development and provision of services (Mpofu et al., 2007; Zimbabwe Action Plan, 2005). The ratio of educational psychologist to learners was one to 145,955 in 2004 (Mpofu et al., 2007). A ratio of one to 700 is recommended by the United Nations Economic, Social and Cultural Organization (as cited in Mpofu et al., 2007, p. 440). The Zimbabwean ratio far exceeds this ratio thereby leaving many learners without the services of psychologists. In the late 1990s, there were high attrition rates of educational psychologists because of high caseloads, understaffing, and underfunding (Mpofu et al., 2007). This was further exacerbated by the unfavorable economic environment between 2006 and 2008, which saw the brain drain of licensed educational psychologists (Nkoma, Zirima, & Chimunhu, 2012) to nongovernmental organizations and universities within the country and abroad. The internship program for trainee/educational psychologists also depends on the availability of senior educational psychologists at each of the provincial offices (Mpofu et al., 2007), and therefore the loss of experienced psychologists affected the quality of training and the availability of school psychological services (Mnkandla, & Mataruse, 2002). Also, the department has a history of neglecting the needs of interns in their professional development (Kasayira, 2005; Mnkandla, & Mataruse, 2002).

Despite these challenges, Manicaland province was seemingly providing functional support for inclusive education. This may, in part, be because the last principal educational psychologist was in Manicaland and left in 2011 after initiating the Performance Lag Address Programme (PLAP), which takes into consideration diverse learners and differentiated instruction in general classrooms to address achievement gaps caused by regressed learning and subdued teaching between 2006 and 2008 (Nkoma, 2014, 2015). Support in adopting the inclusive program by the provincial directorate, district education officers, education officers, school head teachers, teachers, and parents in Manicaland province saw learners achieving far higher than other provinces in Zimbabwe at both primary and secondary levels. PLAP was then rolled out as a national program in 2012 (Nkoma, 2014) and SPS and SNE personnel in Manicaland province were then tasked to in-service train other provincial staff. Taking into consideration these successes and challenges, it seems important to explore the lived experiences of trainee/educational psychologists toward supporting the implementation of inclusive education practices.

3 | STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Closely related literature to this study on inclusive education in Zimbabwe has focused on six main areas: (1) teacher attitudes toward inclusive education (Chireshe, 2011, 2013; Mafa, 2012); (2) parents of handicapped children's views toward inclusion (Zindi, 2004); (3) barriers to inclusive education (Peresuh, 2000); (4) policies on inclusive education

(Mnkandla, & Mataruse, 2002); (5) perceptions of children with disabilities toward inclusion (Dakwa, 2009); and (6) including children with disabilities in primary school (Deluca, Tramontano, & Kett, 2014). These studies used survey methodology, which is positivist in nature and only a few outdated studies have focused on the support roles of educational psychologists in implementing inclusive education practices.

To understand the current status of inclusive education in Zimbabwe, there is a need to focus on the lived experiences of trainee/educational psychologists who are responsible for supporting schools in their inclusive education practices. Thus, this study aims to explore the support roles of educational psychologists in implementing inclusive education practices in Zimbabwe.

4 | PURPOSE STATEMENT

This phenomenological study (Moustakas, 1994) aims to seek in-depth information regarding educational psychologists' support roles in implementing inclusive education practices in Zimbabwe. The phenomenon of interest is the meaning ascribed to the support in the implementation of inclusive education practices. The researcher has worked for the department of SPS and SNE and therefore bracketed himself by setting aside his own experiences, and took a fresh perspective toward the implementation of inclusive education practices.

4.1 | Central question

What meaning do educational psychologists ascribe toward their support roles in the implementation of inclusive education practices?

4.2 | Secondary research questions

1. What are educational psychologists' views on inclusive education?
2. What are their experiences regarding the support roles in the implementing inclusive education practices?
3. How do these lived experiences impact on rendering of support services?

5 | RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study, which focuses on the lived experiences of educational psychologists toward the support regarding the implementation of inclusive education, adopts a qualitative research approach. This is appropriate for this study as the information is collected in a natural setting and very little is known about Zimbabwean educational psychologists' lived experiences regarding the support roles in the implementation of inclusive education practices. The purpose of this research is to understand the social and psychological phenomenon from the perspectives of people who are involved (Welman, & Kruger, 1999) in the issue under study.

To gather such information, the researcher used open-ended questions and interpreted meanings. According to Willis (2007, p. 194), "different people and different groups have different perceptions of the world." It follows that participants in this study will verbalize what their experiences are and such multiple perspectives in interpretivism lead to a comprehensive understanding of the situation (Morehouse, 2011).

This qualitative study was done in three administrative offices in the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, which house SPS and SNE personnel (trainee/educational psychologists) who all share common and particular experiences of support in the implementation of inclusive education practices. Thus, qualitative approaches are more appropriate to provide the insight necessary to understand the participants' lived experiences, which are conscious ones, in their support toward the implementation of inclusive education practices.

TABLE 1 Demographic information of participants

Participants	Highest education	Registered/unregistered psychologist	Gender	Age	Years of experience
Manicaland province					
003	Bsc Psychology	Unregistered	Male	30	7
004	Msc Community psychology	Unregistered	Male	38	6
005	Msc community psychology	Unregistered	Male	35	9
006	Msc child and family studies	Unregistered	Male	34	8
007	Bsc psychology	Unregistered	Male	28	4
Expert 1	PhD psychology	Registered	Male		Lecturer
Masvingo province					
008	Bsc psychology	Unregistered	Male	34	7
009	Msc community psychology	Unregistered	Male	37	8
010	Bsc psychology	Unregistered	Female	27	3
011	Bsc psychology	Unregistered	Female	32	4
Expert 2	PhD educational psychology	Registered	Male		Lecturer
Midlands province					
012	Msc educational psychology	Registered	Male	36	8 (including 2 years registered)
013	Msc Counseling psychology	Registered	Female	31	9 (including 1 year registered)
014	Bsc psychology	Unregistered	Male	26	6
015	Bsc psychology	Unregistered	Male	29	4
Expert 3	PhD psychology	Registered	Male		Lecturer
Total number of participants = 16					

5.1 | Research context and participants

Findings from this research are based on data collected from three provinces, namely, Manicaland, Masvingo, and Midlands. These areas were purposefully selected because they are closer and convenient to the researcher (Neuman, 2016). The selected sites are the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education offices that house the SPS and SNE department and university lecturers at each of the three provinces. At the SPS and SNE sites, parents or guardians consult SPS and SNE personnel for counseling, transfer of their special needs children, psychological assessments, and placement of special needs children. Head teachers might consult for the need for resource classes or special classes, instructional supervision of resource classes/special classes, the need for new special needs teachers, and career guidance of learners.

At each of these administrative offices, there are five trainee/educational psychologists, for a total of 15 participants. Criterion sampling was used to select all trainee/educational psychologists with more than 1 year of experience in the School Psychological Services department as these were presumed to have adequate experience in supporting inclusive education practices. Those with less than 1 year's experience were thus excluded from the research as they were deemed to have inadequate experience. Thirteen trainee/educational psychologists ($M = 10$; $F = 3$) actually participated in the study. Their experiences in the department and ages ranged from 3 to 9 and 26 to 38 years, respectively. Of the total of 15 staff members, one refused audiorecording, while the other did not meet the inclusion criteria. The experts ($n = 3$) on inclusive education in this context refers to university lecturers in the departments of education or psychology from each of these provinces who had once held the post of principal educational psychologist in the department of SPS and SNE. Refer to Table 1 for participant demographic information. The sample size provided a

sufficient number of variations that were needed to come up with a typical essence (Giorgi, 2008), rather than a generality of results (Elanglander, 2012).

5.2 | Data-collection methods

Phenomenological research aims to encounter the phenomenon via the participant's description (Elanglander, 2012). Questions that are part of a phenomenological interview should therefore meet the criteria of description (Giorgi, 2009). Such questions need to focus on participants' descriptions of the situation in which they experienced the phenomenon.

The primary data sources include the trainee/educational psychologists and experts on inclusion at the three provinces. To collect data about the lived experiences on inclusive education practices from participants, in-depth face-to-face phenomenological interviews were carried out. The process of data collection was similar to Elanglander (2012), who specified that a preliminary meeting with research participants prior to the actual interview should be carried out and, in this study, it was done a week before the interview. Such a meeting provided the opportunity to establish trust with participants, review ethical considerations, complete consent forms, and also to review research questions and give participants time to dwell and ponder on the experience. This assisted the researcher to obtain a richer description during the interviews without making the researcher ask too many questions (Elanglander, 2012).

Before interviewing, the primary researcher wrote a full description of his own experience as an educational psychologist within the specific department, thereby bracketing off his experiences from those of the interviewees. The concept of "bracketing" comes from Husserl's (2008/1931/1931) epoché in which the researcher allows himself to be present with the data without positing its validity or existence (Kanyange, & Musisi, 2011).

Each interview took between 25 and 50 minutes depending on the participants' experiences. All interviews were audiorecorded with permission from participants and these were coded (for example, 003; 28.07.2017). These were then transcribed verbatim. Soon after each interview, key words, phrases, and sentences were transcribed.

5.3 | Ethical considerations

Authority to carry out the project was sought from the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and then the Provincial Education Director at each of the three sites. A preliminary meeting with research participants prior to the actual interview was carried out 1 week before the interview. During the meeting, participants were told that they can voluntarily participate and can withdraw from the study at any time without giving reasons for doing so. Completion of consent forms was done using a fellow lecturer as a neutral person during this period. Privacy and confidentiality were assured to participants on how data was going to be used and stored. Participants were also assured that there was no perceived harm in participating in the study. Ethical clearance was also obtained from the university where the primary researcher is a doctoral student.

5.4 | Data analysis

Data were analyzed using Moustakas' approach (Moustakas, 1994). This phenomenological analysis followed the following sequence: first, the researcher started with a full, written description of his experience of support toward the implementation of inclusive education practices. By setting aside the primary researcher's personal experiences, the focus was then directed to participants in the study (bracketing). This was done before data collection and analysis of the research interview. The researcher was attempting to recollect examples of personal experiences as an educational psychologist. This implied that the researcher's biases do not negatively influence the interview process or analysis of data (Grocke, 1999).

Second, a list of significant statements was then developed. Statements in the interviews, which focused on how individuals were experiencing inclusive education practices, were found and these significant statements were listed (horizontalization of the data); each statement was treated as having equal worth and a list of nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping statements was then developed. Third, significant statements were then grouped into larger units of

information called themes ("meaning units"). Fourth, a description of participants' experiences in the implementation of inclusive education practices was then written. This textural description of the experience includes verbatim examples. Last, an overall description of the phenomenon of inclusive education incorporating both textual and structural descriptions was then written. This overall essence represents what the participants experienced with the phenomenon of support for inclusive education and how they experienced it (the context).

5.5 | Credibility

Merriam (2009) notes that the equivalent concept of internal validity in quantitative research is credibility in qualitative research and this deals with the question of how congruent are the findings with reality? Triangulation was used in this study in terms of individual interviews and documents (trainee/educational psychologists' monthly/annual reports) to ensure that these collaborative but different sources would shed light on a theme, and thus locating evidence to document a theme from these sources. Thus, triangulation provided credibility to the findings. Any documents referred by participants during the interview were examined to explain the behavior and attitudes of participants. Site triangulation was achieved by purposefully sampling three provincial offices, ensuring a high level of variation of participant characteristics in terms of gender, ethnicity, and time served in school psychological services. This aided in achieving the greatest diversity of comparisons into the phenomenon.

To also achieve credibility of the findings and interpretations, a meeting was convened with participants so that they could reflect on the written preliminary analyses comprising themes, so that their views were solicited and incorporated, and what is missing would be added.

6 | FINDINGS

Three major themes emerged from trainee/educational psychologists' experiences of their support roles regarding the implementation of inclusive education in Zimbabwe. These were (1) diverse views on inclusion; (2) critical roles, successful, and unsuccessful experiences in implementing inclusive education; and (3) impact of experiences on rendering support services. Refer to Table 2 for participant frequencies on these themes. These themes and their general descriptions were taken back to the trainee/educational psychologists during August 2017 to verify and check for their authenticity. Trainee/educational psychologists reflected that their experiences were essentially captured, and smaller adjustments were effected. The findings are discussed below, with excerpts to support data generated and expounded upon with reference to inclusive education literature.

6.1 | Trainee/educational psychologists' diverse views on inclusion

Psychologists' views on inclusion focused on academic, social, and ethical issues. There appeared to be contrasting views among psychologists when discussing inclusion. One participant indicated that exposure to students with disabilities is beneficial to those without. This is reflected in the following experience:

It allows students to understand and appreciate differences that learners experience ... learners with disabilities are able to access the curriculum. (003)

However, others showed concern on differences in curriculum for those students with disabilities and their nondisabled peers. This is clearly shown in the following experience:

The curriculum for learners with intellectual disabilities is not the same to those in the mainstream classes. (005)

The differences may be explained in their orientation toward segregated practices. Similarly, some participants indicated that there is need for meaningful learning for students with disabilities.

TABLE 2 Frequencies of experiences by participants on themes

Participant	Diverse views on inclusion	Number of experiences	Critical roles, successful and unsuccessful experiences	Number of experiences	Impact of experiences	Number of experiences	Total
003	a	1	d; e; f; g; h; j; k	7	d; e	2	9
004	c	1	e; f; h; l	4	e; l	2	6
005	a; c	2	d; e; f; h; l;	5	j	1	6
006	a	1	e; f; j; h; k	5	f	1	6
007	a; c	2	e; f; i; l; p	5	i	1	6
Expert 1	a; b; c	3	a; e; f; g; h; i	6	-	-	6
008	a; c	2	c; d; e; f; g; h; j; l	8	j	1	9
009	b	1	c; d; e; f; h; m	6	h	1	7
010	a; c	2	c; d; e; i; j; l; o	7	i	1	8
011	a	1	d; e; i	3	f; j	2	5
Expert 2	a; b; c	3	e; f; h; i; o	5	-	-	5
012	c	1	b; c; e; i; k	5	d	1	6
013	c	1	e; f; h; l; m	5	i; f	2	7
014	c; b	2	e; f; g; h; k; l	6	j	1	7
015	b; c	2	e; f; h; k; l	5	n	1	6
Expert 3	a; b; c	3	e; f; g; h; i; j	6	-	-	6
Total		28		88		17	105

a = academic; b = social; c = ethical; d = infrastructural; e = assessment and placement; f = capacity development; g = early identification and intervention; h = outreach programs/advocacy; i = consultation/collaboration; j = resources; k = class size; l = attitudes; m = curriculum and examinations; n = furthering studies; o = counseling; p = knowledge.

We do not need to just include people with disabilities without taking care of their needs, they need to be included but meaningful learning has to take place. (O10)

Other experiences indicate the provision of alternate placement options to address the individual needs of students with disabilities.

When we place in other facilities it will be depending on the level of need but our first priority is to place in the mainstream. (O08)

This may imply that all students with disabilities will not be placed in regular classrooms all the time, but the educational needs of students with disabilities needs to be met no matter where they are placed.

Participants' experiences on social inclusion focused on friendship within the school and community life for learners in segregated classrooms. The following extract depicts some of their experiences:

Learners with disabilities in resource units and special classes get to mingle and socialize with others ... because they are in the same school ... during break time, lunch time they socialize. (O15)

Experiences of participants also indicate the right to education of every learner in their neighborhood schools. For example:

All learners are afforded a right to education regardless of their differences and learn in their communities. (O13)

Generally, most participants viewed total inclusion as theoretical and not practical.

Genuinely speaking, inclusive education is a very good notion but in my own opinion currently it is more theoretical than practical. (O10)

6.2 | Trainee/educational psychologists' critical roles, successful, and unsuccessful experiences in implementing inclusive education practices

Trainee/educational psychologists indicated capacity development of teachers, assessments and placement, and advocacy and consultation as critical roles and successful experiences, whereas barriers such as class size, physical accessibility, curriculum, examinations, student and teacher attitudes, and lack of resources were viewed as unsuccessful experiences.

Advocacy focused on developing school environments that support student learning and well-being while capacity development of teachers focused on teaching diverse learners. This is best shown by the following extract:

We have tried by all means necessary to advocate for the programme and the advocacy has included such practices as schools building ramps, building toilets that are accessible by children using wheelchairs and crutches. We have tried to capacity develop teachers in order that they can have the skills and knowledge to handle learners with varying degrees of disabilities. (008)

In community education programs, they focus on resource mobilization such as telling communities where to access assistive devices for learners with disabilities, school fees, and rehabilitation from governmental and nongovernmental agencies. Other experiences in communities indicate early identification and intervention and the availability of special education programs.

One of the methods we use is early identification where community outreach programme awareness campaigns have been mounted in various communities so that parents are aware on the disabilities that are associated with our children. At the same time the importance of early identification and enrolment in schools so that they are not disadvantaged. Sign language in homes and schools are totally different and hence communities have been engaged to ensure what the learners are learning in school especially on sign language is also the same language that they learn at home. (003)

The successful role of assessment, which focuses on screening for educational purposes, was pervasive throughout the interviews. The following quote indicates the role of placing students with disabilities in the general education environment while recognizing that some students would not benefit from full inclusion because of the nature of their disability.

Our support roles include assessments and placement. We recommend in accordance to the level of need. We may place a child in a special class or special school but in most cases we want to make sure that whoever we place, the first choice is to place in the mainstream so that the idea of inclusive education is better understood. (005)

Another participant concurs by indicating the following:

We place those with mild to moderate disabilities within their local schools, though of course those with severe to profound are still difficult for us to place within their local schools rather we send them to special schools. (004)

Another participant indicated the movement away from assessment, focusing on the provision of psychosocial support:

Nowadays we spend much of time attending to incidences and cases in our schools by offering psycho-social support to different learners such as child abuse and bullying. These are mainly emergency cases and not planned work. (010)

Such services are reactive rather than preventative in nature.

The focus of psychologists appears to be on maximizing interaction between students with disabilities and their "nondisabled" peers. However, the less restrictive environment can be rejected depending on the nature or severity of the disability and home environment of the student, but the participants did not mention students with disabilities not benefiting from the use of supplementary aids and services in the general education when determining the restrictive environment.

Psychologists network with governmental and nongovernmental organizations with an interest in the welfare of children.

We network with a number of partners provided they have a memorandum of understanding with our ministry. We network with the Ministry of Social Services on a day to day basis, they refer clients to us and we also refer to them ... particularly on BEAM (Basic Education Assistance Module to assist vulnerable children with school fees), Ministry of Health and Child Welfare for physiotherapy and assistive devices), PLAN International who are into learner welfare and also support in terms of infrastructural development ... they pay school fees for the girl child. (O13)

Experiences of participants on barriers to inclusive education focused on inaccessible environments, insufficient funding, large class sizes, and student and teacher attitudes. The participants indicated that the government and schools are not committed to build inclusive school structures. The following extract clearly shows their views:

In financing of inclusive structures, schools are not budgeting for the building of infrastructure in the form of ramps. Sometimes you could get to a school and find a learner on a wheelchair trying to negotiate "mujecha" (sandy soil) making it difficult for the learner to negotiate his/her way within the school environment. This makes it difficult for the learner and our programme to move on. (O09)

The following experience indicates lack of teacher skills in teaching diverse students, insufficient support services, and school administrators who do not want students with disabilities in their schools.

Sometimes it has been unsuccessful especially school authorities who prefer that you take away a learner with physical challenges rather than adapting the environment. Teachers lack training in teaching diverse classes and have inadequate support services. (O10)

Data also indicate that the curriculum, pedagogy, and the examination system represent a major barrier to inclusion.

You know how our curriculum is like, teachers would concentrate on finishing the syllabus and on making sure that they achieve a high percentage pass rate, and that is achieved by maybe concentrating on those average to above average learners and they disregard learners with disabilities, they say they have a negative impact on the pass rate and on completing the syllabus. (O09)

The negative attitudes of students, teachers, and school administration were viewed as barriers to inclusive education. The following extract indicates teachers' negative attitudes:

Learners with disabilities are labelled and stereotyped in such a way that there is nothing positive that is seen from them. For example I heard one primary school teacher saying in his classroom "I will put you in the special class if you do not improve." (O05)

Similarly, another participant indicated his experiences with a head teacher who wanted a child to be transferred from the school.

It happened when schools opened first term and a primary school head-teacher phoned me saying that please come and remove this grade one child from my school. The teachers and children are running away from him because of his big protruding eyes which are scary. (O04)

Large class size has been perceived as a challenge for inclusive education:

Theoretically it's (inclusive education) ok but practically we don't have teachers with the skills to use sign language within the 45-50 class ... large class sizes prevent teachers from tailoring their instruction to individual students. (O06)

6.3 | Impact of experiences on rendering support services

The following extract indicates inadequacy in the provision of services that may be a result of shortages of educational psychologists.

When we could assess the impact of what we have done we would discover that at the end of the day, we have covered so little and yet they are so many people who want the services. (014)

Another participant echoed similar sentiments.

As a department we are trying but the province is too big, so we might not end up reaching to everyone. (008)

Some participants' experiences show the benefits of outreach programs over assessments:

So now we have adopted the community outreach approach not the elitist mode where we would sit in the office and then wait for them to come. In order to reach every one we need to be in the community than the office. (009)

However, another participant experienced the following:

The department of School Psychological Services does not have adequate funding for outreach programmes and we only go out there when funds are available. (005)

The impact of experiences indicates inadequacy in the provision of services because of resource constraints that are beyond psychologists:

Sometimes you do not have the resources or maybe the answers to some of the challenges ... there is a lot to do in offering these services to parents and teachers. These experiences are giving me a challenge that I don't have to sit and relax. (007)

The challenges that some psychologists' faces have motivated them to do community psychology programs.

Different experiences have motivated me to pursue a Masters in Community Psychology. All this is an effort for me to offer effective and meaningful support services to all our learners. (015)

The impact of experiences has made some participants to see the benefits of collaboration on inclusive education practices.

Stakeholder involvement is very critical because at the end of the day it is our job together. So if we come together and move together, we are likely to score. We need to involve everyone, the learners, education officials and politicians... everybody should be involved. (013)

The following extract indicates that some psychologists do not have teaching qualifications and they are assisted by remedial tutors and speech correctionists in pedagogical approaches.

Within our department we have personnel with teaching qualifications, like speech correctionists and remedial teachers who really know what can be done. We involve them as well in trying to capacity develop teachers and how to reach different learners in their classrooms. (011)

The impact of experiences suggests that psychologists struggle to implement inclusive education practices.

7 | DISCUSSION

Participants' views on inclusion focused on academic, social, and ethical issues. However, some of their experiences are not aligned with the definition of academic inclusion. Academic inclusion can be defined as where all learners are having full participation in the academic experiences of the classroom, including learning experiences with peers that are not separate or parallel to those of their classmates (Katz, Porath, Bendu, & Epp, 2012). This does not only imply access to education but also acceptance and participation, which result in quality education for all (Terzi, 2008). The findings are supported by Warnock (2005) who rejected the idea of 100% inclusion, and Norwich (2008) who found that higher teacher-to-learner ratios result in a lower level of support in mainstream classes. The experiences of participants also relate to Johansson (2014) who indicated disagreements regarding the meaning, extent, and nature of

inclusive education. However, Ajuwon (2008) found that learners with disabilities can benefit from learning in regular classrooms, while their peers without disabilities gain from being exposed to learners with diverse characteristics, talents, and temperaments.

Katz et al. (2012) define social inclusion as each child being a full and respected member of the classroom community, including feelings of belonging, of being cared for, and of being a part of something larger than themselves. However, the experiences of participants focused on social inclusion for those students with disabilities in segregated classrooms. These findings are not consistent with observational and qualitative studies in Sweden, the United States, and Iceland, which found that learners with disabilities participated less in both structured and unstructured activities compared to their peers without disabilities and they experienced limited classmate interaction and playground/recess participation (Carter, Sisco, Brown, Brickham, & Al-Khabbaz, 2008; Egilson, and Traustadottir, 2009; Eriksson, Welander, & Granlund, 2007).

Participants indicated the right of learners to learn in their neighborhood schools with the emphasis on meeting effective and sustained right to access to the curriculum (Cumming, & Dixon, 2013) in general education classrooms. Results also indicate that exposure to students with disabilities is beneficial to those without. According to Westwood and Graham (2003), exposure to students of all types on a daily basis allows typical students to see that, just like themselves, students with disabilities have strengths and weaknesses, and good and bad days.

The findings indicate that the curriculum, pedagogy, and the examination system represent a major barrier to inclusion. Such findings are also consistent with Farrell (2004) who found that mainstream schools are under increasing pressure to raise academic standards and are therefore reluctant to admit and retain learners whose presence could have a negative impact on their overall profile of results. Konza (2008) indicated that students who may not necessarily contribute to a profile of academic excellence are viewed as not making a contribution to the overall appeal of the school. Similarly, educational psychologists interviewed by Suldo, Friedrich, and Michalowski, 2010 reported that many staff in their schools are exclusively focused on academics and lack concern for students' mental health.

The experiences of participants on teacher attitudes concur with studies that have shown that teacher attitudes and expectations are significant barriers to successful implementation of inclusive classrooms (Avramidis, & Norwich, 2002; De Boer, Pijl, & Minnaert, 2011). Similarly, a review of the literature carried out by Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996) from 28 studies about North American and Australian teachers' attitudes toward integration and inclusion showed that teachers supported the philosophy of inclusion, but few were actually willing to include special education needs learners in their classrooms. Some of the reasons given by participants for negative teacher attitudes include lack of training in inclusive education, inadequate support services, and large class sizes. Also, Bender, Vail, and Scott's study found common practical concerns raised by teachers such as lack of adequate support services and limited training and competence in supporting inclusive educational practice (as cited in Vaz et al., 2015). Large class sizes do not allow for the additional individualized attention some students need (Westwood, & Graham, 2003), resulting in negative attitudes. The apprehension about teachers' capacity to manage and educate students with disabilities, and feelings of anxiety and inadequacy may manifest as resistance to inclusion (Poon, Ng, Wong, & Kaur, 2016).

The findings also indicate that the curriculum, pedagogy, and the examination system represent a major barrier to inclusion. Research indicates that most schools perceive their primary mission to be academics, with the legitimacy of any focus on social-emotional development frequently questioned (Del'Homme, Kasari, Forness, & Bagley, 1996; Lloyd, Kauffman, Landrum, & Roe, 1991).

Barriers to participation include the physical design of schools that affect learners with physical and visual disabilities to participate in the full range of school activities (Hemmingson, & Borell, 2002). This is consistent with experiences by participants on structural or physical barriers within a child's environment. Also participants indicated resource constraints in building infrastructure. Pivik, McComas, and Laflamme, 2002 indicated lack of knowledge, bureaucratic inflexibility, and beliefs toward resource availability as barriers to inclusive education. Developing countries have adopted the philosophy of inclusion but there is insufficient funding, support, or knowledge to be able to assume an effective system-wide inclusive approach for all learners (Sharma, Forlin, Deppeler, & Guang-Xue, 2013).

Assessment and placement, advocacy, and capacity development of teachers were viewed as critical roles and successful. Assessment is used to gather information about a learner so that informed advice or recommendations are

made concerning his/her educational or psychosocial functioning and attainment (Bowles et al., 2016). Such experiences by participants in this study support Farrell and Kalambouka's (2000) findings that educational psychologists are viewed by teachers in different countries as having the responsibility of assessing and recommending resources for learners who experience difficulties in learning and behavior. Similarly, Fagan and Wise (1994) found that educational psychologists spend the highest percentage of their time undertaking assessments. In Zimbabwe, the Education Secretary's Circular Minute No. P.36 of 1990 provides guidelines for placement of learners in special classes, resource units, and special schools, thereby legitimizing the segregation for students with disabilities. The capacity development of teachers focused on equipping teachers with the skill of teaching diverse students in mainstream classes by adapting instructional practices so that all students achieve in ways that are meaningful (Hutchinson, 2007).

The critical roles and successful experiences of participants also focused on the provision of remedial and reactive support and proactive programs aimed at early detection and early intervention. Common roles of educational psychologists in the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, and South Africa include psychoeducational evaluations, consultations, prevention, intervention, research, and evaluation and such services occur at the level of individuals (parents, educators, and learners) and systems (family, schools, classrooms, school systems, and community organizations) (Fagan, & Wise, 2007; Farrell, 2004; Lansdown, Jimerson, & Shahroozi, 2014). The experiences of participants in this study clearly captured advocacy and awareness and consultative roles of members in the department of SPS and SNE. This interfacing results in provision of comprehensive and support services. The SPS and SNE department provide services on a peripatetic basis, that is, visiting schools for purposes of consultation and providing services (Mpfu et al., 2007). Few educational psychologists in Zimbabwe have teaching qualifications (Mpfu et al., 2007); hence, there is the need to collaborate with other professionals in the department with such qualifications.

Some experiences of educational psychologists indicate that outreach programs are more economical than individual assessments. Similarly, Dowdy et al., 2015 indicated that individual problem-focused approaches to service delivery are not sustainable, particularly when resource-restricted economic conditions prevail.

The impact of these experiences indicates inadequacy in the provision of support services. The 2016 annual reports of educational psychologists indicated inadequate ongoing training on inclusive education. Monthly reports (2016 to 2017) show that psychologists spend most of their time doing individual and group assessments, which is consistent with the research findings.

The challenges facing trainee/educational psychologists are a result of high attrition rates of senior educational psychologists because of high caseloads, understaffing, and underfunding (Mpfu et al., 2007). This was further exacerbated by the unfavorable economic environment between 2006 and 2008, which saw the brain drain of licensed educational psychologists (Nkoma et al., 2012) to nongovernmental organizations and universities within the country and abroad. The internship program depends on the availability of senior educational psychologists at each of the provincial offices (Mpfu et al., 2007); hence, the brain drain affected the quality of training and the availability of school psychological services (Mnkandla, & Mataruse, 2002). Also, the department has a history of neglecting the needs of interns in their professional development (Kasayira, 2005; Mnkandla, & Mataruse, 2002).

8 | CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that trainee/educational psychologists' roles and responsibilities focused on assessment and placement, consultancy, and advocacy, whereas structural-organizational barriers such as class size, physical accessibility, curriculum, examinations, and lack of resources were viewed as barriers to inclusive education. The most important contribution of this research is that trainee/educational psychologists will move forward with practice that is informed by research evidence as opposed to intuition.

The study has important implications beyond Zimbabwean trainee/educational psychologists. Placement of children with disabilities and special needs in general education classrooms needs careful consideration. When recommending for mainstream classrooms, trainee/educational psychologists should consider class sizes and composition.

One possible option is to have only one type of disability in one class or by reducing class sizes when there is a need to include multiple disabilities.

The findings also indicate that psychologists work in a constrained environment such as high attrition rates of senior educational psychologists and unfavorable economic environments. Such problems cannot be resolved soon. However, the study challenges the government to provide resources that will facilitate inclusion.

The other finding indicated the need to cover the curriculum and prepare for examinations. The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education needs to provide guidelines for determining which students will sit for examinations and also give parents the option of exempting a student with special educational needs from writing their terminal examinations and proceed to a vocational school.

The Education Secretary's Circular Minute No. P.36 of 1990 legitimizes the placement of students with disabilities in segregated classes. The implication here is that there would be misinterpretation of special education by stakeholders as a special location instead of a set of supports and services to be delivered to any location. Also, psychologists can make placement decisions based on the fact that when a student requires more intensive services, then there is a need for a highly restrictive placement or the belief that the student has a right to move from a more to a less restricted environment.

The in-service training of teachers by educational psychologists is an effective method of improving teaching skills; however, the involvement of disability organizations, and having itinerant teachers who support a cluster schools can provide ongoing support and mentorship for general education teachers. The initial training inputs such as conceptual knowledge of inclusion, differentiated pedagogy, and practical observations or simulations may develop positive teacher experiences. Such a model that starts with in-service training workshops followed by ongoing consultation in the school and classroom setting increases that impact of training, thereby changing the negative attitudes of teachers.

A system of early detection, identification, and referral at community settings, which involves governmental and nongovernmental organizations, is encouraged. Such a system can also provide support and training of communities on inclusive education practices.

In summary, Zimbabwean educational psychologists are embracing the inclusive agenda but with a main thrust on assessments and making recommendations for segregated provisions, thereby assisting in maintaining a system of segregated special education provisions. This has been influenced in part by a medical model of human development and the Education Secretary's Circular Minute No. P.36 of 1990 mentioned earlier. However, some have adopted the school-based consultative role by working with different stakeholders for prevention and intervention.

8.1 | Limitations and further research

This study has been limited to experiences of educational psychologists' roles regarding the implementation of inclusive education in three provinces only and, therefore, the application of these findings to other contexts requires careful consideration and caution. To better understand the support roles of educational psychologists in Zimbabwean schools and communities, further research needs to focus on the views of learners, parents, teachers, and administrators. Future research needs to also compare the views of trainee/educational psychologists by gender to get a clearer picture of their inclusive education practices.

8.2 | Recommendations

There is a need to broaden trainee/educational psychologists' roles by assisting schools to develop policies on inclusion, which mandate that students with disabilities be involved in the general curriculum, and by working with other government and nongovernmental organizations in making schools safe and friendly by developing inclusive strategies. To have high-quality and appropriately trained professionals, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education needs to collaborate with the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education so that ongoing training of trainee/educational psychologists is done by educational psychologists at local universities in each of the ten provinces.

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